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**GASTRONOMIC TOURISM: CREDIBILITY INFLUENCE OF
INTERNET CELEBRITY VIA ELECTRONIC WORD OF
MOUTH (eWOM)**



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UUM
Universiti Utara Malaysia

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA
2025**



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Abstrak

Media sosial telah membentuk lanskap baharu selebriti internet yang menjadikan eWOM begitu penting terhadap peminat dan mempengaruhi niat pembelian pengguna. Walau bagaimana pun, perkembangan industri selebriti internet ini menimbulkan pelbagai kebimbangan, termasuk penyebaran pengiklanan palsu, potensi berkompromi terhadap kualiti produk atau perkhidmatan serta amalan tidak beretika digunakan oleh selebriti internet untuk memperdaya pengguna. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat pengaruh kredibiliti selebriti internet terhadap eWOM kepada peminat dan niat pembelian pengguna, untuk meneroka kriteria selebriti internet yang mempengaruhi pengiklan dalam membuat pilihan, dan untuk mencadangkan model baharu bagi pelancongan gastronomi selebriti internet berdasarkan Model Kredibiliti Sumber. Kajian ini menggunakan temubual mendalam dan analisis kandungan yang melibatkan 25 informan termasuk selebriti internet, peminat, pengguna, pengiklan, dan ahli akademik dan menganalisis komen dari platform TikTok dan RED. Data dari temubual mendalam dianalisis menggunakan NVivo. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa kredibiliti selebriti internet memainkan peranan penting dalam eWOM di kalangan peminat dan mempengaruhi niat pembelian pengguna. Kajian ini turut mendapati elemen utama yang paling memberi kesan kepada eWOM adalah kualiti maklumat, kuantiti ulasan, dan keperluan pengguna, diikuti dengan kemahiran komunikasi dan personaliti. Kriteria pemilihan oleh pengiklan menekankan terutamanya pada prestasi lepas, keterlekatkan pengguna, personaliti dan keserasian selebriti internet. Model selebriti internet pelancongan gastronomi mengandungi lima dimensi iaitu kepercayaan, daya tarikan, kemampuan, keperluan pengguna, dan keserasian. Hasil kajian menyediakan garis panduan praktikal untuk selebriti internet dan pengiklan dalam industri pelancongan gastronomi untuk menghasilkan kandungan iklan yang berkesan.

Kata kunci: Media sosial, Selebriti internet, eWOM (electronic Word-Of-Mouth), Niat pembelian, Model Kredibiliti Sumber.

Abstract

Social media has given rise to a new landscape of internet celebrities, who have become essential in driving eWOM towards fans and influencing consumers' purchasing intentions. Nevertheless, the burgeoning internet celebrity industry raises various concerns, including the proliferation of false advertising, potential compromise of product or service quality, and the deceptive practices employed by internet celebrities to mislead consumers. This research aims to investigate the influence of internet celebrities' credibility on eWOM towards fans and consumer purchase intentions, to explore the internet celebrities' influencing criteria on advertiser choosing and to suggest a new model of gastronomic tourism internet celebrity based on Source Credibility Model. This study utilized in-depth interviews and content analysis involving 25 informants including internet celebrities, fans, advertisers, and academicians and analyzed comments from TikTok and RED platforms. In-depth interview data were analyzed using NVivo. The findings revealed that the credibility of internet celebrities play a significant role in eWOM among fans and influencing consumer purchase intentions. The study also found that the key elements with the most impact towards eWOM are information quality, review quantity, and consumer needs followed by communication skills and personality. Advertisers' choosing criteria primarily emphasize past performance, consumer stickiness, personality and compatibility of internet celebrities. The new gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model consists of five key dimensions which are trustworthiness, attractiveness, ability, consumer needs and compatibility. Findings from this study provides a practical guideline for internet celebrities and advertisers in the gastronomic tourism industry to produce impactful content advertisement.

Keywords: Social media, Internet celebrity, eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth), Purchase intention, Source Credibility Model.

Acknowledgement

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of many individuals.

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Noor Aziah binti Abdullah, Dr. Aselawati binti Che Ab Adziz, for their invaluable guidance, patience, and continuous support throughout this research journey. Their insightful advice and constructive feedback have been instrumental in shaping this work.

I would also like to thank all the informants who generously shared their time and experiences, making this study possible. My sincere appreciation goes to my colleagues and friends, who provided both academic and emotional support—our countless discussions, shared frustrations, and words of encouragement kept me going through the most difficult moments.

Most importantly, I extend my deepest appreciation to my family for their unconditional love, understanding, and belief in me. Their support has been my greatest source of strength.

Finally, I must acknowledge the many long days and even longer nights spent writing in the postgraduate room. Those quiet hours, filled with determination and exhaustion, were an unforgettable part of this journey.

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List of Abbreviations

eWOM	Electronic Word-of-Mouth
SCM	Source Credibility Model
CAC	Cyberspace Administration of China
UGV	User-Generated Video
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
UUM	Universiti Utara Malaysia



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Internet celebrities have gained significant popularity by effectively showcasing their charisma and charm on various social media platforms. They offer a diverse range of content and exert an impact on consumer trends by leveraging the credibility they have established via ongoing engagement with their consumer (Li, 2018). Internet celebrities have the potential to shape the identity of their followers. With the widespread use of social media, consumers see them as ideal role models to emulate (Dinh & Lee, 2021). They are regarded as celebrities who not only play an important role as media icons on social media but are also admired by consumers and have gained a wide reputation with their large follower base (Weiwei & Yongyue, 2021). Furthermore, they are often seen as innovators, as they can drive new ideas and trends by creating content and building a fan base (Nouri, 2018). They play a role in advertising, publicity, and promotion, therefore conveying their endorsement, recommendation, or support for a specific product or service (Reinikainen et al., 2020).

In addition, gastronomic tourism is progressively emerging to be a popular travel habit and manner lifestyle in China, with the impact of internet celebrities on gastronomic tourism gaining growing importance (Zhang, 2020). Internet celebrities are used by a variety of tourist companies to endorse culinary places (Wu & Lai, 2023) and local gourmet experiences via the creation of short videos (Yang et al., 2022). Thereby

enhancing the co-creation of the consumer experience (Nadeem et al., 2021). According to Rossanty et al. (2021), internet celebrities in the form of short videos have emerged as influential opinion leaders and significant purveyors of information on various social media platforms. It indicates that internet celebrities have had a significant influence on consumer engagement within the gastronomic tourism industry, particularly on social media platforms that feature short videos.

Furthermore, it has been observed that younger consumers exhibit a preference for obtaining information about items and brands via online comments, as opposed to relying on conventional media platforms such as television and radio (Hu et al., 2017).

Internet celebrities establish a strong emotional connection and foster trust with consumers using self-presented substance on online platforms. They engage with consumers in real-time, facilitating the immediate sale of items or services. This process effectively generates a smooth and easy purchasing experience (Li, 2018).

Consequently, the importance of internet celebrities using audiovisual content for electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication is rising, Audiovisual content is becoming a trusted source for consumers (Israfilzade & Baghirova, 2022). Internet celebrities' audiovisual content is trusted because they disclose their positive and negative experiences (Saura et al., 2022). Hence, positive consumer attitudes toward internet celebrity referrals improve purchase intention and eWOM (Ermeç, 2022). Internet celebrities are increasingly influencing consumer attitudes across branded products and ads.

1.2 Background of the Study

The popularity of the internet and the rise of social media have significantly changed consumer purchasing intentions. As new types of social media celebrities, internet celebrities have become an important power in guiding consumer purchasing intentions (Vrontis et al., 2021). Internet celebrities have gained recognition for their proficiency across many domains, production of entertaining content, or personal characteristics, thereby fostering the development of a devoted following (Gross & Wangenheim, 2018). The act of generating and disseminating information, including interactive content such as short videos, via social media platforms, is of utmost importance for companies and brands. This is due to its significant influence on shaping consumer attitudes and opinions about various brands (Al-Emadi & Yahia, 2020). According to De Veirman et al. (2017) in Daniel Belanche et al. (2021) as followers tend to value internet celebrities' advice because of their expertise in certain subjects, it would seem vital for internet celebrities to maintain their credibility to strengthen their relationships with their followers.

Internet celebrities are often praised for their achievements; nonetheless, they exhibit a transitory and unstable nature, encountering multiple challenges such as limited rates of success, frequent turnover, and personal instances of attack (Zhang & De Seta, 2018). Although a few internet celebrities have successfully transitioned their online popularity into real achievements, the absence of standardized practices within the sector has resulted in mixed effects. A notable Chinese case is internet celebrity Li Ziqi, who successfully commercialized her personal intellectual property. However, due to

the lack of industry standards, disputes over brand control with her business partners led to the suspension of her short video updates (Chen, 2022). The industry as an entire community is now experiencing an overwhelming sense of urgency in its pursuit of achieving success (Abidin, 2018). In recent years, many disputed cases have arisen concerning the credibility of internet celebrities, especially in China. These cases have given rise to concerns such as deceptive advertising, substandard product quality, and the misguidance of consumers (Chang, 2023; Guo, 2024; Kong, 2023; Li, 2023; Lin, 2023; Wang, 2023; Zhao & Ding, 2024). It indicates consumers possess a level of worry over the credibility and authenticity of the content they provide. Internet celebrities must consistently preserve their online image and enhance their credibility. The investigation of internet celebrities necessitates a thorough analysis of their credibility since these factors play a crucial role. Consequently, the adaption and change of internet celebrities developed as an important and immediate issue.

Meanwhile, the influence of internet celebrities has not only driven the development of gastronomic tourism but is also intrinsically linked to their information credibility. In the research of Ohanian (1991) about the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers in advertising, this scholar used the Source Credibility Model, which includes the dimensions of attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. In the case of identifying how these attributes influence consumers' evaluations and purchase intentions, the model focuses on the role of perceived credibility as the strongest predictor of consumers' behavioral responses. According to Lou et. al (2019), internet celebrities have the potential to be seen by consumers as trustworthy and credible sources of

information, leading to a greater likelihood of influencing consumer decisions. Recent research has shown the significant impact that internet celebrities have on consumer decisions and behavior. Various elements, including reputation, trustworthiness, consumer engagement, brand connection, and personality, have been identified as influential determinants of consumer intentions (Pradhan et al., 2023).

Therefore, the main aim of this research is to investigate the influence of credibility of internet celebrities on eWOM towards fans and consumers' purchase intentions. The advertiser plays a role in choosing the internet celebrities as their endorsement of the product or services. Therefore, it's important to explore the criteria the advertiser consider when choosing internet celebrities using Ohanian's (1990) Source Credibility Model. This study's attempts are intended to enhance our comprehension of source credibility theory and its application to internet celebrities. Through this, this study aims to provide a gastronomic tourism internet celebrity credibility model that explains and predicts the influence of internet celebrity credibility on the purchase intention and eWOM of consumers. The findings of this study offer valuable recommendations for enhancing credibility management among internet celebrities. Additionally, they provide advertisers and companies with more efficient strategies to optimize the impact of internet celebrities in attracting and retaining consumer decisions.

1.3 Problem Statement

The popularity of the internet and the rise of social media have significantly changed consumer purchase decisions. As new types of social media celebrities, internet

celebrities have become an important power in guiding consumer purchase decisions. (Vrontis, et al., 2021). Become a key driver of consumer decision-making as they trust more the peer recommendation rather than the traditional way. However, AlFarraj et al. (2021) stated that the credibility of internet celebrities as endorser became a critical issue as their perceived trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness, significantly can impact how their followers engage with eWOM and influence their purchase intention. According to reports, numerous gastronomic tourism internet celebrities have failed to disclose their collaboration with merchants to create false positive comments about their destinations, leading to rapid dissemination by social media users resulting in a phenomenon of consumers' reverse choice of low-rated restaurants (Kong, 2023; Li, 2023).

Likewise, in the Chinese gastronomic tourism industry, internet celebrities often use editing techniques to create exaggerated or idealized representations of gastronomic tourism destinations, such as presenting false landscapes or overly positive reviews (Guo, 2024). Such practices are especially common on short-video platforms like TikTok and RED, which play a key role in promoting gastronomic tourism through their visual and interactive content (iClick, 2023). As Zhao and Ding (2024) point out, such practices can mislead tourists into forming unrealistic expectations, which may result in disappointment, financial loss, or even unsafe travel experiences. The frequent spread of such exaggerated content on these platforms underscores a critical concern that the credibility of internet celebrities strongly influences eWOM, consumer trust, and purchase intentions.

Although internet celebrities are consumers, they are strangers. Thus, consumers must delicately assess strangers' judgments (Lim & Van Der Heide, 2014). Social media-based eWOM lacks cues to assist consumers in assessing opinions. These cues are the non-verbal and contextual signals absent online, such as body language and tone of voice. Consumers can't discern from a person's facial expressions, context, or language in online comments (Biswas et al., 2021). Internet celebrities' material may also be manipulated and abused since their online identities are readily changed (Chu et al., 2022). These combined variables contribute to the challenge consumers face in assessing the authenticity and trustworthiness of information when they get eWOM. Hence, this study investigated the influence of the credibility of internet celebrities on eWOM towards fans and consumer purchase intentions.

Further, in recent years, Internet celebrities have become an essential component of brand advertising strategies. Controversial issues concerning the authenticity and credibility of internet celebrities have increased in China, presenting substantial challenges for marketers in evaluating the actual influence and benefits of sponsored content (Dhun & Dangi, 2022). The erosion of trust is commonly linked to the inclination of specific internet celebrities to take endorsements without assessment, placing financial gain above the integrity of their work (Bastrygina et al., 2024). The commercialization of numerous internet celebrities leads to the production of homogenous material that lacks authenticity. They exploit their influence unethically to generate profit and seek substantial commissions by disseminating false advertising, resulting in objections from many advertisers (Chang, 2023; Wang, 2023).

This shows the necessity for advertisers to collaborate with expert/credible internet celebrities to help safeguard their brand reputation and prevent any harm to the interests of consumers and merchants.

Choosing inappropriate internet celebrities as product endorsers can indeed have financial repercussions for advertisers. Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) highlights that the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements is predicated on the compatibility between the celebrity's image and the brand's identity; poor compatibility can result in suboptimal campaigns and financial losses. Erdogan (1999) further emphasizes that choosing the inappropriate celebrity endorser can result in negative publicity and diminished brand credibility, ultimately impacting the advertisers' financial performance. These studies underscore the importance of careful selection in internet celebrity endorsements to safeguard financial investments. Furthermore, studies have emphasized the various factors and lack of criteria for advertisers to consider in choosing internet celebrities such as fan base and influence, expertise and area relevance, brand image compatibility, cooperation experience and cases, and word-of-mouth evaluation and feedback (Audrezet et al., 2020; Janssen et al., 2021; Vrontis et al., 2021). Therefore, this study explores the criteria advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities.

Besides the above challenges, in China, the Cyberspace Administration of China, along with several departments, has issued normative documents such as the Guiding Opinions on Strengthening the Standardized Management of Live Webcasting and the Measures for the Management of Live Webcasting and Marketing (Trial), these

documents aim to regulate live streaming and improve the quality and credibility of internet celebrities (Cyberspace Administration of China et al., 2021a, 2021b). Nevertheless, the credibility of internet celebrities continues to be obstructed by their absence of uniform standards and specific guidance, primarily due to factors such as low penalties for violations, inadequate regulatory and disciplinary systems, consumers' challenges in asserting their rights, and the prevailing emphasis on traffic value (Guo, 2023). This issue influences consumers' judgment of Internet celebrities' recommended content and challenges their self-regulation and social media platforms, especially in a changing technology and market.

In addition, according to the Live Streaming with Products Consumer Rights Opinion Analysis Report released by China Consumer Web et al. (2023), endorsements by internet celebrities are mainly caused by issues such as product quality, false propaganda, uncivilized branding, misleading prices, and lack after-sales services. These issues emphasize the repercussions of failing to evaluate and regulate gastronomic tourism internet celebrity credibility. This has lowered consumers' trust in Internet celebrities, making it hard to verify their recommendations. Therefore, this study suggests a credibility model for gastronomic tourism internet celebrities to enable advertisers and consumers to identify high-quality and credible internet celebrities to safeguard consumers' interests, especially in eWOM and encourage industry growth.

Although previous research has examined internet celebrity endorsements and their

effects on consumer purchase intentions as well as the general role of eWOM (Meng et al., 2021; Tseng & Wang, 2023; Nuseir, 2019), limited research has addressed these issues from the perspective of source credibility (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018; Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020). There is a lack of academic investigation into how the credibility of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities influences eWOM and purchase intention. Meanwhile, while social media research has expanded rapidly, advertisers' choosing criteria for internet celebrities remain underexplored. Existing studies largely emphasize influence metrics such as follower count and engagement (De Veirman et al., 2017; Haenlein et al., 2020), yet the role of credibility in advertisers' decision-making is insufficiently investigated, especially in gastronomic tourism.

The use of source credibility models has been utilized to explain the credibility and effect of information conveyed by internet celebrities (Arenas-Márquez et al., 2021; Asyraff et al., 2022; Human-Van Eck et al., 2021). Despite the existence of several research that has investigated source credibility models across various settings (Cabeza-Ramírez et al., 2022; Tikhomirova, 2021), including the examination of several factors that impact internet celebrities, such as trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness (Afifah, 2022; AlFarraj et al., 2021; Nur Fuady Mahardika & Ning Farida, 2022). The applicability of existing models for credibility to social media platforms is limited due to factors such as consumer variety, the rapid speed of eWOM, and the heterogeneity of internet celebrities (Park & Lin, 2020). Consequently, it is necessary to use new models to evaluate the influence of internet celebrities on consumers (Fan, 2021; Liu et al., 2020).

In summary, the credibility of internet celebrities influences eWOM and online consumers' purchasing intentions are still lacking. This qualitative study investigates the multi-dimensional credibility of internet celebrities and their influence on online consumers' purchase intention and eWOM communication to fill a research gap. Thus, this study examined China's top short video platforms, TikTok and RED.

1.4 Research Questions and Research Objectives

1.4.1 Research Questions

From these issues, the research questions that follow are derived:

- I. How does the credibility of internet celebrities influence electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) towards fans and consumer purchase intentions?
- II. What are the criteria that advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities?
- III. What is the gastronomic tourism model for internet celebrities?

1.4.2 Research Objectives

- I. To investigate the influence of the credibility of internet celebrities on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) towards fans and consumer purchase intentions.
- II. To explore the criteria the advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities.
- III. To suggest a gastronomic tourism model of the internet celebrity.

1.5 Significance of the study

As a theoretical contribution, this study will expand the existing literature about internet celebrities as influencer marketing and eWOM, particularly regarding the role of credibility in shaping fans' and consumers' perceptions and purchase intentions.

Thus, it will provide evidence of the relationship between the source credibility theory and consumer purchase intention in the digital marketing platform. This research would help the advertiser avoid making a wrong decision and prevent losing finances due to wrongly choosing ineffective endorsements. In addition, it would enhance the advertiser's ability to make informed decisions by selecting internet celebrities for brand endorsements and ensuring they align with brand values and the target market.

From the findings of research objective 3, the significance of this study is that it would provide insights for agencies, businesses, and regulatory bodies in developing policies or guidelines related to the disclosure of paid endorsements, especially involving internet celebrities. This is to ensure that the ethical elements of internet celebrities as influencers of marketing practices are considered before choosing them. Developing the model would also encourage platform accountability as the crucial element to prevent deceptive marketing tactics. Despite this study employs a qualitative research approach by integrating in-depth interviews and content analysis, incorporating diverse perspectives from consumers, fans, internet celebrities, advertisers, and academicians, while also analyzing comments from TikTok and RED.

1.6 Research Scope

The scope of this study focuses on the use of short videos featuring internet celebrities on TikTok and RED platforms in China, with particular attention to interactive comments. While there are many categories of internet celebrities, such as those in fashion, beauty, and gaming, this research narrows its focus to the field of gastronomic

tourism. A total of twenty-five informants were recruited for the study, Specifically, this includes six consumers and six fans who actively engage with two popular social media platforms, TikTok and RED. These informants were chosen from the age group of 19 to 35 years old, as this demographic represents most active social media participants. Additionally, four internet celebrities who have garnered significant influence in the sphere of gastronomic tourism were chosen for in-depth interviews. Six advertisers and three academicians—each with either experience in brand collaborations or substantial academic research on internet celebrities—were also selected to provide diverse perspectives.

The primary objective of this study is to focus on the credibility of internet celebrities in social media to understand the influence of internet celebrities on eWOM and purchase intentions, as well as the criteria that advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities. This study was focused on three main perspectives: source credibility, eWOM and purchase intention, and proposing a gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model. Specifically, it investigates the influence of credibility of internet celebrities in short videos towards fans' eWOM and consumers' purchase intentions. The SCM serves as the theoretical framework for this research. This study used the SCM as a theoretical framework. In addition, the study explores the criteria advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities and suggest a gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model.

The research used a qualitative approach, namely employing the qualitative research methodology. Qualitative methodologies can ascertain relationships and discern prevailing variables. This research used a combination of content analysis and in-depth interviews to gather data. This research seeks to select a sample of twenty videos featuring internet celebrities within the gastronomic tourism sector from two platforms, namely TikTok and RED. Comments from fans and consumers on the short video content produced by internet celebrities are also used as data for content analysis. The data that has been gathered subjected to analysis via the use of NVivo 14 qualitative software, enabling the acquisition of the ultimate study outcomes.

1.7 Operational Definition

1.7.1 Credibility

According to Hovland et al. (1953), credibility may be defined as the perceived trustworthiness of specific information and the source from which it originates. In a similar vein, the concept of source credibility pertains to the degree to which the recipient of information regards the source as possessing competence and as being accessible to obtain product-related knowledge (Ohanian, 1990). Additionally, credibility, as defined by HA et al., (2019), refers to the subjective sense of dependable, honesty, and trustworthiness, in the context of endorsing products or services on social media platforms like Instagram. According to Crescentia and Nainggolan (2022), credibility refers to the perceived reliability and believability of internet celebrities about the suggestions and information they provide to their followers.

Hence, the concept of credibility in this research pertains to the extent of dependability, honesty, and trustworthiness, shown by internet celebrities on online platforms (HA et al., 2019). This encompasses the extent to which consumers possess confidence in their perspectives, evaluations, and knowledge of the items or services they endorse (Crescentia & Nainggolan, 2022). The effect of individuals is determined by several aspects, including their level of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990; 1991), which collectively shape how internet celebrities influence consumer perceptions, engagement, and purchasing intentions. This research focuses on credibility construction in short videos, such as the presentation of visual information, the supporting role of user comments, and how the personal characteristics of internet celebrities shape their influence in e WOM.

1.7.2 Internet Celebrity

Using the phrase “someone who has become famous through their presence and/or activity on the internet,” Abidin (2018) presents a definition of an internet celebrity. This concept serves to differentiate between online and offline celebrities by emphasizing the important role that the internet plays in the rise to fame of internet celebrities rather than more conventional forms of media like television, radio, or print. Although internet celebrities may originate from any walk of life, most of them are young, handsome, and creative internet personalities who have risen to fame thanks to their writings or videos (Marwick, 2015). According to Deges (2018), an internet celebrity is an expert in their field who interacts with the community by sharing opinions, experiences, and expertise through blogs and social media accounts. By

contrast, Luo et al. (2023) argue that an internet celebrity is “a social media celebrity who has become well known by leveraging their online presence and influence, potentially profiting from their activities”.

Similarly, Waili (2023) describes internet celebrities as “those who have gained fame and recognition through the use of social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter”. These definitions emphasize that a specific group of internet celebrities has gained fame as influential stars through social media. In this research, an internet celebrity refers to a person who has attained prominence and exerted influence within a particular domain or field through their online presence or engagement on social media platforms (Abidin, 2018). This refers to individuals who have achieved renown as internet celebrities focusing on areas such as gastronomic tourism (Deges, 2018). They cultivate a robust following by generating content that highlights their individuality and viewpoints, therefore engaging with their consumer (Waili, 2023). Internet celebrities often capitalize on their digital presence to generate income, while exerting influence on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions (Luo et al., 2023).

1.7.3 Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

Kim and Lee (2005) propose that eWOM refers to the dissemination of both positive and negative consumer opinions by those with prior experience, occurring inside an online environment. Conversely, less experienced consumers use online platforms to communicate pertinent experiential information. Similarly, Litvin et al. (2008) define the electronic word of mouth as “all informal communications directed to consumers

through internet-based technologies regarding the use or characterization of specific goods and services or their sellers” (p. 459). This sort of communication may be described as a dynamic and ongoing flow of information on goods and services among future, current, or past consumers. This facet of the concept emphasizes the fluid and ongoing character of the use of a certain commodity or service, as well as its vendor, together with the incorporation of prospective, existing, and past consumers.

Moreover, eWOM may be described as the act of individuals expressing their experiences and opinions on various goods, services, brands, and businesses via online platforms, including but not limited to reviews, social media postings, and testimonials (Khondkar, 2022). This statement underscores the notion that eWOM mostly occurs on social media platforms, and further highlights the multifaceted nature of eWOM, including several dimensions of consumer feedback and experiences shared. Hence, the present study defines eWOM as positive or negative evaluations made by consumers on short video social media platforms regarding products or services recommended by internet celebrities (Kim & Lee, 2005; Ismagilova et al., 2019). Compared to traditional eWOM, short video eWOM has greater visual impact and interactivity, allowing users to express their opinions through comments, likes, shares, bullet screen interactions, and other methods (Khondkar, 2022).

1.7.4 Social Media

In their definition of “social media”, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) write that “social media” is “a group of internet-based applications that expand upon the concepts and

technologies of Web 2.0 to facilitate the production and dissemination of user-generated content.” User-generated content as per the definition provided by Carr and Hayes (2015), is a channel of mass communication that is unfiltered and persistent. It enables users to perceive the interaction between themselves and derives value primarily from content that is generated by users. This definition emphasizes the use of internet-based applications and then considers channels and value. Similarly, Kapoor et al. (2018) defines “social media” as a digital platform designed for individuals to engage and network with one another across various domains, such as personal, professional, business, marketing, political, and social. This concept guides social media sites but doesn’t specify methods of participation. Social networking platforms allow users to establish individual user profiles and exchange various types of material. Individuals can construct and sustain their social connections by engaging in interactions with others on various social media platforms (Ali Taha et al., 2021).

Therefore, the term “social media” was used in this context to refer to internet- and app-based platforms and apps that encourage user-to-user sharing and engagement (Carr and Hayes, 2015; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.61). Specifically, this research focuses on the role of short video social media platforms (such as TikTok and RED) in eWOM communication, examining how users shape information credibility and influence through video content, comments, and interactions. Individuals or organizations may sign up for these services and then utilize their accounts to construct and maintain social networks via the sharing of material, comments, likes, retweets, etc. (Ali Taha et al., 2021; Kapoor et al., 2018).

1.7.5 Fans

According to Morrissey (2013), fans may be defined as those who engage in fan groups and behaviors as a means of expressing their affection and enthusiasm for a specific media series. This perspective emphasizes the communal and participatory aspects of fan culture. In the opinion of Abercrombie and Longhurst (2014), fans may be characterized as those who possess a profound emotional connection and fervor for certain people, groups, or activities. As explained by Fuschillo (2018), those who possess a profound interest in or adoration for a certain person, organization, or activity, and who often engage in various activities associated with their interests, such as attending events or amassing related products, may be classified as fans. Souza-Leão et al. (2020) posit that fans are seen as engaged consumers of popular culture companies, actively involved in various activities such as the creation of fan videos and engaging in imitation.

Hence, in the context of this research, the term “fans” refers to individuals who possess intense emotional connections and fervor towards individuals, groups, cultural phenomena, media content, or activities (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 2014; Fuschillo, 2018). These individuals demonstrate their support and articulate their sentiments for the subjects of their admiration through verbal communication and active participation within communities (Morrissey, 2013). Individuals actively engage in social media platforms and online communities, therefore establishing a collective group characterized by common interests and beliefs (Souza-Leão et al., 2020).

1.7.6 Consumers

According to Selvaraj and Malathi (2005), consumers are individuals who engage in the process of evaluating, acquiring, using, or disposing of products and services to meet their needs and requirements. This concept emphasizes the significance of consumers in their capacity as ultimate recipients of goods and services. Based on the definition provided by Venkatesh and Akdevelioglu (2017), consumers are persons who actively participate in brand interactions on social media platforms and engage in online activities related to consumer behavior. The definitions underscore the significance of consumers as engaged players and interactors within the realm of social media, hence emphasizing their active engagement in brand communication and marketing endeavors.

Furthermore, in the view of Mathur et al. (2022), consumers can be defined as individuals who engage with companies and express their opinions and experiences through various social media platforms. This term places additional emphasis on the active engagement of consumers in social media platforms. Hence, the consumers in this research are individuals who engage in the assessment, procurement, utilization, or disposal of commodities and services to fulfill their requirements (Selvaraj & Malathi, 2005). These individuals actively partake, interact, and exert influence on other individuals' perceptions of products, services, brands, and organizations through social media platforms (Mathur et al., 2022; Venkatesh & Akdevelioglu, 2017).

1.7.7 Purchase Intention

In the opinion of Hill et al. (1977), purchase intention may be defined as an individual's anticipation of their conduct in a certain scenario, specifically referring to the probability of their intention to act. This finding demonstrates the correlation between an individual's purchase intention and their perception of the anticipated outcomes of their actions. As defined by Khalifa and Limayem (2003), the concept of internet purchase behavior refers to the act of acquiring goods, services, and information using online platforms. This study focuses on the purchasing behavior inside the internet environment. According to Morwitz et al. (2007), the concept of purchase intention refers to the consumer's explicit desire or intention to acquire a certain product or service at a later point in time. This concept emphasizes that buying intention precedes the actual act of purchasing. As defined by Morwitz (2012), purchase intention refers to the potential or indicated desire of consumers to acquire a product or service at a later point in time, considering the inherent uncertainty that exists between this intention and the actual act of making a purchase.

Morwitz (2012) further underscores the notion that purchase intention should not be seen as an infallible indicator of consumer eventual purchasing behavior since intentions do not always manifest as real purchases. Hence, this study operationalizes purchase intention as the probability that an individual who engages in online shopping will proceed with the purchase of a specific product or service (Hill et al., 1977). Meanwhile, it encompasses the inclination and readiness of consumers to make purchases based on endorsements or recommendations from internet celebrities

(Khalifa & Limayem, 2003; Morwitz, 2012), and the underlying factors that influence the decision to make a purchase (Morwitz et al., 2007).

1.8 Chapter Summary

The present chapter has an introductory section, providing contextual information, followed by an examination of the determinants impacting eWOM and online consumers' purchase intentions and the perceived dimensions of credibility attributed to internet celebrities. The chapter further delineates the research aims, research questions, and the importance and scope of the investigation. Subsequently, the research proceeds to provide detailed explanations of the conceptual definitions of significant concepts.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The primary purpose of this literature review chapter is to review the credibility influence of internet celebrities via eWOM and purchase intention. The initial section of this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the gastronomic tourism internet celebrities active on Chinese short video platforms. Subsequently, the chapter reviews the definitions of eWOM and further explores the impact of credibility on eWOM. On this foundation, the chapter defines the concept of purchase intention and analyzes the link between eWOM and purchase intention, clarifying the role of credibility in this process. Further, based on the SCM, this research proposes a theoretical framework tailored to gastronomic tourism internet celebrities, aiming to reveal the components of credibility and its logical relationship with eWOM and purchase intention. It also identifies gaps in the existing literature.

2.2 Gastronomic Tourism Internet Celebrities

Celebrity endorsement is a common strategy for many brands that over the last few years have been using this powerful marketing tool to communicate their products. A strategy that has become more and more relevant, particularly with the digital era and the growth of social networks (Loureiro & Sarmento, 2018). Internet celebrities are distinguished by their ability to exert influence, their perceived genuineness, and their possession of several identities. Internet celebrities cultivate a substantial following by

disseminating self-generated content in many domains such as beauty, fitness, cuisine, and fashion via online platforms, therefore transforming their online social engagements into a viable profession (Lin et al., 2018). A diverse array of Chinese internet celebrities encompasses several domains and areas of interest. Among the many categories of internet celebrities, gastronomic tourism internet celebrities blending lifestyle presentation with sensory appeal to attract broad consumers (Li et al., 2020).

Gastronomy is not just food but a combination of experience, culture and food and beverage tasting (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012, as cited in Vukolic et al., 2025).

Gastronomic tourism is defined as an activity of research and discovery of culture and history through food, which influences the formation of unforgettable experiences (Long, 1998; Vukolić, 2020). The importance of certain food attributes and the impression that food leaves on tourists are of great importance for the development of loyalty among tourists (Gajić et al., 2021). The phenomenon of gastronomic tourism has seen significant worldwide growth in recent years. Gastronomic tourism is classified as a kind of special interest tourism that appeals to those with a profound fascination with culinary experiences. Individuals who engage in extensive culinary exploration and prioritize gastronomic as a central aspect of their travel experiences are often referred to as food enthusiasts or gastronomic tourists/travelers.

Gastronomic tourism has emerged as a prevalent travel phenomenon, as indicated by the World Food Travel Association (2019). The selection of a location by tourists is

increasingly influenced by the allure of culinary offerings, resulting in a heightened emphasis on allocating additional resources, both in terms of time and finances, towards indulging in distinctive eating experiences. Video bloggers and travel internet celebrities are utilized by various tourism businesses to promote gastronomic destinations (Shoukat et al., 2023) and local culinary experiences (Sharma et al., 2020) through social media platforms like video endorsement. This practice contributes to the enhancement of consumer experiences through co-creation (Haenlein et al., 2020; Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2018). In addition, a poll done by Du (2023), which had 1,333 young individuals as participants, revealed that 96.1% of the respondents expressed a strong inclination to explore and experience local specialties throughout their travels. The primary avenue via which young individuals seek sustenance during their travels is by relying on the recommendations and food-sharing practices facilitated by internet celebrities. Most of the questioned youth hold the belief that consuming locally sourced cuisine while vacation imbues it with a sense of authenticity and cultural significance.

The popularity of gastronomic tourism has risen due to the growing demand for such experiences (Li et al., 2020). As a result, videos featuring internet celebrities engaging in gastronomic tourism have gained significant attention (Li et al., 2020). Additionally, the enjoyment derived from gastronomic consumption is closely linked to sensory pleasure (Batat et al., 2019). Su et al. (2018) asserts that gastronomic plays a pivotal role in shaping travel choices and serves to acquire knowledge about culinary identities, cultural history, shared gastronomic values, and lifestyles (Boniface, 2017). According

to Batat et al. (2019), videos created by gastronomic tourism internet celebrities effectively capture the whole sensory encounter of traveling. These internet celebrities not only document their journeys, but also engage in introspection, connect with their consumer, and recount their anecdotes related to gastronomic tourism. Consumers demonstrate emotional engagement and indirectly participate in a multimodal gastronomic encounter via the consumption of videos featuring internet celebrities who document their culinary journeys.

Internet celebrities in the field of gastronomic tourism provide content that is presented from an interactive standpoint. This kind of content is characterized using technology to facilitate an embodied and narrative experience (Le et al., 2018). Brochado et al. (2019) see online wine videos as a digital phenomenon that augments individuals' inclination to make purchases and their propensity to allocate financial resources. Nevertheless, how social media internet celebrities partake in sensory-rich gastronomic tourism and their impact on consumers' purchase intentions and eWOM remains ambiguous. Therefore, this study focuses on gastronomic tourism internet celebrities to fill the research gap.

2.2.1 Internet Celebrity in TikTok and RED

TikTok has established significant influence within China's social media landscape, where its short-video format and precision algorithmic recommendations are fundamentally reshaping the dissemination of gastronomic tourism content. Research indicates that TikTok's recommendation mechanisms rapidly amplify visually driven

and entertainment-focused gastronomic content, enabling previously niche gastronomic experiences or destinations to achieve widespread exposure within brief periods, thus enhancing destination visibility and influencing tourist flows (Aini Suid et al., 2024; Kulkarni, 2025).

In terms of narrative strategies and production practices, scholars have consistently noted that gastronomic tourism short videos on TikTok predominantly employ fast-paced editing, trending templates, and emotionally charged expression to generate visual impact. As Walsh et al. (2024) emphasize, such sensory stimulation-focused narratives frequently sacrifice contextual information, resulting in compromised authenticity. Similarly, Selvakumar et al. (2025) found that TikTok's gastronomic tourism internet celebrities prioritize showcasing visual spectacles of consumption moments over comprehensive cultural contexts.

Beyond content production, scholars have examined TikTok's gastronomic tourism phenomenon through persuasion and ethical lenses. Chen et al.'s (2022) empirical research demonstrates that internet celebrity reach, perceived authenticity, and commercial partnership disclosure significantly affect consumer trust and travel intentions. Meanwhile, Islam (2025) warns that the normalization of excessive commercialization and idealized imagery often generates unrealistic tourist expectations, potentially leading to disappointment and overtourism challenges.

RED occupies a distinct position within China's social media landscape compared to TikTok. Widely recognized as a lifestyle-sharing platform in China, RED features

content formats that combine image-text posts with short videos, emphasizing "grass-planting/grass-pulling" consumption sharing practices. Fan's (2024) research suggests that RED influencers depend more heavily on experience-based detailed sharing, which enhances the trustworthiness and practicality of culinary tourism recommendations. Wang and Iahad (2024) further argue that RED has emerged as a crucial channel linking social interaction with e-commerce consumption in urban tourism and restaurant promotion.

Within industry practices, culinary tourism influencers on RED typically provide comprehensive food travel experiences through image-text posts or short videos, incorporating practical information such as pricing, routes, and dining specifics. As Pop et al. (2021) observe, this thoroughness not only increases content reference value but also substantially influences consumer travel decisions. Ma's (2024) mixed-methods study further demonstrates that internet celebrity activity levels and credibility on RED significantly impact consumer destination selection. Critical research, however, questions RED's commercialization practices. Chen et al.'s (2024) investigation reveals that platform incentive structures partially encourage internet celebrities to produce excessively positive content, thereby obscuring authentic consumption experiences. Fan (2024) identifies tensions between brand collaborations and lifestyle curation that create both labor and commercial pressures for RED internet celebrities. These findings suggest that while RED enhances internet celebrity expertise and trustworthiness, it simultaneously risks authenticity deficits and consumerism expansion.

Both TikTok and RED significantly influence the gastronomic tourism industry, yet their platform mechanisms and content ecosystems differ substantially. TikTok prioritizes immediacy and visual impact in short videos, facilitating trend creation through algorithmic recommendations that rapidly generate short-term destination traffic, though this approach risks authenticity deficits and excessive commercialization. Conversely, RED emphasizes comprehensive experience-based sharing, with its "grass-planting/grass-pulling" mechanism providing stronger reference value and sustained influence in consumer decision-making, while facing content distortion and consumerism expansion due to commercial collaboration pressures. These platform differences demonstrate that gastronomic tourism internet celebrity communication logic and effectiveness vary across different social media environments. Nevertheless, whether on TikTok or RED, internet celebrity credibility remains the fundamental determinant of eWOM dissemination and consumer purchase intentions.

2.2.2 Credibility of Internet Celebrity

Credibility is related to the positive communication traits to influence the receivers to accept the message that is delivered by the communication source (Lim et al., 2023). The level of trust and authority that consumer attribute to internet celebrities directly impacts their credibility. Credibility pertains to the level of expertise, authenticity, sincerity, and dependability shown by an internet celebrity (Abidin, 2016; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018). According to previous research conducted by Munasinghe et al. (2019) and Origgi (2020), it is often observed that consumers tend to exhibit a higher

level of confidence in internet celebrities who possess specialized expertise and maintain a trustworthy reputation within a certain field. Therefore, credibility is often regarded as the foremost trusted determinant for the internet celebrity (Suresh et al., 2020). Credibility is determined by the presence of trustworthiness and expertise. The views generated by expertise and trustworthiness sources exhibit the greatest degree of diversity. This supported by Vidyanata et al. (2022) informed that credibility of the celebrity may attract the consumer without considering too much of the product credentials. Credibility could be deemed as the source of trustworthiness and reliability. Generally, the source is considered as trustworthy, attractive and deemed as an expert. It can influence the consumer purchase intention also attitude and behavior (Vidyanata et al., 2022). Nevertheless, according to McGinnies and Ward (1980), communicators who are seen as trustworthy possess a higher degree of persuasiveness, regardless of their level of expertise.

Previous research has indicated that the ideal qualities required for celebrity endorsement are consistency, flexibility, expertise, attractiveness, as well as longevity and likeability (Jha et al., 2020). A study conducted by Zak and Hasprova (2020) revealed that consumers place a higher value on the skills and expertise possessed by internet celebrities compared to their physical attractiveness. A majority of over 55% of participants hold the belief that items recommended by internet celebrities have superior qualities compared to other alternatives. Furthermore, a minimum of 30% of respondents express their intention to make a purchase solely based on the recommendation of their preferred internet celebrity. Contrary to that, the study

conducted by Wiedmann and Von Mettenheim (2020) revealed that trustworthiness and attractiveness emerged as the primary determinants of success for internet celebrities, with expertise playing a comparatively lesser role. Similarly, in a study conducted by Karaila (2021), it was shown that the credibility and attractiveness of social media internet celebrities had a beneficial impact on word-of-mouth, purchase intentions, and sentiments towards both mainstream and independent games, particularly within the video game sector. Moreover, the study conducted by Lin et al. (2021) shows that consumers' perception of trustworthiness towards internet celebrities can transcend racial and cultural boundaries. Internet celebrities who possess likeability and credibility, together with a deep understanding of a product, have a greater impact on consumers by effectively encouraging brand purchases.

The study conducted by Lou and Yuan (2019) discovered that various factors, such as the informational value of content generated by internet celebrities, the credibility and attractiveness of these celebrities, and the level of similarity between them and their followers, have a positive impact on the trust followers place in brand posts created by internet celebrities. Meanwhile, Dhun and Dangi (2022) determined that expertise, similarity, and reliability have a favorable correlation with brand attitude. Expertise, trustworthiness, and similarities have a favorable correlation with consumers' propensity for engagement in eWOM. In addition, Lee and Eastin (2021) found that internet celebrity authenticity is a multidimensional construct, encompassing sincerity, genuine recommendations, recognizability, expertise, and uniqueness. Similarly, Wellman et al. (2020) suggest that internet celebrities use authenticity as an ethical

framework, emphasizing loyalty to self and brand, as well as loyalty to their fans, to balance commercial interests with fans' trust.

In conclusion, the preeminent determinant of credibility among internet celebrities is widely regarded as trust, as shown by the studies conducted by Suresh et al. (2020). Numerous scholarly investigations have shown that the credibility of internet celebrities has significant sway on consumer purchase decisions and behavioral (Karaila, 2021; Lou & Yuan, 2019). This finding indicates consumers are inclined to place more trust in internet celebrities who are viewed as trustworthy. Nonetheless, Lin et al. (2021) found no substantial variation in the perception of internet celebrities' credibility among consumers from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

2.3 Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

2.3.1 Definition of eWOM

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) refers to the ongoing flow of information about a product, service, brand, or company among future, current, or past consumers using the Internet (Ismagilova et al., 2017, p. 18). EWOM communication is a cost-free method of sales support that aids consumers in acquiring information about products and services. EWOM is perceived as more reliable and trustworthy for shaping impartial viewpoints (Doh & Hwang, 2009). EWOM is deemed more influential than expert opinions and substantially impacts the purchase intention process (Hussain et al., 2017). Hence, the present study defines eWOM as positive or negative evaluations made by consumers on short video social media platforms regarding products or

services recommended by internet celebrities (Kim & Lee, 2005; Ismagilova et al., 2019).

Prior research has identified two types of eWOM based on its sources: organic (or intrinsic) eWOM and amplified (or extrinsic) eWOM, the latter also referred to as exogenous eWOM (Cheung et al., 2009). Further research indicates that eWOM manifests in various content formats, such as online text reviews, image-based reviews, and video-based reviews (Li et al., 2023). Social media sites often feature user-generated eWOM in the form of reviews, which can include rating systems from 1 to 5, as well as open-ended reviews, photos, and videos. User-generated video reviews enhance the persuasive impact of a review by demonstrating the practical application of a product or service, in contrast to text reviews (Diwanji & Cortese, 2020). Video-mediated eWOM, or vWOM, Zhai et al. (2022) describes it as user-generated video reviews of a product or service uploaded to a video platform. Product or service demo films can help consumers by providing detailed information that reduces confusion in online shopping (Hao et al., 2019).

2.3.2 Impact of Credibility on eWOM

The credibility of the individual generating eWOM has been explored based on their followers, opinions, likes, and shares. It has been found that this credibility has an impact on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions (Kim et al., 2020). According to Kwiatek et al. (2021), consumers have a higher inclination to trust eWOM over traditional WOM when seeking brand recommendations online. This is primarily due

to the endorsement of eWOM by internet celebrities who possess significant knowledge in a specific field, exhibit charisma, and command respect from other users. The study additionally affirms that the credibility of Internet celebrities, encompassing their expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness, significantly impacts consumer attitudes toward brands.

Previous research has shown that credibility is significant in assessing eWOM information (Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2018; Yan et al., 2018). Consumers may encounter significant eWOM when researching products or services online. Consumers rely on source credibility to navigate eWOM communications (Dou et al., 2012). Consumers who receive eWOM messages are more inclined to consider them throughout their purchase intention process if they view them as reliable (Aladwani & Dwivedi, 2018). Trust in eWOM influences online consumers' acceptance of items and services. (Liu et al., 2015). EWOM from internet celebrities significantly impacts their capacity to influence others and online consumers. This study investigated the influence of the credibility of internet celebrities on eWOM towards fans and consumers' purchase intentions.

The influence of eWOM is contingent upon the credibility of the source, the veracity of the information, and the quantity of information acquired from eWOM (López & Sicilia, 2014). The credibility of the eWOM is evaluated based on factors such as appearance, presentation, transparency, and the identity of the generator (Reichelt et al., 2013). In their study on beauty internet celebrities, Konstantopoulou et al. (2019)

found that trust, honesty, and authenticity play crucial roles in enhancing the influence of eWOM. Shen (2021) discovered three factors that determine the effectiveness of fashion internet celebrities in persuading others through eWOM: content keywords, positive influence, and the type of expertise possessed by the internet celebrity. Hussain et al. (2017) found that expertise, trustworthiness, and objectivity are the main factors that determine the credibility of eWOM.

The quality of eWOM has been acknowledged as an essential factor in influencing information (Petty et al., 1986), and it plays a significant role in establishing the credibility of consumer eWOM generators. Zhang et al. (2014) have classified the quality of eWOM into two categories: perceived informativeness and perceived persuasiveness. Perceived informativeness pertains to consumers' general impression of information, whereas perceived persuasiveness refers to consumer's impressions of spoken assertions (Zhang et al., 2014). Zhou et al. (2017) argued that perceived informativeness and perceived persuasiveness both contribute to the perceived value of information, as individual consumers have varying information demands and perspectives. Perceived informativeness and perceived persuasiveness both indicate how well information fulfills consumers' requirements and their capacity to assess and understand information (Zhang et al., 2014). Susanti and Yulianita (2021) in their study on 'The study of advertisement quality of information, attractiveness and display frequency influence to purchase intention in Indonesia' emphasized a variable that had the most positive and significant influence, which is information quality.

The quantity of eWOM is also essential for consumers to assess the credibility of the eWOM source (Bulut and Karabulut, 2018). The quantity of eWOM is commonly seen as an indicator of the credibility and popularity of product reviews. Petty et al. (1986) found that consumers consider a greater quantity of online reviews to be more informative. Cheung and Thadani (2012) asserted that the quantity of recommendations is a highly scrutinized sensory cue in eWOM communication. Research has demonstrated that the quantity of eWOM can enhance product recognition, popularity, and sales (Duan et al., 2008). Furthermore, current research indicates that the quantity of eWOM, consumer engagement, and the perceived credibility of eWOM are significant factors that influence the acceptance of eWOM (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2019). Previous research has established that word count, specific information, the proportion of negative words, and persuasive words determine the persuasiveness of eWOM in consumer-brand relationships (Cheung et al., 2009; Cheng and Ho, 2015).

Ngarmwongnoi et al. (2020) propose that the quantity of eWOM significantly influences consumers' impressions of its utility. Furthermore, the quantity of shares, likes, and views serve as the metrics for assessing the credibility of eWOM. Similarly to Hoffman and Fodor (2010), as cited in Loureiro and Sarmento (2018), eWOM can be understood as likes, comments, or shares of brand or celebrity posts that are visible to friends and other users and are valuable indicators of consumer engagement. When social network users like or follow a brand or celebrity, they get their updates and messages in their feed. Users can then "like", comment on, or share a "post" by

spreading it through their friends' feed, whose interactions with the "post" will in turn make it retransmit their networks (Phua et al., 2016). Yu and Natalia (2013) found that the adoption of eWOM in user-generated video environments is strongly influenced by the credibility of the person who posts or creates a video review on the platform. This credibility is closely linked to the individual's expertise and trustworthiness. Moreover, Research conducted by Nurfadila (2020) has revealed that the sensitivity and agility of internet celebrities in keeping up with current trends can have a substantial impact on the extent to which consumers are reached and engaged. Internet celebrities can enhance their fans' trust and sense of connection by following popular trends. Consumers may view internet celebrities as more down-to-earth and dependable, leading to an increase in their confidence in the items or services they recommend (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

2.4 Purchase Intention

2.4.1 Definition of Purchase Intention

Purchase intention was initially conceptualized by Namias (1960) as the tendency of consumers to plan or intend to purchase a specific product or service. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) further defined it as an individual's subjective expectation regarding the performance of a particular behavior in each context, emphasizing the perceived likelihood of future action and the expected consequences associated with that behavior. With the development of the internet network, researchers began to examine consumer behavior in online settings. Khalifa and Limayem (2003) viewed internet purchasing behavior as the process of acquiring products, services, or information via

online networks, thereby highlighting the distinct characteristics of online purchase intention. According to Sa'ait et al. (2016), if the users are interested to get the product or services, it means that, there is a purchase intention in their mind; they wish to get the product or services, either in long term or short term. When consumers have a positive attitude or expression toward brand products or services, purchase intentions will happen, as they are influenced by their positive attitude towards the product or services.

In the e-commerce, Pavlou (2003) defined purchase intention as the consumer's willingness and plan to engage in online transactions, noting that concerns about privacy and security may influence this intention (George, 2004). Morwitz et al. (2007) asserted that purchase intention serves as a key antecedent to actual purchase behavior, although such intentions do not always translate into actions (Morwitz, 2014). Ouimet (2015) also emphasized that purchase intentions are typically directed toward specific products or services. Hence, this study defines purchase intention as the consumer's subjective probability and willingness to purchase products or services within social media, particularly after being influenced by recommendations from internet celebrities (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Khalifa & Limayem, 2003; Morwitz, 2014). It is considered a critical precursor to actual purchasing behavior.

2.4.2 Linking eWOM to Purchase Intention Effectively

As a form of information dissemination, eWOM has been shown to play a significant role in influencing consumer purchase intention. Ho et al. (2021) identified many key

elements that influence consumers' eWOM. These factors include the expertise of the information provider, the quantity of eWOM, the trustworthiness of the source of eWOM, and the quality of eWOM. Each of these four factors exerts a positive and diminishing influence on consumer purchase intention. Dahlgren & Enshagen (2023) found that eWOM on TikTok, namely concerning video information, quality, quantity, and following trends, had a direct impact on consumer purchase behavior. Furthermore, Deandra Perkasa Putri and Omar Sharif (2023) corroborated the perspective that the quality, quantity, and credibility of eWOM have a favorable and substantial impact on purchase intention.

Multiple studies have shown evidence that the quality of eWOM has the greatest influence on consumer purchases. In their study, Bulut and Karabulut (2018) showed that consumers' perceptions of the quality of eWOM positively influence their adoption of the information and their intentions of purchasing intentions. The data analysis revealed that the influence of review source and review quality on online review credibility ratings was more substantial compared to the influence of review consistency and receiver (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018). According to Thomas et al. (2019), the quality of arguments in online reviews, such as accuracy, completeness, and quantity, has a considerable impact on the credibility of the reviews. This credibility, in turn, has a beneficial effect on consumers' intentions to make a purchase.

The quantity of eWOM is determined by the number of comments and the consistency of those remarks (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018; Thomas et al., 2019). The quantity of

eWOM is considered a significant factor in eWOM and social media studies (Thomas et al., 2019). When an individual has many followers, consumers may view them as reliable and accept the information they provide (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2016). Therefore, the quantity of anything is strongly linked to its credibility, the extent to which its message is accepted, and the likelihood of being purchased (Bataineh, 2015).

Studies have demonstrated that eWOM mostly affects consumer intentions and decision-making using visual signals, as evidenced by Filieri et al. (2021). Rani et al. (2019) showed that the presentation of eWOM on the Internet has an important effect on consumers' purchase intention. There is a distinction between the practical elements, such as "visual and textual," and the informational aspects of eWOM. While the practical aspects serve a purpose, the informational aspects do not. In addition, Filieri et al. (2021) conducted a study that applied the dual coding theory to examine how verbal and visual eWOM cues influence consumer intention and behavior. The study suggested that pictures inspired by popularity, visually appealing performance, and user-generated content had an impact on consumer intentions and decisions to visit a destination and its attractions.

Zhai et al. (2022) discovered that there is a substantial and positive correlation between the visualization of eWOM and the credibility of internet celebrities, and purchase intention. The association between internet celebrities' credibility and purchasing intention is negatively influenced by Visual eWOM engagement. Additionally, it was discovered that the visual emotional polarity had a negative moderating effect on the

connection between eWOM visualization and purchase intention. Furthermore, the influence and effectiveness of internet celebrities in attracting consumers is significantly increased when their visuals and material are in line with following trends (Jin & Phua, 2014). Xu and Pratt (2018) validated that internet celebrities can significantly enhance brand recognition and consumers' inclination to purchase by exhibiting the most recent fashion trends or technology products. Shoenberger and Kim (2022) provide additional evidence to support this perspective. Their study examines the impact of following internet celebrities on Instagram for trend-following. The results indicate that such followers are more likely to have an increased intention to purchase the items displayed by these celebrities.

2.4.3 The Role of Credibility in the Link Between eWOM and Purchase Intention

The significance of credibility in consumer purchase intentions lies in its impact on both the desire to acquire suggested items or services and the intention to engage in eWOM (Mainolfi & Vergura, 2021; Prastiwi & Aminah, 2021). According to the study conducted by Wang et al. (2022), it was observed that the purchase intentions of consumers were positively influenced by the perceived credibility and impulsiveness of internet celebrities. This implies that credibility has a significant influence on online consumers' purchasing intentions. Chen et al. (2021) agreed with the notion that credibility plays a significant role in influencing impulsive purchasing behavior. Furthermore, the factors of identity and perceived fit play a significant role in augmenting impulsive purchases by enhancing credibility.

Numerous studies have been shown to indicate that the credibility of internet celebrities has influence on online consumers' purchase intentions. The study conducted by Muda and Hamzah (2021) examined the indirect impact of consumers' perception of the source credibility of video internet celebrities on YouTube on their intent to engage in eWOM activity and make purchase intentions. The results indicate a significant and favorable association between perceived source credibility and consumers' attitudes towards user-generated content on the YouTube platform. Baig and Shahzad (2022) conducted a study to examine the impact of evaluating the credibility aspects, namely trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise, of internet celebrities on consumer behavior. The findings of the research indicate a favorable relationship between the credibility characteristics of internet celebrities and consumer attitudes towards businesses as well as purchase intentions. Recommendations provided by proficient and knowledgeable professionals are more inclined to be seen as credible, hence fostering client loyalty. The findings of a study done by Nugroho et al. (2021) provide support for this assertion, particularly about generation Z consumers.

Contrary to that, in a recent study conducted by Bogoevska-Gavrilova and Ciunova-shuleska (2022), it was shown that the perceived attractiveness and trustworthiness of an internet celebrity significantly impacted consumer intentions to make a purchase. Nevertheless, the factors of source expertise and similarities were shown to have no significant impact on consumer purchasing intentions. Furthermore, the study conducted by Yap and Yang (2021) specifically examined the credibility of internet celebrities on TikTok and its influence on the purchase intention of youngsters. The

findings of the study indicate that there is a positive association between perceived trustworthiness, physical attractiveness, and similarity with purchase intention. However, it was shown that the expertise of the source did not have a statistically significant effect on the desire to make a purchase.

Martiningsih and Setyawan (2022) conducted a study that revealed the potential impact of attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise attributes on consumer intention, accounting for 49% of the effect. The remaining 51% of consumer intention is attributed to other variables. The influence of internet celebrities on purchase intention was shown to be both minor and negative, indicating a lack of credibility. In a study conducted by Li and Cai (2019), it was shown that consumer attitudes and purchasing intention are significantly influenced by attractiveness, expertise, and celebrity engagement from traditional sources. However, the level of trustworthiness associated with these sources was found to vary.

Various studies have examined how credibility influences Internet celebrities and other factors influencing consumers' purchasing intentions. Zniva et al. (2023) discovered that the mediating role of internet celebrity authenticity on purchase intentions is facilitated by both brand authenticity and brand attitude. This implies that consumers are more inclined to make purchases of items endorsed by internet celebrities who are viewed as genuine and aligned with their brand. Scholarly investigations have also directed their attention towards examining the influence of video attributes and authenticity of internet celebrities on consumer engagement. Ying et al. (2020)

conducted research that revealed the influence of many video attributes, such as speaking style, aesthetics, quality, duration, and the legitimacy of internet celebrities, on consumers' purchase intentions and brand perceptions. These elements significantly influence consumer opinions and confidence in celebrities.

In contrast, the study conducted by Andonopoulos et al. (2023) investigates the influence of internet celebrity authenticity on consumer behavior. The impact of authenticity on consumers' purchasing intentions is mediated by factors such as trustworthiness and the capacity to inspire. Nevertheless, the need for authenticity may not always be imperative in shaping consumer behavior, as even internet celebrities without genuineness may nevertheless effectively stimulate consumers and have a favorable impact on their inclination to acquire hedonistic items. Moreover, research has demonstrated that humor can effectively impact consumers' purchasing intentions, both through direct and indirect means (Guo et al., 2020). The presence of humor has a notable impact on consumers' behavioral intentions across different forms of live broadcasts (Hou et al., 2019).

Moreover, interactions between internet celebrities and consumers, which are multichannel, real-time, dynamic, and two-way, serve to stimulate consumers' purchasing intentions (Liu et al., 2020). Sun et al. (2021) discovered that consumers' social presence and flow experience mediated the positive impact of internet celebrity interactivity on consumers' purchase intentions. Simultaneously, when an internet celebrity's communication style aligns with consumer preferences, consumers

experience stronger parasocial interactions, enhanced immersive experiences, and ultimately increased purchase intentions (Dong & Tarofder, 2024). Furthermore, research indicates that internet celebrities can emotionally influence consumers, with homophily, social presence, and physical attractiveness all positively affecting consumer purchase intentions, while affinity, trust, and loyalty play partial mediating roles in this process (Meng et al., 2021; Rajput & Gandhi, 2024). Argyris et al. (2020) based on the source credibility model and similarity-attraction model, explored the impact of internet celebrities' visual presentations of extraversion on credibility and purchase intentions through controlled online experiments, discovering that the matching of internet celebrity and consumer extraversion serves as an asymmetrical moderating factor. Additionally, Aggad and Ahmad (2021) employed quantitative research methods to analyze data from 510 Saudi Arabian consumers. Their results indicated that internet celebrity' personality, content, and credibility significantly impact consumers' purchasing intentions and eWOM dissemination.

In summary, previous research indicates that source expertise, trustworthiness, and homogeneity have a substantial impact on how eWOM is evaluated in terms of usefulness and credibility, purchase intention, and information adoption, ultimately resulting in more favorable assessments of online reviews (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Further debate is needed to determine the impact of elements like eWOM content and eWOM credibility on online consumer behavior (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Conflicting data exists about how different attributes of source credibility affect other variables. Rani et al. (2019) discovered that valuable attributes like “visual and textual” in eWOM

were compared based on utility, not knowledge functions. Filieri et al. (2021) discovered that the quality of information in eWOM did not influence consumers' intentions and behaviors. The varying results complicate the development of source credibility feature models using data from past research.

In addition, most prior research has concentrated on textual eWOM, but scholars still need to examine the impact of short video eWOM on internet celebrities. Research indicates that numerous internet celebrities utilize short videos in their eWOM messages. This study focuses on the determinants of internet celebrities' short video eWOM on consumers, as the persuasive impact of short video eWOM remains a poor investigation (Ismagilova et al., 2016). Textual eWOM has been shown to impact consumers' purchasing intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019) and decision-making (Filieri et al., 2021). However, research on eWOM through user-generated short video is still in its early stages (Babić Rosario et al., 2019). Addressing this gap, this study explores how internet celebrities' credibility in short video content influences fans' eWOM, thereby shaping consumer purchase intentions.

2.5 Key Factors Advertisers Evaluate Internet Celebrities

Social media is an influential and cost-effective platform that organizations and brands should employ as an advertising strategy. In this technological era, internet celebrities play a significant role in consumer purchasing processes and product life cycles (Moodley & Machela, 2022). Therefore, internet celebrities have become important collaborators for brand promotion. Advertisers increasingly rely on internet celebrities

to enhance brand exposure, strengthen consumer engagement, and influence purchasing intentions (De Veirman et al., 2019; Belanche et al., 2021). However, research indicates that inappropriate internet celebrity selection, unsuitable platform choice, and negative impacts on brand image represent the primary threats faced by advertisers (Alipour et al., 2024). Consequently, advertisers must comprehensively evaluate multiple factors during their decision-making process to ensure effective brand communication and maximize return on investment.

Despite the growing body of research on internet celebrities in recent years, there remains no unified consensus regarding the specific criteria advertisers employ when selecting internet celebrities. Existing research primarily revolves around core elements such as influence metrics, consumer compatibility, internet celebrity credibility, and content creation abilities, attempting to reveal advertisers' decision-making logic in collaborations with internet celebrities (Boerman, 2023; De Veirman et al., 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Advertisers typically prioritize internet celebrities' influence to ensure effective brand communication (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Traditional perspectives suggest that a greater follower count equates to greater influence. However, research demonstrates that follower count does not fully reflect internet celebrities' genuine impact (Abidin, 2021). Although internet celebrities with more fans are generally considered more popular, their enhanced opinion leadership is only valid under limited conditions (De Veirman et al., 2017).

Conversely, Boerman's (2023) research found that fan engagement positively

correlates with brand communication effectiveness. Micro-internet celebrities (10K-100K followers) often possess higher engagement rates than mega-internet celebrities (over 1 million followers) (Gómez-Suárez et al., 2023). Furthermore, Hu et al. (2020) emphasize that fans' stickiness reflects consumers' continuous attention and interaction, which are crucial factors affecting monetization abilities and conversion of fans into paying consumers. Simultaneously, Vu et al. (2024) emphasize that parasocial interaction mediates the impact of source credibility dimensions (physical attractiveness, social attractiveness, attitude homophily, expertise, and trustworthiness) on stickiness. Thus, advertisers favor internet celebrities with higher engagement rates.

When collaborating with internet celebrities, advertisers' decisions depend not only on follower count and engagement rates but are also closely related to internet celebrities' personal branding, value congruence, and sense of responsibility. Research indicates that Finnish internet celebrities prioritize authenticity, value consistency, and brand responsibility when choosing collaborative brands (Marknadsföring, 2023). Leung et al. (2022) note that internet celebrities can leverage fans' networks, personal positioning, communication content, and fans' trust to enhance brand promotion effectiveness. Similarly, Lenger (2022) employed multi-criteria decision-making methods to analyze corporate decisions, proposing five core criteria: positioning, target consumer, budget, past marketing activities, and fan count. The research found that target consumer alignment is the most critical selection criterion, while the impact of past marketing activities is relatively minor (Lenger, 2022).

Additionally, Haenlein et al. (2020) utilized case analysis methodology to explore how companies choose suitable internet celebrities for collaboration on Instagram and TikTok. They emphasize that internet celebrities' authenticity, industry passion, fan engagement rate, and multi-platform presence are companies' criteria for collaboration. Similarly, Jayasinghe (2021) proposed a conceptual framework for evaluating social media internet celebrities' impact on organizational performance, emphasizing the role of content ability, community integration, interactive dialogue, authenticity, fan loyalty, and peer effects in enhancing internet celebrity impact. However, these studies focus on European and American market platforms, neglecting short-video platforms like TikTok and RED, and lack empirical data support, particularly regarding the Chinese market's emphasis on community operations, community economics, and live streaming e-commerce.

Advertisers also consider whether internet celebrities' consumer groups align closely with the brand's target market when choosing internet celebrities. Liao and Chen (2024) investigated the moderating effects of internet celebrity ability and internet celebrity-brand compatibility. Their research found that two-sided messaging, sponsorship disclosure, brand love passion, and self-identity construction all enhance digital engagement. Among these, internet celebrity ability strengthens the impact of two-sided messaging, while sponsorship disclosure and internet celebrity-brand match weaken the effect of self-identity construction on digital engagement. Similarly, Gómez-Suárez et al. (2023) indicate that fashion brands targeting young consumers tend to select fashion-forward, topic-driven internet celebrities to increase brand

exposure in young markets. Furthermore, Xie et al. (2024) emphasize that advertisers should comprehensively consider whether internet celebrities' promotion strategies align with the brand's pricing model when choosing internet celebrities, as well as whether internet celebrities possess the ability to adapt to different marketing contexts.

Notably, internet celebrities create potential needs while activating consumers' explicit needs (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Research demonstrates that internet celebrities' targeted use of empathy and identification mechanisms when reaching potential consumers can significantly increase purchase intentions (Dovzhik et al., 2021). However, internet celebrities' misconduct can rapidly spread and damage brands. Von Mettenheim and Wiedmann (2023) developed a framework of 11 types of internet celebrity misconduct, revealing that even minor violations (such as profanity or commercialized child exposure) can yield negative effects, though the impact on brands may be mitigated if the internet celebrity has a "rebellious" persona.

Previous research has also focused on the impact of internet celebrities' content creation abilities on advertisers' decision-making. Research indicates that content engineering can enhance social media marketing effectiveness by optimizing information characteristics (increasing click-through rates) combined with brand personality content (enhancing social media influence and brand image) (Lee et al., 2018). Hur et al. (2019) note that first-person perspectives in brand social media enhance brand heat, self-brand connections, and information search intentions more effectively than third-person perspectives, with imagery fluency playing a key role in

visual information processing.

Further, based on research by Vukolic et al. (2025), social networks and eWOM significantly influence Serbian consumers' perceptions and choices in gastronomy tourism, surpassing other forms of advertising. Hussain et al. (2024) explored the impact of visual content on consumer purchasing behavior in the fashion industry, revealing that visual content elements significantly influence consumer purchasing behavior, with their components substantially enhancing consumer engagement and decision-making processes. Additionally, Rao et al. (2024) indicate that brand storytelling emphasizes authentic values and emotional engagement, enhancing cognitive personalization and image processing, and fostering deeper connections between consumers and brands. Similarly, Li et al. (2019) conducted empirical research on advertisers' "storytelling" utility, finding that story relevance, opposition, specificity, and positive values positively correlate with consumer trust.

In summary, previous research has primarily focused on internet celebrity marketing (Alipour et al., 2024; Xie et al., 2024; Leung et al., 2022), with limited studies exploring advertisers' strategies for choosing internet celebrities (Haenlein et al., 2020; Lenger, 2022; Marknadsföring, 2023). However, limited research only addresses influence metrics (such as follower count and engagement rate), with insufficient research on the specific weight of credibility in advertisers' decision-making (De Veirman et al., 2017; Vu et al., 2024). Simultaneously, research primarily focuses on traditional social platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, while internet celebrity

criteria for short-video platforms like TikTok and RED remain insufficiently explored (Haenlein et al., 2020; Marknadsföring, 2023).

Furthermore, although the high engagement rates of internet celebrities have been confirmed (Gómez-Suárez et al., 2023), systematic analysis is still lacking regarding how advertisers balance traffic, content quality, and credibility under different marketing objectives, particularly in the gastronomic tourism industries. Additionally, existing research primarily employs quantitative methods, with relatively few qualitative studies on how advertisers comprehensively evaluate different factors in actual decision-making processes (Alipour et al., 2024). Therefore, this research further explores advertisers' criteria for choosing internet celebrities and analyzes the role of internet celebrities' credibility in advertiser collaborations, incorporating the characteristics of short-video platforms.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

2.6.1 Source Credibility Theory

The notion of source credibility may be historically linked to Aristotle's rhetoric book syllogism (Giffin, 1967). Aristotle postulated the existence of three distinct ways of persuasion, namely Ethos, Pathos, and Logos. Within the realm of Ethos, credibility assumes a pivotal role, denoting the level of trustworthiness and believability attributed to the communicator. The notion of source credibility was presented by Hovland et al. (1953), drawing upon the foundational ideas put out by Aristotle. The persuasive impact is directly proportional to the credibility of the source, with a higher

credibility resulting in a stronger effect, while a lower credibility leads to a diminished effect. The magnitude of the persuasive impact decreases as the size diminishes. Nevertheless, as time progresses, the persuasive impact of sources with high credibility diminishes, and the persuasive impact of sources with low credibility continues to escalate (Hovland et al., 1953). According to McCroskey et al. (1974), those who are seen as highly credible by the recipient are more likely to be held in high regard and have their statements accepted. The credibility and dependability of the receiver are significantly influenced by the personality characteristics of the communicator.

The multifaceted nature of source credibility has been identified by researchers. The SCT, first introduced by Hovland and Weiss in 1951, suggests that the reliability of information is contingent upon the expertise and trustworthiness of the source. The theoretical framework posits that the perceived credibility of the individual endorsing a product or idea may have an impact on the recipient's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors toward the endorsed entity. Scholars have since provided comprehensive justifications for the various elements of source credibility.

According to McGuire's (1985) proposition, the source attractiveness model posits that the credibility of information is contingent upon the attractiveness of the source. Research studies have provided evidence indicating that individuals who possess physical attractiveness as communicators tend to have a more favorable influence on attitude change, product appraisal, and other indicators of reliance (Joseph, 1982). The use of celebrities as advertising spokespersons has been more prevalent in the

marketing of products and services. Consequently, Ohanian (1990) proposed source attractiveness as a significant aspect of source credibility.

2.6.2 Source Credibility Model

According to Ohanian (1990), a synthesis of scholarly perspectives suggests that the Source Credibility Model needs to include trustworthiness, attractiveness and expertise. Fifteen sub-dimensions have been extensively acknowledged and used by many scholars (Pornpitakpan, 2003; Sertoglu et al., 2014; Till & Busler, 2000). These factors included five sub-dimensions of each dimension. Trustworthiness included dependable, trustworthy, reliable, sincere, and honest. Expertise included expert, experienced, knowledgeable, qualified, and skilled. Attractiveness included attractive, classy, beautiful, elegant, and sexy (Ohanian, 1990, 1991). See Figure 2.1.

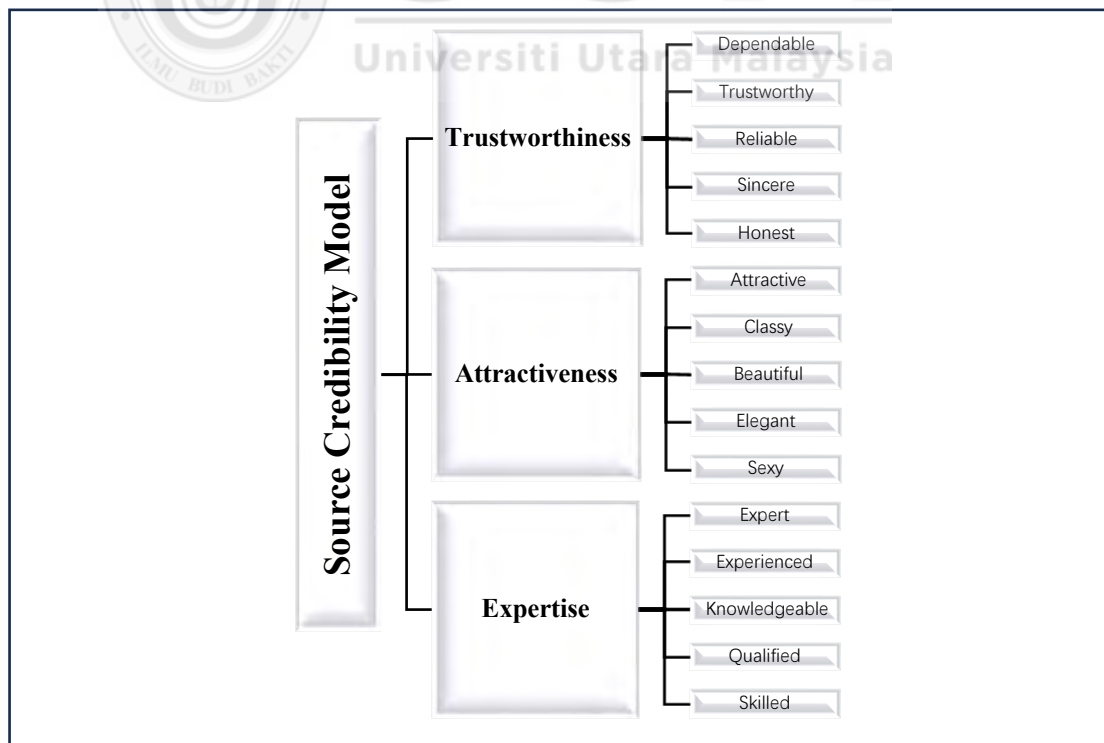


Figure 2.1. Source Credibility Model (Ohanian, 1990; 1991)

a. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the perception of the message receiver about the source's honesty, genuineness, truthfulness (Giffin, 1967), trustworthiness, reliability (Ohanian, 1990), integrity, and believability (Van der Waladt et al., 2011). This implies that the listener has trust in the communicator and holds the belief that their remarks are accurate. Trustworthiness, as defined by Hovland et al. (1953), pertains to the level of confidence that the recipient has in the recipient's purpose to provide information that is dependable and accurate. As per the research conducted by Friedman (1979), the factor that has the greatest significance in evaluating source credibility is trustworthiness. The perception of honesty, integrity, and sincerity serves to bolster confidence in the communicator (Copeland et al., 2010; Erdogan, 1999).

Furthermore, it is widely believed that the capacity of a communicator to portray themselves as genuine has an impact on the recipient's evaluation of their credibility (Cheung et al., 2009). Cheung et al. (2009) suggest that the persuasive capacity of a communicator is influenced by their level of sincerity. Therefore, trustworthiness is defined as the degree to which the recipient of information places faith in the credibility and reliability of the source (Ohanian, 1990). Scholars have expressed the need for a more comprehensive comprehension of the impact of trust building in internet celebrities on consumer behavior since these individuals generate content and communicate with their consumers primarily via social media platforms, particularly short videos (Gupta et al., 2023; Kim & Kim, 2021).

b. Attractiveness

According to Eagly and Chaiken (1975), appearance is critical to the credibility of a source because communicators who are perceived as attractive are more persuasive than unattractive communicators. In addition, facial and physical attractiveness are thought to have a positive effect on both perceived trustworthiness and expertise (Patzer, 1983). Similarly, according to McGuire (1985), source attractiveness relates to physical aspects of the source such as attractiveness, approachability, or similarity. However, attractiveness or positive associations with a person also include other characteristics in addition to physical characteristics, such as personality and athletic ability (Erdogan, 1999).

Ohanian (1990) identifies grace, elegance, charm, beauty, or sensuality as characteristics of the dimensions of the attractiveness of an endorser. However, perceived attractiveness is not only dependent on appearance, De Veirman et al. (2019) argued that factors such as similarity, likability, and familiarity contribute to the perception of attractiveness. Given the nature of the gastronomic tourism industry, personality traits, and attractiveness are important factors in the selection of spokespersons.

c. Expertise

Expertise refers to the proficiency of a communicator in effectively transmitting a message, which is contingent upon the communicator's knowledge and experience with a particular subject matter (Hovland et al., 1953). In a similar vein, Ohanian (1990)

elucidates the concept of source expertise as the consumer's cognitive evaluation of the endorser's expertise, qualifications, skills, and suitable level of knowledge. Expertise may also include the knowledge and skills possessed by a source, which allows them to articulate opinions, viewpoints, and claims about a certain subject (McCroskey, 1974). Furthermore, the expertise of an endorser pertains to the skills, knowledge, and practical experience that are obtained via the act of endorsing a particular brand or product (Van der Waldt et al., 2011). This implies that the endorser's product or brand has an ample level of skills, knowledge, and experience in the field of advertising the product or brand.

For instance, the sense of expertise might be heightened when the communicator is situated inside the topic under consideration (Martensen et al., 2018). This suggests that the source has a certain degree of comprehension and proficiency in the specific field. The perception of possessing enough expertise in a particular field (such as Gastronomic Tourism) elucidates how the overall perception of credibility influences consumer persuasion, irrespective of its manifestation. Hence, it is often believed that experienced sources possess a greater capacity to provide convincing information in contrast to non-experts, owing to the presumption that the information provided by experts is more likely to be valid or accurate.

The notion of source credibility posits that the communicator's personality and positive personal attributes have an impact on the recipient's attitude and intention to accept the message (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990). Advocates that are seen

as reliable sources of information are successful in generating purchase intentions (Ohanian, 1990; Van der Waldt et al., 2011) due to the perception that consumers have that internet celebrities possess more credibility compared to sellers (AlFarraj et al., 2021). According to Pornpitakpan (2004), three crucial dimensions play a significant role in determining source credibility: attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness. The significance of these three dimensions of purchase intention and their influence on engagement with the advertising message cannot be understated. Moreover, it is worth noting that the dimensions of source credibility exhibit similarities across different cultures. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the impact of these dimensions of source credibility might vary depending on the specific dependent variable being examined, as highlighted by Yoon et al. (2001).

Source credibility theory, originally developed for communication research, has been widely used in several fields such as consumer behavior, technology, media, and information-related subjects. In the context of consumer behavior, scholars have employed source credibility theory to elucidate the impact of online reviews on consumer attitudes, behaviors, purchase intentions, decision-making processes, and their inclination to revisit or share a website (Fernando et al., 2021; Hsieh & Li, 2020; Roy et al., 2023; Vrontis et al., 2021). In the realm of media and information, the idea of source credibility is used to assess the credibility of a given source or to elucidate the influence of credibility on persuasive communication (Chao et al., 2024; Li & See-To, 2024). In the realm of technology, the application of source credibility theory serves as a guiding principle for the development of actual technological methods and

algorithms that aim to fulfill user expectations and requirements (Tandoc Jr et al., 2020; Whalen & Lauber, 2025).

The application of source credibility theory to internet celebrities has been seen in previous studies (Jia, 2022; Weismueller et al., 2020; Wellman, 2023). The phenomenon of internet celebrities' ability to establish and sustain credibility may be elucidated using the concept of source credibility (Wellman, 2023). According to Weismueller et al. (2020), there is a considerable positive relationship between perceived source attractiveness, source trustworthiness, source expertise, and consumer purchase intentions. In the realm of consumer behavior, continuous exposure to trustworthy social media information has a significant role in shaping consumers' attitude shifts and behavior. This phenomenon fosters a feeling of trust, connection, and identification between internet celebrities and consumers, as highlighted by Jia (2022). Moreover, within the realm of online video streaming, the three primary elements that include the source's credibility are trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness, as suggested by Todd and Melancon (2017). Han and Balabanis (2023) highlighted the credibility, trustworthiness and perceived expertise of internet celebrities as the main factors influencing consumer attitudes and behavior. They also pointed out that Source Credibility Theory is the strongest framework to explain these results. Therefore, the theory of source credibility serves as a robust basis for the present investigation on internet celebrities.

This theory applies to this study as it seeks to understand the influence of credibility

of internet celebrities on eWOM and online consumers' purchase intentions. Using this theoretical framework, the present study aims to comprehend better the criteria the advertisers investigate in choosing internet celebrities. Additionally, this study seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the limitations associated with the credibility of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities. This effect primarily centers on the knowledge component of the SCM which plays a significant role in shaping the perceived credibility of internet celebrities. This phenomenon contributes to enhanced credibility management and maintenance among internet celebrities and the augmentation of expertise in their content, hence facilitating a more effective impact on consumer purchasing intentions.

2.6.3 Previous Research on Source Credibility Model

The efficacy of celebrity advertising was examined through the lens of source credibility theory in research done by Ohanian (1990; 1991). The present study examined the structure of celebrity credibility via the use of component analysis, drawing upon existing literature. The findings indicate that celebrity credibility may be conceptualized as including three distinct dimensions, namely expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. According to Ohanian (1990; 1991), the effectiveness of an advertisement may be enhanced when the celebrity included in the commercial has attributes such as attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness.

Hence, the only element in the SCM pertains to the credibility of the celebrity endorser, including the three characteristics of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness as

outlined by Ohanian (1991) for effective communication. Trustworthiness pertains to the extent to which the celebrity is perceived as being reliable and whether their opinion is considered unbiased. Expertise, on the other hand, relates to the level of knowledge the celebrity possesses regarding the products featured in the advertisement (Ratneshwar & Chaiken, 1991). Additionally, the physical appearance of the celebrity plays a significant role in determining their attractiveness (Kahle & Homer, 1985).

Additionally, source credibility theory was used to statistically synthesize the correlation between the impact of celebrity spokespersons and the success of advertising. The study conducted by Amos et al. (2008) indicates that the dimensions of source credibility, namely attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise, have significant implications. The results suggest that a model encompassing trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness effectively captures the primary source effects on purchase intentions, brand attitudes, and attitudes toward the advertisement.

The studies conducted by Ohanian (1990, 1991) and Amos et al. (2008) have shown the significance of source credibility in the efficacy of celebrity endorsement communication.

A separate cross-cultural investigation was conducted to analyze the characteristics of source trustworthiness as it pertains to individuals from both American and Korean cultures. The research revealed that there was a high degree of similarity in the source credibility dimension between the two samples. The impact of the dimensions of source credibility shows variability across different dependent variables. The factors

of attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness were shown to have comparable significance in influencing purchase intention (Yoon et al., 1998). According to Yoon et al. (1998), the perceived attractiveness of the endorser had more significance in influencing attitudes towards the advertising, compared to factors such as expertise and trustworthiness.

Alternatively, Pornpitakpan (2004) performed a comprehensive examination of source credibility, specifically analyzing a substantial body of empirical research spanning five decades, to investigate the impact of source credibility on persuasion. The concept of source credibility and its constituent elements exhibit some variations across different studies, but in general, it refers to the extent to which individuals place belief and confidence in the information provided by external sources about a certain product or service (Pornpitakpan, 2004). According to Pornpitakpan (2004), an analysis of several research conducted over fifty years revealed that sources with high credibility were more effective in persuading individuals to modify their beliefs and comply with desired behaviors compared to sources with low credibility. Several research studies have yielded contrasting results or failed to identify any discernible disparity in the persuasive impact of sources with varying levels of trustworthiness (Pornpitakpan, 2004). The lack of consistency in these results might perhaps be attributed to variations in study methodologies, specialized expertise, interpretations of credibility and attractiveness, measurement inaccuracies, and divergent dependent variables of interest. Various variables might potentially contribute to disparate outcomes in research examining the reliability of sources.

Besides, as claimed by Lou and Yuan (2019), the concept of source credibility is often used to examine the positive characteristics of internet celebrities that impact consumers' acceptance of information. The field of source credibility modeling focuses on analyzing the factors that impact the perceived credibility of an endorser. The SCM incorporates attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise as the primary elements for evaluating source or communicator efficacy (Ohanian, 1990). The model primarily examines the impact of source credibility on effectiveness, specifically whether high or low-credibility sources have varying degrees of influence or no influence at all. It posits that information derived from credible sources has the potential to shape individuals' beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors through a phenomenon referred to as "internalization". This process occurs when the recipient willingly embraces the source's influence on their personal attitudes and value system (Erdogan, 1999). The determination of the credibility of an endorser in advocating a product, idea, or service is achieved by the combination of three distinct qualities, as proposed by Ohanian (1990).

An additional advantage of Source Credibility Theory is its adaptability to tailor it to unique research endeavors. Lafferty and Goldsmith (1999) argue that the criteria of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness are the most straightforward means of evaluating the emotional impact of advertisements on consumers. According to Jia (2022), the significance of source credibility is highlighted in the establishment of a relationship between internet celebrities and consumers. The study revealed that the credibility of internet celebrities has a positive impact on the credibility, connection,

and identity that exists between internet celebrities and consumers. In addition, Source Credibility Theory was used to assess variations in perceived credibility between endorsers and celebrity endorsers. The study conducted by Wang and Scheinbaum (2017) revealed that the dimensions of source credibility, namely attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise, were found to have a positive correlation with purchase intentions. The study also found that endorsers were perceived as more trustworthy and competent, while celebrity endorsers were seen as more attractive.

Nevertheless, research placed significant emphasis on the role of source credibility as the primary determinant of consumer purchasing intentions. In their study, Seiler and Kucza (2017) examined various forms of testimonials, namely those provided by celebrities and experts. This investigation was grounded on the theoretical framework of source credibility. The results of the study demonstrate the impact of credibility and consistency on attitudes and purchase intentions, both directly and indirectly. In juxtaposition to the concept of consistency, the notion of product fit has a favorable impact on individuals' perceptions towards advertising, therefore influencing their intentions to make a purchase. The efficiency of a suggestion is significantly influenced by the level of trust placed in it, with credibility being the primary determinant (Seiler & Kucza, 2017). The model of source credibility has been crucial in facilitating researchers' comprehension of how individual status, relationships, and behaviors have an impact on consumer behavior.

In their research, Balaban and Mustățea (2019) examined the credibility of internet

celebrities in Romania and Germany. The findings revealed that attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, and similarity were significant variables influencing the perceived credibility of these internet celebrities. Research conducted utilizing the source credibility theory has revealed that trustworthiness and expertise exert a substantial impact on travel intentions. Conversely, no statistically significant correlation has been observed between attractiveness and travel intentions. This lack of association may be attributed to the prevailing perception of attractiveness as a prevalent trait among internet celebrities, whereas trustworthiness and expertise hold greater significance in shaping travel intentions (Yılmazdoğan et al., 2021).

According to Belanche et al. (2021), an examination may be conducted on the factors that influence the credibility of internet celebrities, specifically from the standpoint of their followers. This finding suggests that the establishment of credibility plays a vital role in fostering favorable sentiments towards individuals who have gained fame and recognition via internet platforms. Both the perceived credibility and attitudes of consumers contribute to the cultivation of positive behavioral reactions toward internet celebrities. Furthermore, a study done by Wiedmann and Von Mettenheim (2020) used an online survey with a sample size of 288 participants to examine the extent to which internet celebrities meet the criteria for success, namely attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness, as outlined by source credibility theory. The findings of this research indicate that trustworthiness emerges as the most influential factor in determining the status of internet celebrities, closely followed by attractiveness. Moreover, it is seen that credibility has a positive association with brand satisfaction, image, and trust.

On the contrary, there is a negligible link between expertise. The research mostly focuses on luxury brand items within the field of fashion. According to Ladhari et al. (2020), when focusing on the credibility dimension, it is important to consider its applicability to different types of products or services. Particularly, the requirements for gastronomic tourism may vary in terms of their interrelation and the presence of additional related requirements.

2.6.4 Limitations of Source Credibility Model

Based on an examination of the SCM within the context of internet celebrities, findings indicate that factors such as source trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness exert a favorable influence on the effectiveness of social media messaging. Moreover, it is observed that consumer behavior exhibits varying responses about the perceived credibility of internet celebrities. According to Djafarova and Trofimenko (2018), their research indicates that the use of internet celebrities is increasingly emerging as a prominent determinant in contemporary communication practices. The credibility of internet celebrities is not consistently relied upon by potential consumers when making their ultimate purchasing choices. However, some consumers do consider suggestions from internet celebrities throughout the last phase of their search process. This distinct behavior aligns with the SCM, which offers insights into the underlying reasons for such patterns.

The SCM's dimensions provide the parameters for the investigation; nevertheless, Yılmazdoğan et al. (2021) have identified several structural deficiencies within the

model regarding shared content and destinations. Numerous scholars have investigated various factors to provide a comprehensive and inclusive expanded framework for assessing source credibility (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018; Tanha, 2020). Pornpitakpan (2004) conducted a comprehensive assessment of studies spanning five decades that examined the influence of source credibility on persuasive communication. According to Pornpitakpan (2004), the research revealed that the credibility of a source plays a significant role in the process of persuasion. Specifically, the study demonstrated that as the level of source credibility increases, the persuasive impact in terms of attitudinal and behavioral outcomes also increases.

Nevertheless, the concept of source credibility alone does not provide a comprehensive explanation for the impact of various factors on persuasion. These factors include the medium through which the message is conveyed, the level of extremity in the claims made by the source, the timing of source identification, and the interplay between time pressure and source expertise in the persuasion process (Andreoli and Worchel, 1978; Goldberg and Hartwick, 1990; Herron, 1996). These results clarify the significant constraints associated with the practical implementation of source credibility theory. Previous research has shown that there are distinct outcomes and potential implications associated with source expertise and trustworthiness (Pornpitakpan, 2004). If researchers want to include source credibility in their study, this is an area that requires their attention.

In addition, internet celebrities must establish a suitable online persona to engage with

their intended consumer of followers. The researchers Djafarova and Trofimenko (2018) utilized the SCM to examine the credibility of internet celebrities. They also introduced a novel aspect, online behavior, as an additional dimension. Competence has replaced the conventional component of expertise. The authors Djafarova and Trofimenko (2018) developed an expanded framework for assessing the credibility of online sources, which incorporates trustworthiness, attractiveness, competency, and online behavior. Nevertheless, the study had restrictions as it focused solely on the social media site Instagram and the participants were exclusively female consumers in Russia. This implies that it may have limited relevance to other forms of short video social media sites such as TikTok and RED, and to consumer behavior in different regions.

Similarly, Tanha (2020) proposed a revised version of Ohanian's (1990) source credibility model, incorporating trustworthiness, attractiveness, adeptness, and online self-presentation as dimensions for assessing the credibility of internet celebrities among consumers. This study focused on a sample of Instagram users in Bangladesh. The researchers' failure to clearly define different categories of internet celebrities implies that there could be other factors to consider when evaluating the credibility of various sorts of internet celebrities, particularly those focused on gastronomic tourism. Furthermore, Balaban and Mustățea (2019) stated that internet celebrities should cultivate the dimension of peer recognition, as credibility plays a crucial role in establishing a robust and enduring rapport with both the community and the company they endorse.

In summary, the use of source credibility modeling is often seen in research about internet marketing and the endorsement of celebrity brands (Seiler & Kucza, 2017). Most scholarly investigations tend to prioritize the examination of the authenticity of internet celebrities and the impact of their influence on consumer behavior, particularly on widely used platforms like Instagram (Roy et al., 2023; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018; Tanha, 2020; Weismueller et al., 2020; Wellman, 2023). Most of the research tends to examine the impact of internet celebrities on consumer purchasing intentions in social media within the context of marketing (Vrontis et al., 2021; Jia, 2022; Fernando et al., 2021). The factors that are often investigated in connection to the credibility of these internet celebrities are the message variable and the receiver variable (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Due to the efforts exerted by internet celebrities in constructing comprehensive social media communication strategies, it is anticipated that source credibility would be subject to additional elements that impact consumer engagement. Hence, the present research aims to examine the credibility of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities to shape their impressions of these internet celebrities.

The current understanding of the composition of internet celebrities on social media platforms, specifically short-form video platforms like TikTok, is limited. Existing models that assess the credibility of sources on platforms like Instagram and YouTube may not be entirely suitable for the distinct context of short-form social media platforms such as TikTok (Park & Lin, 2020). The established source credibility factors were included and adjusted to provide a systematic comprehension of the credibility

of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities. This study aims to provide a model that elucidates the credibility of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities. This model aims to elucidate the factors contributing to the credibility of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities towards their successfully engaging online consumers. Hence, the conceptual research framework for this study is summarized in Figure 2.2.

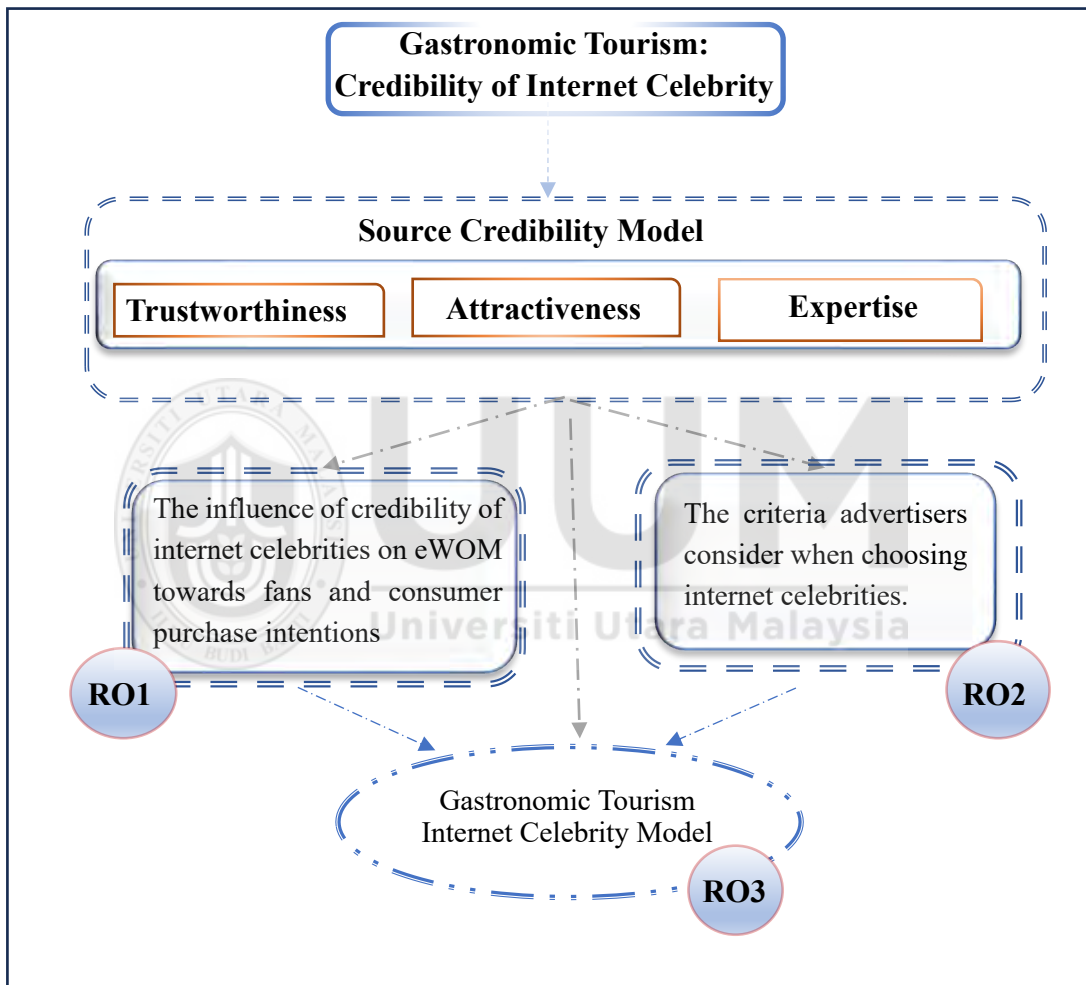


Figure 2.2 Research Conceptual Framework

2.7 Internet and Social Media Trends in China

2.7.1 Internet Trends in China

China exhibits a notable degree of internet penetration, with mobile internet serving as a pivotal component within this context. The utilization of smartphones for internet

access has become prevalent among a significant portion of the population, leading to the integration of mobile payments and applications into individuals' everyday routines. Based on the 56th Statistical Report on internet Development in China (CNNIC, 2025), the number of internet users in China reached 1.123 billion as of June 2025, indicating an internet penetration rate of 79.7%. Among the surveyed population, the total count of individuals utilizing mobile phones for internet access amounted to 1.116 billion. This figure represents a substantial proportion of internet users, accounting for 99.4% of the total.

Additionally, the average amount of time spent online per person weekly was recorded as 30.6 hours. The gender distribution of internet users exhibits a male-to-female ratio of 50.4:49.6, mirroring the male-to-female ratio observed in the general population. Regarding age demographics, individuals within the age ranges of 10-19, 20-29, 30-39, and 40-49 constituted 13.7%, 12.8%, 18.9%, and 16.3% of internet users respectively (CNNIC, 2025). Conversely, the cohort of internet users aged 50 and above represented 33.5%, indicating a significant presence of internet usage within the middle-aged and older populations. This data suggests a notable expansion of internet adoption among these age groups (CNNIC, 2025).

According to the China Internet Development Report (CNNIC, 2025), China has emerged as a global leader in network infrastructure construction since 2025. The country has made significant advancements in enhancing its innovation capacity in digital technology, recognizing the substantial value of data elements. Furthermore,

China has made gradual improvements in the establishment of a network rule of law and the promotion of network civilization. The comprehensive network governance system has become more robust, and the data security protection system has been further strengthened. Additionally, China has made notable progress in international cooperation in cyberspace, contributing to the remarkable achievements in the construction of a digital China.

2.7.2 Social Media Trends in China

In China, social media applications have gained significant prominence and have been deeply ingrained in the daily routines of individuals, surpassing their prevalence in other regions worldwide. China's firewall restricts access to popular global social media platforms such as Google, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. Consequently, a multitude of domestic social media alternatives have arisen in response to the need for online platforms and social networks in China (SEO Agency China, 2021). Furthermore, there is an emerging inclination to use social networks as search engines to locate certain material. Simultaneously, there exists a notable reduction in the expenses associated with generating short-form video content for both companies and people. The phenomenon has resulted in the exponential expansion of content-oriented social media and the use of diverse social media platforms to speed up commercialization.

As of June 2025, the total count of social network users in China has surpassed 1.107 billion, representing 98.6 % of the total number of internet users. This prevalence of

social media adoption is leading to transformative shifts in the structure and content of social media platforms, as the concept of “social for all” gains prominence. The utilization of short video platforms within the realm of social media has garnered significant popularity in China (CNNIC, 2025). According to the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC, 2025), most internet users, accounting for 95.1%, are currently utilizing short videos as a preferred form of online content. Furthermore, this user segment is experiencing significant growth in numbers. When contrasting visual and lengthy videos, it is evident that short videos possess enduring allure for viewers owing to their capacity to accommodate fragmented time and the inherent depth of their material. Social media platforms, exemplified by TikTok, have introduced a content e-commerce model that leverages short videos as the primary medium. These platforms actively facilitate e-commerce by showcasing compelling short video content of superior quality (CNNIC, 2025).

In recent times, the use of social media platforms has seen a significant surge in its significance for the establishment and enhancement of brands. The proliferation of many content formats has enabled the seamless transfer of web traffic between diverse social media platforms, as well as between social media platforms and other online platforms. The phenomenon of individuals attaining internet celebrity status by amassing a substantial following on social media platforms through the creation and dissemination of popular content has emerged as a prevalent social media trend (Li,2018). Marketers are increasingly favoring internet celebrities as endorsers for their products.

2.8 Short Video Platform

Short video platforms have gained immense popularity as a global type of social media, meeting consumers' desire for immediate pleasure and offering a forum for content creators to exhibit their skills. Platforms differ in their functionality and target consumer, but collectively, they enable user engagement and the sharing of various materials. User-friendly creative tools, specialized recommendation algorithms, and strong community elements make this possible (Mob, 2023).

The distinctiveness of Chinese social media platforms stems from their notable disparities compared to those in the Western world. YouTube Shorts, Instagram Reels, Likee, Snapchat Spotlight, and Triller are the dominant platforms in the Western world (Adam, 2023). However, China's governmental constraints prevent its citizens from accessing these platforms, which has resulted in the emergence of creative local alternatives. These domestic platforms have well understood the distinct requirements and inclinations of Chinese users, providing highly tailored content and features, thereby establishing a distinctive and dynamic digital environment. Presented here is a concise overview of 10 widely used worldwide and Chinese short video platforms (Table 2.1).


Table 2.1

Top 10 Short Video Platform (Source: Olivier, 2023; Rahu, 2023; Samantha, 2024)

Platform Name	Region	Key Features
TikTok (Douyin)	Global (China)	Revolutionized short video entertainment with its advanced algorithm that personalizes content discovery.
RED (Xiaohongshu)	China	A unique blend of lifestyle blogging, and short video content focused on genuine user experiences and product discoveries.



Table 2.1 *continued*

Platform Name	Region	Key Features	
Kwai (Kuaishou)	Global (China)	Champions the authenticity of everyday life through short videos, fostering a strong sense of community and engagement.	
Bilibili	China	Originally celebrated for its ACG (Anime, Comics, and Games) content, Bilibili has expanded into a diverse short video and live streaming platform, attracting a young consumer with its interactive community features and user-generated content.	
WeSee WeChat Channel	China	Integrated within Tencent's ecosystem, these platforms offer a seamless experience for creating and sharing short videos, leveraging the vast social network of WeChat for content distribution and interaction.	
YouTube Shorts	Global	Leverages YouTube's vast video library and creator community to offer a rich and diverse short video experience.	
Instagram Reels	Global	Seamlessly integrates short videos into Instagram's ecosystem, making it easy for users to explore and create within a familiar platform.	
Snapchat Spotlight	Global	Pioneered ephemeral content, offering short videos that disappear after 24 hours, emphasizing privacy and spontaneity.	
Likee	Global	Offers an extensive array of creative tools and effects, making it a playground for users to explore their creativity in video creation.	
Triller	Global	Focuses on music-driven content, allowing users to create professional-looking music videos with minimal effort.	

Within the ever-evolving social media landscape, different short video platforms present diverse characteristics and influences. And this study focuses on two social media platforms with significant influence, TikTok and RED.

a. TikTok

TikTok is a social media application created by the Chinese corporation Byte Dance, designed for the creation and dissemination of brief movies ranging from 15 seconds to 3 minutes in duration (Mohsin, 2023). These videos can be enhanced with various audio tracks, visual effects, and filters. TikTok garners global admiration from its user base due to its innovative and captivating short-form content. TikTok ranks as the sixth

most widely used social media site globally (Mohsin, 2023). According to a report by Data Reportal (2023), TikTok has constantly demonstrated a strong performance in terms of download figures across many countries, particularly exerting a significant influence among the younger demographic. Internet celebrities on TikTok garner a substantial following using concise video material, employing distinctive, imaginative, and interactive approaches to cultivate their brands, foster intimate engagement with their fan base, and facilitate branding and promotional endeavors. Based on statistical data, it can be observed that the content category labeled “Entertainment” holds the highest level of popularity on the platform when considering a global scale. According to Mediakix (2020), the hashtag has garnered a total of 535 billion hashtag views.

Although TikTok has gained global popularity, it is noteworthy that most of its user base is concentrated in China, where the platform is referred to as “Douyin”. In this region, TikTok boasts an impressive daily active user count of 600 million (Mansoor, 2023). TikTok has emerged as a prominent leader in the realm of short video content, owing to its distinctive format and sophisticated algorithms. This platform offers users an avenue to showcase their creative endeavors and engage in interactive exchanges with fellow users. A digital platform that facilitates the exchange of creative content and fosters interactive engagement. TikTok consistently endeavors to engage its consumers by delivering novel special effects, stimulating activities, and innovative means of social engagement. Furthermore, the platform is diversifying its content domain, encompassing a broad spectrum of subjects including entertainment, education, health, and fashion (Mohsin, 2023).

b. RED

One notable social media platform that has achieved popularity in China is an application known as RED, which is also referred to as Xiaohongshu or Little Red Book. RED is a digital platform that facilitates the sharing and purchasing intentions related to many aspects of individuals' lifestyles. The platform enables users to disseminate concise films and photographs about many subjects such as fashion, beauty, gastronomic, travel, and more (Qiangua Data, 2023). RED has been referred to as "the Chinese equivalent of Instagram". The company RED was established in June 2013 by Mao Wenchao and Qu Fang. As of January 2019, the user base of RED has exceeded 200 million individuals. It continues to be widely regarded as one of the most prevalent social media platforms in China (Qiangua Data, 2023). The RED platform not only provides those who already possess a certain level of popularity with the means to foster a community of followers but also presents an avenue for regular RED users to potentially attain prominent status as opinion leaders using their contributions on the platform.

The RED platform, which was introduced in 2013, has had significant growth in its user base. As shown by the RED Active User Portrait Trend Report (2022), conducted by Qian Gua, the platform has amassed a monthly active user count of 200 million in the same year. Notably, the report highlights that 72% of these users belong to the post-90s generation. Approximately 90% of users are in first and second-tier cities. According to the data, the three most prominent product categories included in RED postings are fashion, cosmetics, and food. In recent years, there has been a noticeable

rise in consumers' emphasis on travel, technology, and education. Typically, individuals engage in information retrieval on the platform RED to get evaluations and suggestions before finalizing a purchase. Certain individuals use the platform RED to get fashion ideas, including apparel and haircuts (Qiangua Data, 2023). Individuals have the option to establish a personal account to share their material, or they may establish an electronic shop inside the RED application, therefore enabling users to directly purchase things.

Frequently, marketers form collaborations with internet celebrities on the RED platform to enhance brand recognition, acquire new followers, and bolster brand credibility (Lin et al., 2018). The significance of RED in the pre-order process has been widely recognized among Chinese consumers. A significant number of young Chinese women engage in the activity of browsing a mobile application as a kind of leisure, seeking inspiration and entertainment via the discovery of novel, intriguing, or captivating content (Qiangua Data, 2023). The use of RED as a significant platform for pre-purchase information research among Chinese consumers has gained prominence.

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents an overview of the definition and categorization of internet celebrities, the structure and manifestations of their credibility and examines the definitions and typologies of eWOM, with particular attention to the impact of credibility on eWOM. In addition, it further explores the impact of credibility on

eWOM, the link between eWOM and purchase intention, and the role of credibility in it. The chapter also discusses the criteria for consideration considered by advertisers when choosing internet celebrities, along with the challenges they encounter in this process. There is limited knowledge regarding the makeup of internet celebrities on social media platforms that focus on short videos.

The existing models that assess the credibility of sources on platforms like Instagram and YouTube do not fully apply to the distinct environment of short social media platforms such as TikTok. There is insufficient research on the influence of internet celebrity credibility on eWOM and purchase intention, particularly regarding the dynamic process of eWOM spread on various social media platforms. Additionally, there is a lack of understanding of how advertisers choose criteria for internet celebrities. Hence, this study addresses these deficiencies by examining the influence of Internet celebrity credibility on eWOM and purchase intention. It aims to provide fresh perspectives on the criteria advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities, as well as to develop a comprehensive model of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities to inform future implementation strategies.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The present chapter covers the research methodology. A qualitative approach was employed to address the research objectives, primarily through in-depth interviews with 25 informants—including internet celebrities, consumers and fans, advertisers, and academicians—and qualitative content analysis of 60 comments from TikTok and RED, with the content analysis to support the interview findings. Creswell (2017) argues that qualitative research is well-suited for augmenting the existing body of information regarding the nature of the study. By analyzing participant views and comments, qualitative research enables the identification of unforeseen themes and ideas that may arise from the study. The research method section describes the procedures used to gather and scrutinize the requisite data for addressing the research inquiries and attaining the objectives of the study.

3.2 Method of the Research

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of the credibility of internet celebrities on eWOM towards fans and consumer purchase intentions. Qualitative research methods are employed in situations where it is necessary to examine a collective or populace, when it is imperative to survey to identify a resolution to a predicament, or when it is essential to lend an ear to the perspectives of marginalized individuals, or when it is crucial to comprehend a particular matter, or

when the researcher aims to gain insight into the framework within which research participants interpret their narratives, address their challenges or concerns, or express their viewpoints (Ting, 2018).

This approach is equally suitable when the researcher aims to acquire a more profound comprehension of the issue based on the informant's original material. Simultaneously, qualitative research methods are designed to examine and analyze certain aspects of human behavior, as emphasized by Creswell (2007). This study investigated the influence of internet celebrities' credibility on eWOM and purchase intentions, a lack of explored area of research. The study also explored the criteria advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities. Additionally, it endeavors to suggest a model that elucidates the dimensions of the credibility of internet celebrities in gastronomic tourism. This study employed qualitative research methodologies, including content analysis and in-depth interviews, to accomplish its objectives in terms of research scope and methodology. Qualitative research is often favored in the academic community due to its enhanced visibility and ability to elicit comprehensive and detailed information from study participants.

Qualitative content analysis is a versatile approach for examining textual material (Cavanagh, 1997). According to Cole (1988), scholars engage in the process of summarizing and categorizing knowledge conveyed by written, oral, or visual forms of communication. The utilization of user-generated text, such as online consumer comments, facilitates the comprehension of individuals' viewpoints, inclinations, and

actions, establishing a substantial basis for scholarly investigations (Berger et al., 2020). The present study employed certain methods to gather consumer comments on short videos featuring popular internet celebrities. These comments served as the primary dataset for conducting a comprehensive content analysis. To acquire a more profound comprehension of the influence of internet celebrities on eWOM and the underlying reasons and mechanisms driving it. Therefore, this approach was adopted to achieve Research Objective 1, as it not only enables the systematic extraction of key information from consumer reviews but also facilitates a deeper understanding of how internet celebrities influence eWOM and consumer behaviour through short videos.

Qualitative research examines similarities and differences by analyzing observations, interview transcripts, and audio recordings, serving as a representation of the participants (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). This research endeavor aims to collect data about informants' experiences and understandings using conducting in-depth interviews. Moreover, qualitative research provides the researcher with the autonomy to guide the inquiry. Through the utilization of this methodology, the investigator ascertained both homogenous and diverse viewpoints among the populace, to mitigate divergent perspectives inside the community. According to Merriam (2009), while social capital is typically seen as the result of interactions between individuals, a more comprehensive and nuanced dataset can be acquired by gathering input from a collective of informants concerning targeted questions and hypothetical situations. In-depth interviews are therefore essential in uncovering the underlying motivations, perceptions, and credibility evaluations of internet celebrities in short video contexts.

This method was employed to address all research objectives in this study.

Qualitative methods are used to explore questions related to experience, meaning, and perspective—primarily from the standpoint of the participant (Hammarberg et al., 2016). These types of data are typically not suitable for quantification or statistical measurement. Qualitative research techniques include small-group discussions to investigate beliefs, attitudes, and social norms; semi-structured interviews to gather views on specific topics or background information from key informants; in-depth interviews to gain insight into a condition, experience, or event from a personal perspective; and text and document analysis, such as reviewing government reports, media articles, websites, or personal diaries, to understand distributed or private knowledge. Therefore, this study employed qualitative methods - including in-depth interviews and content analysis - to achieve all three research objectives: investigating how the credibility of internet celebrities influences eWOM and purchase intentions, identifying advertisers' criteria for choosing internet celebrities, and constructing a model of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities. Figure 3.1 presents the research methods framework.

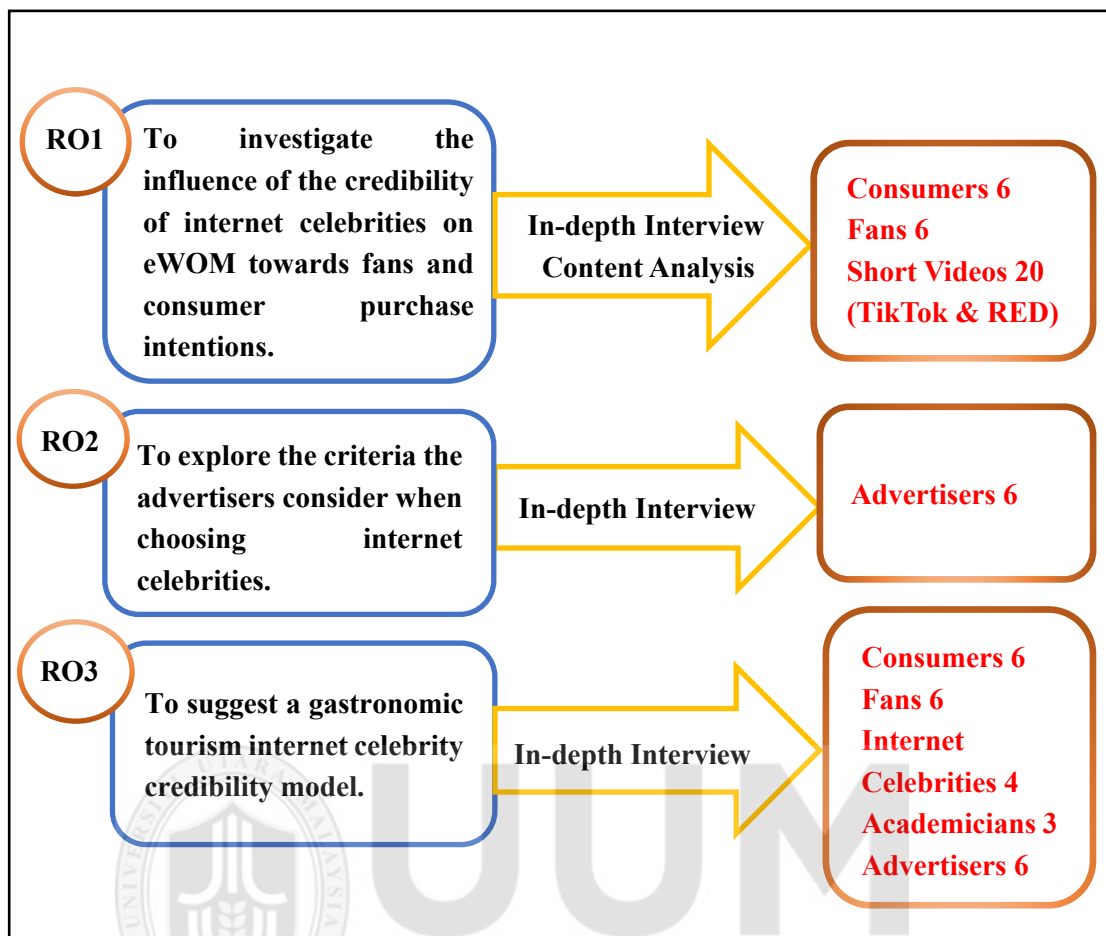


Figure 3.1 Research Methods Framework

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 In-depth Interview

In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research method designed to obtain comprehensive insights from a limited number of participants (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020). Unlike other qualitative approaches, this method requires researchers to engage extensively with each participant through a structured yet flexible conversational format. As highlighted by Rutledge and Hogg (2020), in-depth interviews predominantly utilize open-ended questions, fostering an exploratory and discovery-driven inquiry. The primary objective of this approach is to elicit nuanced

understandings of participants' perspectives, lived experiences, emotions, and the meanings they ascribe to a specific phenomenon or issue. Therefore, this study employs in-depth interviews to investigate and collect empirical evidence focusing on achieving how credibility of internet celebrities influences eWOM towards fans and consumer purchase intentions, the criteria advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities and suggesting a model for gastronomic tourism internet celebrities.

In the realm of qualitative research methods, interviews are commonly employed as a data-gathering strategy. According to Ting (2018), there is a methodology available that enhances comprehension of persons by acquiring insights into their viewpoints, experiences, emotional states, and attitudes. He also added that the utilization of qualitative methodologies enables researchers to obtain detailed information from informants, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the distinct context, interpretation of informants' perspectives on various matters, and acquisition of supplementary insights from informants' observations during the interview procedure. When considering research initiatives, in-depth interviews have the potential to offer researchers enhanced opportunities for accessing more comprehensive narratives and data. Researchers have the potential to elicit diverse interpretations by posing more questions, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding.

The study adopted semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. During these interviews, participants were presented with open-ended questions, allowed themselves the freedom to react in a manner that best suits their perspectives

and experiences. Each participant was requested to provide further details regarding their first responses through a set of follow-up inquiries that were specifically geared to advance the research aims. The interview approach entails the utilization of a predetermined set of themes or questions during the interview process. The flexibility of questioning techniques and timing allows respondents to choose how and when they respond (Deterding & Waters, 2018). The capacity to adapt is crucial to provide a sense of ease for the informant. The presence of flexibility is crucial to establishing an environment where informants feel at ease in disclosing their narratives, hence augmenting the quantity of data acquired for this study.

To ensure the acquisition of the most candid responses from each participant, this research facilitated an environment where informants can freely articulate their views and opinions without any form of intervention. Individual respondents provided distinct responses based on their prior experiences and level of engagement. In this scenario, it is expected that respondents exhibited varied reactions, hence facilitating the acquisition of intriguing data about the phenomenon of internet celebrity-to-consumer interactions. The data-collecting process continued until respondents reach a state of saturation, indicating that enough responses have been obtained. The researchers initially employed icebreaker questions to establish rapport with unfamiliar informants, thus facilitating their willingness to disclose information. A funnel interview structure was adopted to maintain participants' comfort throughout the interview process, thereby increasing the likelihood of obtaining high-quality responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The researcher adopted the following strategies to enhance the effectiveness of the interviews:

- i. The interview began with an icebreaker session, aiming to reduce participant anxiety and improve initial engagement. While early responses may have lacked depth due to unfamiliarity, this stage was crucial for establishing rapport.
- ii. Following the icebreaker, participants were expected to feel more relaxed, increasing the likelihood of providing more accurate and thoughtful responses.
- iii. The researcher used icebreaker sessions consistently across interviews to engage all participants and encourage meaningful dialogue, thereby enhancing overall interview productivity.
- iv. Once rapport was established, participants demonstrated greater openness and honesty, contributing to the richness and reliability of the data collected.
- v. Recognizing that the opening phase plays a critical role in shaping the flow of the interview, the researcher ensured that each session began in a way that fostered comfort and psychological safety.
- vi. Throughout the interview process, steps were taken to maintain a state of calm and receptiveness among participants, ensuring a conducive environment for information sharing.

Various methods can be employed to do qualitative research, including face-to-face interviews, video interviews, and online surveys. According to James and Busher (2009), informants can assume control of the discourse by sharing their personal

perspectives, experiences, and research findings. The data for this study will be gathered data using a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both in-person and online interviews. The researcher created a set of inquiries to structure the interviews and posed supplementary follow-up inquiries about the participants' responses throughout the interviews. The researcher was able to assess and evaluate the interviews at their convenience due to the presence of audio and video recordings.

Furthermore, the initial stage of the data collection procedure the researcher requested for official letter from the School of Multimedia Technology and Communication, UUM, which was then disseminated to all participants (See Appendix D). This measure was implemented to ensure that participants possess a comprehensive understanding of the study's objectives and related contextual information. The researcher used the following strategies to get data.

- i. The researcher utilized social media platforms to identify individuals who align with the specified criteria, including internet celebrities, consumers, and fans.
- ii. The researchers consider establishing communication with advertisers who possess significant expertise in collaborating with internet celebrities, mostly through taking advantage of branded advertising companies.
- iii. The researchers consider establishing communication with academics specializing in the domain of social media the internet celebrities, namely those connected with universities offering media programs.
- iv. After identifying suitable internet celebrities, consumers, and fans, the researchers proceeded with communicating relevant information or extend invitations to them.

In a similar vein, the identification of appropriate advertising specialists and academic experts as informants led to the issuance of written invitations.

- v. Introducing oneself to informants and describing your research topic.
- vi. Schedule interviews with individuals who have consented to participate and fulfill the predetermined criteria for inclusion and exclusion in the research.
- vii. The development of an interview schedule was considered the availability of each informant.

Since all the chosen interviews are in China. Hence, the interviews were performed through online platforms such as Tencent Meetings and Webex at a mutually agreed-upon time. Each interview session has a duration of approximately 45 minutes. The researcher performed comprehensive, online interviews conducted in Mandarin, as per the informants' preferences. Before the commencement of the interview, all participants were furnished with consent forms containing signatures and letters assuring the confidentiality and exclusive utilization of the acquired information solely for research objectives. Additionally, the informants were informed of their prerogative to terminate the interview session at any point during the proceedings. The interviews were done at various locations, specifically offices, based on the informant's specific needs and preferences. The chosen interview venues are designed to ensure a secure environment, hence facilitating the informants' ability to express themselves candidly during the interview process.

During the interview, the researcher posed a sequence of inquiries that span from basic

to detailed. This methodology enables the researcher to elicit perceptions regarding the internet celebrity and the extent of trustworthiness associated with the interview, as well as to gather crucial data from the informant. The researcher prioritized the importance of maintaining confidentiality, safeguarding data, and obtaining informed consent before commencing the interview, fostering a sense of comfort and reassurance among the participants. Every interview was recorded using an audio recording device. The entirety of the Chinese interviews was transcribed in English without any alterations.

a. In-depth Interview Protocol

The present study employed in-depth interviews, employing the language favored by the informants and engaging with one informant at a time, ultimately resulting in a joint survey (Coleman, 2019). The present study undertook data collection in two distinct phases. The preliminary round of the interviews was a warm-up session aimed at gaining insights into the informants' perspectives on the credibility of internet celebrities. Within this phase, the investigator shall proceed to systematically arrange the personal data of the informants, encompassing their demographic information.

The subsequent section was predicated upon the inquiries presented by the research question. The interviews were performed in Mandarin during the scheduled appointment, and after the interviews, the informants were provided with Chinese transcripts to confirm or add any necessary information. Upon obtaining confirmation from the participants of the interviews, the researcher proceeds to translate the

transcripts written in Chinese into the English language. Following the process of translation, the transcripts in English were subsequently imported into NVivo 14 for analysis. (See Appendix C Interview Protocol)

b. In-depth Interview Ethical

The study placed significant emphasis on the ethical considerations. During the initial round of informant recruitment, the researcher assessed if the individual fulfills the predetermined criteria established for participation in the study. Subsequently, the researcher inquired of the participants whether they are willing to partake in the study. Following the researcher's self-introduction, the participant was provided with a comprehensive overview of the study. The subsequent phase entails the researcher's introduction of the study and its underlying objectives. If inquiries arise about the study, the researcher shall duly address them. Once the informants have been adequately briefed on the research topic, the researcher proceeded to provide an official invitation letter as evidence of the study's authenticity.

During the third phase, the process of recruiting study subjects involved the distribution of interview consent forms via postal mail to the researcher. The interview consent form was distributed to participants in both English and Mandarin languages. Adequate time was allocated for participants to carefully review, sign, and return the form to the researcher. Additionally, the researcher was available to address any inquiries or concerns raised by participants regarding the study. The interview consent form stipulates that aliases were employed to designate participants in the research.

Subsequently, the researcher arranged a meeting with the informant to conduct an interview. Before the commencement of the interview, participants were instructed to familiarize themselves with and comprehend the interview protocol. The interview forms in both English and Chinese are available in the Appendix section. The completion of the interview form was required before the commencement of the interview. The interview was documented as an analytical record. Figure 3.1 presents the methodological framework of this study. (See Appendix A: Interview Invitation Letter; Appendix B: Consent to Participate in a Research Project Form)

3.3.2 Informant

The selection of informants is contingent upon the size of the sample and the quantity of data that can be feasibly handled during the processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell, 2014). As previously said, qualitative research generally necessitates a sample size that is smaller compared to quantitative research. However, this sample size should still be sufficiently substantial to effectively address the research inquiries and yield robust and dependable conclusions (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The primary objective of qualitative research is to achieve theoretical saturation, a point at which the researcher possesses a high level of confidence that the inclusion of further data will not have any impact on the conclusions (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The point of saturation is achieved when further codes are introduced or when the subject no longer generates novel data (Charmaz, 2016; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

To achieve all research objectives, in-depth interviews were used for the collection and

analysis of data. According to Creswell's (1998) recommendation, it also ranges between 5 and 25 interviews for a phenomenological study and 20–30 for a grounded theory study. Meanwhile, according to Bernard (2013), there is growing support that 10-20 key research participants are enough to uncover and understand the major issues in any study of lived experience. In addition, according to Guest et al. (2006), taking sample heterogeneity and research objectives under consideration 6-8 interviews are enough for a homogeneous sample and 12 to 20 when trying to achieve maximum variations.

Hence, this study involved in-depth interviews with a total of twenty-five informants. Informants include six consumers can provide abundant data while considering potential diversity and varying consumer experiences. For more targeted and cohesive groups of enthusiasts, who may share similar interests and activities. A group of six fans would possess ample expertise. Simultaneously, the involvement of six advertisers can offer a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the criteria consideration on choosing the internet celebrity and how this key factor influences the consumer purchase intention. Advertisers are parties who allocate budgets to launch advertising campaigns. Therefore, they will ensure that only qualified internet celebrities who can effectively attract customers to purchase the promoted products or services will be selected.

Moreover, as noted by Guest et al. (2006), individuals with expertise or distinct professional backgrounds typically do not need many participants to acquire

comprehensive insights. This study involved selecting four internet celebrities and three academicians to conduct in-depth interviews. The selection of internet celebrities was as they serve as the primary subjects of this study and provide first-hand experience on content creation for short videos, credibility building, and interaction with fans or consumers. The inclusion of academics was selected to introduced theoretical perspectives, who were able to critically analyze the credibility of internet celebrities, consumer behavior and eWOM to provide a solid theoretical foundation for the study. The aim is to gather data from diverse perspectives. It is crucial to acknowledge that there are stringent standards for the selection of every informant. The total of 25 informants was not predetermined arbitrarily but confirmed through the principle of data saturation. Data collection and coding were conducted iteratively, and interviews were continued until no new themes or insights emerged from the data, indicating that thematic saturation had been achieved (Guest et al., 2006; Saunders et al., 2009).

The rationale for distributing participants across groups was based on the study's research objectives and the nature of gastronomic tourism internet celebrity research. Consumers and fans (n=12) were given a larger proportion because they represent the primary audience of internet celebrities and are directly affected by their credibility and eWOM, which is central to research objective 1. Advertisers (n=6) were included as they play a critical role in determining collaboration standards and selecting internet celebrities, aligning with research objective 2. Internet celebrities (n=4) provided insider perspectives on self-presentation, credibility construction, and interaction

strategies. Finally, academicians (n=3) contributed theoretical and critical reflections, complementing the empirical findings with scholarly insights. This distribution thus ensured both breadth and depth, while prioritizing consumer and fan perspectives as the main source of eWOM influence.

The researcher opted to undertake in-depth interviews with four internet celebrities, two from each of the platforms TikTok and RED. These platforms vary in user characteristics and interaction styles, which influences how credibility is established. This selection helps to understand their influence on eWOM and purchase intentions across platforms. These platforms have been picked as they represent prominent internet celebrity communities. This study centers on internet celebrities within the domain of gastronomic tourism, specifically selecting individuals who possess a notable level of expertise and influence in this industry. The internet celebrities were chosen based on a variety of criteria (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

Criteria for Internet Celebrities as Informant

Point	Specific conditions
Follower Count	All internet celebrities involved in the study were required to possess a follower base of between 0.5 million and 1 million fans or more. (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019).
Short video content posted	The content showcased in the short videos predominantly consists of gastronomic tourism content, as shared by the chosen internet celebrities. The content may encompass several aspects such as suggestions for meals, evaluations of food quality, advice for traveling, and personal accounts of travel experiences.
Activity	The selected internet celebrity consistently releases fresh content every week and actively engages with their fan base by responding to comments, ensuring a high level of interactivity. This phenomenon can be attributed to the higher probability of internet celebrities who maintain a consistent level of activity to generate increased levels of engagement from their fans (Syrdal & Briggs, 2018).

Table 3.1 *continued*

Country	Informants were chosen from the pool of internet celebrities who actively engage with Chinese social media sites. Most users on the social media platforms TikTok and RED, as discussed in Chapter 2, are Chinese persons.
Demographic	The study deliberately focused on internet celebrities aged 18 to 35 as the target demographic. The reason behind the high level of activity observed among TikTok and RED users can be attributed to their predominant demographic, which consists primarily of those born in the 1990s (Mansoor, 2023; Qiangua Data, 2023).
Gastronomic Tourism Products or Services	Numerous internet celebrity has publicly praised comparable gastronomic tourism products or services through their TikTok and RED accounts (Ermeç, 2022). This phenomenon can be attributed to the collaboration between internet celebrities and marketers, resulting in the generation of consumer buy intent an eWOM (Ermeç, 2022).

The researcher-initiated communication with internet celebrities using private messages and web invitations. If the internet celebrity demonstrates an intention to engage in the study, the researcher processed to send a formal invitation and arrange a comprehensive interview. Table 3.2 presents the basic characteristics of these internet celebrity informants, including their gender, years of experience in the industry, number of short videos published, number of followers, and number of likes received.

Table 3.2

Profile of Internet celebrities as informants

Internet Celebrity	Gender	Years of Experience	No. of Short videos	Number of Followers	No. of Likes
A1	Female	5	135	1.303 mil	10.981 mil
A2	Male	6	73	1.238 mil	15.961 mil
A3	Male	4	535	1.199 mil	16.880 mil
A4	Male	3	65	0.515 mil	2.515 mil

The four internet celebrities in the table demonstrate their impact characteristics in the gastronomic tourism area: three males and one female, with industry experience ranging from 3 to 6 years, showing significant variations in the number of short videos produced and engagement metrics (follower count and likes received). The follower

count of these four internet celebrities ranges from 500,000 to over 1 million, classifying them as medium to large-scale internet celebrities with a broad consumer base, effectively reflecting their appeal and popularity in the gastronomic tourism area. However, this study did not make specific gender-based selections, as it employed a heterogeneous approach to data collection, requiring only that each informant meet the conditions outlined.

The subsequent section elucidates the sampling approaches that are most suitable for the selection of social media consumers as the unit of study. There are two primary categories of sampling procedures, namely probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling is a methodological approach that involves the selection of a “random sample” from a comprehensive list of units that accurately reflect the entirety of the target population. In this scenario, it is important to note that probability sampling does not necessarily guarantee that every consumer has an equal chance of getting selected as an informant. Non-probability sampling strategies involve the deliberate selection of specific units to concentrate on a particular research phenomenon (Babbie, 2015). To conduct in-depth interviews, this study employed a purposive selection method to choose 6 social media consumers from TikTok and RED applications. The selection criteria used for this process are as follows. (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3

Criteria for Social Media Consumers as Informants

Point	Specific conditions
Purchased Products or Services	Informants are commonly individuals who have engaged in the purchase of a product or service. The chosen participants should consist only of those who engage in frequent product or service purchases based on endorsements from internet celebrities. The recommendations of chosen internet celebrities facilitate the selection of informants. This is because the control backend of these celebrities' social media accounts typically contains a list of consumers who have previously purchased the product or service (Yang & Ha, 2021).
Activity	The individual providing information should embody the role of a consumer who actively participates on the social media site. This includes consumers who engage in various activities on social media platforms, such as posting comments, liking, sharing, and actively participating in discussions. Specifically, consumers who engage or provide feedback more frequently to internet celebrities. This phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that these consumers possess a heightened comprehension of the internet celebrity's credibility (Syrdal & Briggs, 2018).
Demographic	The survey purposely focused on Chinese consumers aged 18 to 35 as the intended consumers. The reason behind the high level of activity on TikTok and RED platforms can be attributed to the predominant user base consisting of individuals born in the 1990s (Mansoor, 2023; Qiangua Data, 2023).
Social Media Platforms	All consumers who consume a product or service possess an account on at least one social media platform, such as TikTok or RED. These consumers actively participate in acquiring gastronomic tourism-related products, or services via these social media platforms.

Similarly, this study employed a purposive sampling technique to pick six fans from the fan base of the chosen internet celebrities as informants. The selection process involved the application of numerous criteria (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4

Criteria for Fans as Informants

Point	Specific conditions
Follower Count	The informant chooses fans who actively follow and engage with popular gastronomic tourism internet celebrities, to ascertain their genuine interest and enthusiasm in the field. This study includes fans with varying degrees of popularity, ranging from those with a substantial number of followers to those with a smaller following. This approach is adopted to ensure the inclusion of a diverse sample (Bakshy et al., 2011).
Demographic	The informants' age range should be limited to those between 19 and 35 years old, given that a significant portion of the fan base consists of young individuals. This criterion facilitates the comprehension of factors that impact eWOM (Mansoor, 2023; Qiangua Data, 2023).
Social Media Platforms	The informant actively engages with the internet celebrity on one or more social media platforms, namely TikTok and RED. These informants assist in identifying the factors that influence fans to communicate with internet celebrities for eWOM.

Table 3.4 *continued*

Field-specific	The informants exhibit a significant level of interest in content related to gastronomic tourism. The informants possess significant expertise in the realm of internet celebrities and their content creation, enabling them to provide a substantial quantity of experience and knowledge throughout comprehensive interview sessions (Moser & Korstjens, 2017).
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The utilization of these criteria serves the objective of comprehending the efficacy of distributing short video content featuring internet celebrities, with a focus on the perspective of their fan base. The researcher chooses individuals to serve as informants from the fan base of the internet celebrity. Upon being contacted by the researcher, the researcher initially provided an introduction of themselves and thereafter elucidate the objective of the study. Subsequently, if the fan demonstrates an inclination towards engaging in the study, the researcher proceeded to inquire about the four pivotal criteria to ascertain the fan's eligibility as an informant for the present investigation. Informants who fulfill the necessary criteria received notification regarding the scheduled date and time for their interview. Table 3.5 outlines the basic characteristics of the informants, including gender, age, occupation, duration of online activity, and city of residence. This information provides foundational background for the research objectives and demonstrates the diversity of the informants.

Table 3.5

Profile of Fans and Consumers as Informants

Fans (B) Consumer(C)	Gender	Age	Occupation	Online Activities	Locations
B1	Female	22	Undergraduate	1hr	Hangzhou
B2	Male	21	Courier	1hr30mins	Hangzhou
B3	Male	27	Salesperson	5hr	Guiyang
B4	Female	24	Bank clerk	2hr30mins	Nanjing
B5	Male	27	Surveyor	1hr	Changsha

Table 3.5 *continued*

Fans (B) Consumer(C)	Gender	Age	Occupation	Online Activities	Locations
B6	Female	22	Assistant	3hr30mins	Beijing
C1	Male	31	Engineers	1hr	Zhangjiakou
C2	Female	25	Interior Designer	1hr	Shenzhen
C3	Female	24	Postgraduate	2hr	Hefei
C4	Female	24	Journalist	1hr30mins	Chengdu
C5	Male	25	Accountants	1hr30mins	Quanzhou
C6	Female	24	Legal Adviser	1hr	Quanzhou

As shown in Table 3.5, the informants' ages primarily range from 20 to 35 years old, encompassing various occupations including undergraduate students, engineers, designers, bank employees, and legal consultants. Their daily online activity duration varies from 1 to 5 hours. The geographical distribution covers multiple cities including Hangzhou, Beijing, Shenzhen, and Chengdu, demonstrating a broad national representation. The diverse characteristics of the informants facilitate understanding of how fans and consumers receive and interact with internet celebrities' content. The feedback from these informants provides comprehensive support for analyzing internet celebrities' impact on eWOM dissemination.

Regarding the selection of advertisers and academicians. The researchers extended invitations to 6 social media brand advertisers who possess significant expertise and experience in the domain, particularly in the realm of social media advertising and marketing. In addition, 3 esteemed academicians with exceptional academic standing and notable professional acclaim within the realm of social media internet celebrities were extended invitations. The relevance of the academic specialists' field of study to the research issue was ensured. This is because their specialized knowledge and areas

of research can offer valuable perspectives and understanding within the discipline.

The advertisers and academicians were chosen based on various criteria (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6

Criteria for Advertisers and Academicians as Informants

Point	Specific conditions
Experience	The informant as an advertiser should have extensive experience in social media marketing. Experienced advertisers can provide real-world experience and success stories, which are crucial for understanding the marketing effectiveness of short video platforms (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The academician as an informant should have published high-quality research papers in the areas of social media marketing, new media, and communication. Academic achievements reflect the degree of specialization and influence of the academician in his or her field of study and are key to ensuring the depth and breadth of research (Westerman et al., 2013).
Field-specific	The informant as an advertiser should specialize in relevant areas such as social media marketing, advertising planning, and brand management. Domain expertise ensures advertisers can provide specialized strategies and insights that are particularly important for researching specific marketing strategies for short-form video platforms (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Academicians who are informants should focus on researching areas and research topics related to social media marketing, internet celebrity, and brand communication. Research around expertise can provide theoretical support and an analytical framework for studying internet celebrity credibility (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).
Social Media Platforms	The informant as an advertiser should have marketing programs on TikTok and RED. In-depth operational experience with these platforms can provide direct insights into user behavior, content trends, and marketing effectiveness (Chen et al., 2019). Academicians who are informants have researched social media platforms such as TikTok and RED, especially on their credibility and influence building. The research experience for social media platforms can provide an in-depth understanding and analysis, which is valuable for exploring new research directions and strategies (Hu et al., 2014).

Table 3.7 presents the basic characteristics of these advertiser informants, including gender, occupation, company size, marketing experience, and city of residence. This information provides a background overview of the advertisers to help analyze their decision-making factors when choosing internet celebrities.

Table 3.7

Profile on Advertisers as Informants

Advertisers	Gender	Occupation	Company Size	Marketing Experience	Location
D1	Female	Brand Vice President	Medium	9	Changchun
D2	Male	Advertising Planner	Medium	6	Zhengzhou
D3	Male	Marketing Manager	Large	5	Taiyuan
D4	Female	Brand Manager	Small	3	Beijing
D5	Male	Marketing Manager	Small	4	Jinan
D6	Male	Advertising Producer	Medium	4	Nanjing

As shown in the table, among the six advertisers, there are four males and two females, occupying various positions including Brand Vice President, Marketing Manager, Advertising Planner, and Producer. The advertisers represent companies of varying sizes, including small, medium, and large enterprises, suggesting that selection criteria for internet celebrities may differ across different business environments. Their marketing experience ranges from 3 to 9 years, indicating substantial professional background in brand promotion and advertising planning. Geographically, these advertisers are from diverse locations including Changchun, Zhengzhou, Taiyuan, Beijing, Jinan, and Nanjing, representing a broad distribution. The diversity of these advertisers provides multi-dimensional insights for this study, helping to further understand their criteria when choosing internet celebrities for collaboration. However, this study did not make specific selections based on company size, requiring only that each informant meet the conditions outlined.

Table 3.8 presents these academics' professional fields, years of experience, and research directions, which cover Marketing, social media, and Communication Studies, with working experience ranging from 9 to 12 years.

Table 3.8

Profile of Academicians as Informants

Academicians	Area of Expertise	Years of Work	Research Direction
E1	Marketing	12	E-commerce, Marketing Management
E2	Social media	9	Broadcasting and Hosting
E3	Communication	9	Network & New Media

As shown in the table, E1 specializes in Marketing, with a research focus on e-commerce and marketing management, providing theoretical support for understanding internet celebrities' roles in e-commerce promotion. E2 focuses on social media, with expertise in broadcasting and hosting, offering academic perspectives on content dissemination across social platforms. E3 specializes in Communication Studies, researching internet and new media, contributing to the analysis of internet celebrity content dissemination effects in cyberspace. The diversity of these academic backgrounds provides theoretical foundation for constructing this study's credibility model, further enriching our understanding of internet celebrities' role mechanisms in eWOM dissemination.

A variety of data collection approaches were employed in this investigation. Hence, the selection criterion for informants does not include gender, provided that each informant fulfills the parameters. The various criteria implemented in this study serve to elucidate the influence of the credibility of internet celebrities in social media on eWOM, and the criteria the advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities. These criteria are then connected to the theoretical frameworks utilized in this research. In addition, this study has been identified the informants according to the criteria of

the informants (Table 3.9).

Table 3.9

The Table of Informants

No.	Coding	Category	Age	Occupation
1	D1	Internet Celebrity	27	Preschool Teacher
2	D2	Internet Celebrity	30	Photographer
3	D3	Internet Celebrity	29	Operations Manager
4	D4	Internet Celebrity	25	Train attendant
5	B1	Fans	22	Undergraduate
6	B2	Fans	21	Courier
7	B3	Fans	27	Salesperson
8	B4	Fans	24	Bank clerk
9	B5	Fans	27	Surveyor
10	B6	Fans	22	Assistant
11	C1	Consumer	31	Engineers
12	C2	Consumer	25	Interior Designer
13	C3	Consumer	24	Postgraduate
14	C4	Consumer	24	Journalist
15	C5	Consumer	25	Accountants
16	C6	Consumer	24	Legal Adviser
17	D1	Advertiser	32	Brand Vice President
18	D2	Advertiser	28	Advertising Planner
19	D3	Advertiser	27	Marketing Manager
20	D4	Advertiser	25	Brand Manager
21	D5	Advertiser	26	Marketing Manager
22	D6	Advertiser	26	Advertising Producer
23	E1	Academician	54	Marketing
24	E2	Academician	35	Social media
25	E3	Academician	36	Communication

3.3.3 Content Analysis

The objective of this research is to investigate the influence of internet celebrities' credibility on eWOM towards fans and consumer purchase intention. To accomplish that objective, this study employed the content analysis method follows the in-depth interviews. The content analysis method is a systematic research approach that is

extensively employed in qualitative research to facilitate a nuanced interpretation of textual content, visuals, or other forms of media content (Krippendorff, 2018). The method is extensively employed in social science research and is especially well-suited for examining the communication and exchanges within social media material. Measuring the dissemination and influence of internet celebrities on consumers through eWOM might provide valuable insights.

In the context of social media, the influence of internet celebrity has become an important topic of scholarly attention. Herring (2004) points out that content analysis is particularly suitable for studying online communication and user interaction, as it enables systematic analysis of language, discourse styles, and information dissemination methods to understand consumer behavior. Content analysis becomes particularly essential when research aims to understand eWOM. Unlike interviews that reflect informants' retrospective or self-reported perspectives, consumer comments represent spontaneous, real-time reactions within natural social contexts. According to Neuendorf (2017), content analysis proves especially suitable for examining communication patterns within unstructured datasets, thereby revealing collective opinion trends that interviews alone cannot capture. By analyzing comments on TikTok and RED platforms, this study ensures that findings reflect not only what informants articulate during interviews, but more importantly, the dynamic processes through which credibility is negotiated in public discourse.

While informants may intentionally or unintentionally withhold information during

interviews, comments often highlight unfiltered consumer concerns, such as skepticism toward commercialization, disappointment with misleading content, or enthusiasm for authentic experiences, as Hsieh and Shannon (2005) note, qualitative content analysis proves particularly effective in identifying implicit meanings and emerging categories within textual data. Meanwhile, Herring (2004) emphasizes that online discourse is shaped both by individual contributors and broader community norms. This study captures individual perceptions of internet celebrity credibility through interviews, using comments to reveal how these perceptions are collectively reinforced, challenged, or reshaped within digital communities. Without content analysis, the research would likely overlook the broader social validation mechanisms that drive eWOM dissemination and consumer behavior. Consequently, this method becomes a crucial tool for detecting gaps between internet celebrity self-presentation and consumer reception, making it an indispensable component of the research design.

Furthermore, content analysis holds particular significance for eWOM research as it captures how consumers actively construct meaning through online interactions. Herring (2004) notes that user-generated comments in digital environments constitute crucial forms of social discourse, reflecting consumer evaluations and collective sentiment in real-time. In the context of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities, short-video comments not only express opinions but also reveal how communities internally negotiate credibility, authenticity, and commercial intent. Therefore, through comment analysis, this study deeply explores how internet celebrity credibility translates into consumer trust and ultimately affects purchase intentions.

Notably, content analysis strengthens methodological rigor by enabling triangulation and enhancing validity. Mayring (2014) argues that qualitative content analysis allows researchers to systematically connect theoretical constructs with empirical data, thereby improving interpretive depth. This study provides empirical grounding for its model by coding consumer comments according to credibility dimensions (such as trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness). This approach not only corroborates interview findings but also achieves independent verification, ensuring that the proposed culinary tourism model possesses robustness and an empirical foundation. Therefore, content analysis is employed to analyze video content and comments on short-video platforms (such as TikTok and RED) to identify how internet celebrity credibility influences eWOM towards fans and consumer purchase intentions, as well as how short-video content shapes eWOM and influences consumer behavior.

The data sources utilized in this study comprise short videos showcasing internet celebrities, together with social media (TikTok and RED) data about comments made by fans and consumers. These data sources are important because they offer insights into the interaction between internet celebrities and consumers in the context of eWOM, thereby reflecting the influence of internet celebrities on eWOM. Consequently, this study aims to extensively study consumer opinions regarding the gastronomic tourism endorsements made by internet celebrities on TikTok and RED platforms. The analysis involved extracting relevant information from the internet celebrities' profiles, branding, and the comments left by consumers on the short video content posted on these platforms. Table 3.10 presents the criteria of short video.

Table 3.10

Criteria of Short Video

Criteria	Details
Platform	TikTok, RED (10 videos from each, total 20)
Keyword	#gastronomic tourism
Date of Production	March 1, 2024 – August 31, 2024
Selection Method	Top 10 most popular videos identified using platform search engines
Number of Views	At least 500,000 views
Number of Likes	At least 20,000 likes
Content Type	Videos created by gastronomic tourism internet celebrities

The data-gathering process included several dimensions, such as the careful selection of specific periods, to guarantee the currency and pertinence of the gathered data. This study focuses on two short-video platforms, TikTok and RED, examining short videos published during the six-month period from March 1 to August 31, 2024. The choice of a six-month duration for collecting short-video content and comments is intended to reduce temporal bias and to allow for the detection of stable patterns rather than transient spikes. Studies in social media research often use periods of up to six months to ensure that short-term events or trends do not unduly influence results (Addo et al., 2022; Dong et al., 2024). This approach helps avoid data bias caused by changes in platform algorithms or user behavior, while capturing current trends and user interaction patterns (Tufekci, 2014).

Additionally, the study employs a systematic method to select the most popular #gastronomic tourism, short videos on TikTok and RED to ensure data representativeness and interactivity. The comments selection is based on criteria such as popularity, thematic relevance, and combines interview findings to identify themes including internet celebrity trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise to evaluate

their influence on eWOM and purchase intentions.

This study employed a cross-sectional approach to gather data through descriptive content analysis. The researchers utilized search engines on TikTok and RED to identify 20 most popular short videos related to gastronomic tourism, with 10 videos selected from each platform. Short videos tagged with the hashtag #gastronomic tourism were undergo pre-processing to identify relevant internet celebrities among their creators. The selected videos had a minimum of 500,000 views, at least 20,000 likes, and were created by internet celebrities in the field of gastronomic tourism. Ultimately, user comments were collected from the selected videos. The comments made by users pertain to short videos featuring prominent internet celebrities. Comments provided by users were retrieved from the social media platform TikTok and RED's "comments" function, which serves as a valuable tool for open data collection. According to Cooper (2020), the comments function enables followers to articulate their perspectives and sentiments regarding online personalities, media material, and brands using textual expressions or the utilization of emoticons (emojis). There are no certain standards enforced for users when they input comments into the application's open fields. This is because comments can significantly differ in terms of length, style, and content.

This study selected 10 short videos each from TikTok and RED platforms, totaling 20 videos as analysis samples, to understand the eWOM dissemination effects of internet celebrities in gastronomic tourism content. Tables 3.11 and 3.12 present the sampling

plan, with data collection spanning from March 1, 2024, to August 31, 2024, including the quantity, duration, and dates of gastronomic tourism short videos from both TikTok and RED platforms. Through systematic collection of comments on these videos, this study can compare interaction differences across different platforms and videos, thereby analyzing the characteristics of eWOM dissemination in the gastronomic tourism sector.

Table 3.11

Schedule: The amount of sampling Gastronomic Tourism short video on TikTok

Duration	Date	No. of Videos	Sampling
Mar 2024	1 Mar–30 Mar	140	Video 1–20 Mar 2024(1.5 mil viewer) Video 2–27 Mar 2024(5.5 mil viewer)
Apr 2024	1 Apr–30 Apr	186	Video 3–4 April 2024(2.3 mil viewer) Video 4–26 April 2024(0.9mil viewer) Video 5–30April 2024(0.6 mil viewer)
May 2024	1 May–31 May	151	Video 6–2 May 2024(0.5 mil viewer)
Jun 2024	1 Jun – 29 Jun	153	Video 7–21 Jun 2024(0.8 mil viewer) Video 8–30 Jun 2024(2.4 mil viewer)
Jul 2024	1 Jul – 31 Jul	188	Video 9–19 Jul 2024(2.2 mil viewer)
Aug 2024	1 Aug – 31 Aug	148	Video 10–6 Aug 2024(0.7 mil viewer)

Table 3.12

Schedule: The amount of sampling Gastronomic Tourism short video on RED

Duration	Date	No. of Videos	Sampling
Mar 2024	1 Mar–30 Mar	14	Video 1–16 Mar 2024(3.8 mil viewer)
Apr 2024	1 Apr–30 Apr	19	Video 2–13 April 2024(2.1 mil viewer)
May 2024	1 May–31 May	16	Video 3–2 May 2024(1.7 mil viewer) Video 4–10 May 2024(3.6 mil viewer)
Jun 2024	1 Jun – 29 Jun	15	Video 5–10 Jun 2024(3.5 mil viewer) Video 6–13 Jun 2024(1.2 mil viewer)
Jul 2024	1 Jul – 31 Jul	21	Video 7–10 Jul 2024(1.3 mil viewer) Video 8–19 Jul 2024(0.8 mil viewer) Video 9–27 Jul 2024(1.2 mil viewer)
Aug 2024	1 Aug –31 Aug	23	Video 10–10 Aug 2024(1.0mil viewer)

These short videos were selected using strict screening criteria. Using the platforms'

search engine functionality, the top ten most popular short videos were selected within a six-month timeframe by searching for gastronomic tourism keywords. Tables 3.13 and 3.14 present the detailed sample information.

Table 3.13

Detail of Sampling (TIK TOK)

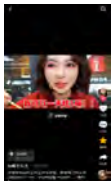





	Video 1: The internet celebrity travels to Gansu, China, in search of local delicacies, focusing on the experience of visiting a Lanzhou hand-pulled noodles restaurant. The video is shot from a first-person perspective, showcasing the noodle-making process. The internet celebrity narrates the price of the meal while enjoying the dish and explains the different ways to pair it with various side dishes.				
Date	20 March 2024	Duration	228 sec	No. of Viewer	1.5 mil
Detail	75,259 like, 11,299 comments, 3635 favorites and 25,483 shared				
	Video 2: This video highlights local specialty gastronomic tourism attractions in Chengdu, China. The internet celebrity, accompanied by a fan, explores the local culinary scene with a cheerful and interactive style. The video showcases three breakfast spots, and ends with a visually engaging narrative, expressing the internet celebrity's deep connection to their hometown.				
Date	27 March 2024	Duration	425 sec	No. of Viewer	5.5 mil
Detail	458,404 like, 31,537 comments, 51,687 favorites and 325,682 shared				
	Video 3: Set in Tianjin, China, this video is a 24-hour gastronomic tourism, featuring the internet celebrity sampling 30 different dishes. The experience is narrated through an automated voiceover with accompanying music, providing a dynamic and engaging overview of the internet celebrity's gastronomic adventure.				
Date	4 April 2024	Duration	433 sec	No. of Viewer	2.3 mil
Detail	116,434 like, 9244 comments, 31,075 favorites and 148,432 shared				
	Video 4: The internet celebrity spends a full day exploring the local gastronomic tourism in Hangzhou, China. Over the course of the day, they sample 14 different dishes. The video is enriched with entertaining and AI-generated voiceovers, taking viewers from breakfast to dinner as they explore popular local specialties.				
Date	26 April 2024	Duration	388 sec	No. of Viewer	0.9 mil
Detail	45,059 like, 3142 comments, 11,130 favorites and 25,254 shared				
	Video 5: Presented from the perspective of a local, this video takes viewers on a gastronomic tourism of Guiyang, China. The internet celebrity narrates the journey, introducing both tourist spots and local delicacies, providing a comprehensive guide to the city's gastronomic highlights from a resident's point of view.				
Date	30 April 2024	Duration	368 sec	No. of Viewer	0.6 mil
Detail	29,958 like, 3320 comments, 21,814 favorites and 16,667 shared				
	Video 6: In this video, the internet celebrity offers a more critical perspective on their hometown of Leshan, China, providing gastronomic tourism recommendations while also highlighting potential drawbacks. The content is framed from the viewpoint of a fan and consumer, offering practical tips for visitors.				
Date	2 May 2024	Duration	242 sec	No. of Viewer	0.5 mil
Detail	20,747 like, 3569 comments, 2770 favorites and 6969 shared				

Table 3.13 *continued*





	Video 7: The internet celebrity introduces the gastronomic tourism of Anhui, China, through the lens of historical significance. The video presents various local dishes and scenic spots with a deep, culturally rich narrative, focusing on the heritage and culinary traditions of the region.				
Date	21 June 2024	Duration	199 sec	No. of Viewer	0.8 mil
Detail	38,959 like, 6963 comments, 9057 favorites and 49,982 shared				

Table 3.13 *continued*

	Video 8: Dressed in a cosplay outfit, the internet celebrity takes viewers on a three-day gastronomic journey through Shantou, China. The video covers various aspects of tourism, from transportation to sightseeing, and showcases 20 different dishes and multiple tourist spots, all narrated in a lively and detailed manner.				
Date	30 June 2024	Duration	336 sec	No. of Viewer	2.4 mil
Detail	122,928 like, 14,356 comments, 58,227 favorites and 125,026 shared				
	Video 9: With a “special forces” gastronomic tourism theme, this video covers a one-day gastronomic tourism in Shengzhou, China. The internet celebrity uses a voiceover to complement visual shots of various dishes, while also offering practical tips and recommendations for gastronomic tourism in the area.				
Date	19 July 2024	Duration	337 sec	No. of Viewer	4.2 mil
Detail	208,914 like, 11,720 comments, 22,889 favorites and 112,012 shared				
	Video 10: Filmed from a daily life perspective, the internet celebrity shares their multi-day gastronomic tourism experience in Xinjiang, China. The video covers not only the region’s diverse cuisine but also its scenic spots, with detailed explanations of the travel itinerary, including meals and sightseeing highlights.				
Date	6 August 2024	Duration	443 sec	No. of Viewer	0.7 mil
Detail	33,715 like, 4511 comments, 6072 favorites and 29,141 shared				

Universiti Utara Malaysia

Table 3.14

Detail of Sampling (RED)











	Video 1: The video highlights an internet celebrity’s gastronomic tourism journey in Xi’an, China, where the celebrity experiences a range of local delicacies throughout the day. The unique aspect of the video is the blend of traditional culture and modern tourism, as it ends with the celebrity and a friend donning Hanfu and taking photos at a famous tourist site.				
Date	16 March 2024	Duration	165 sec	No. of Viewer	1.0 mil
Detail	49,000 like, 2690 comments, 42,000 favorites and 19,000 shared				
	Video 2: The video stands out for its fast-paced coverage of a 72-hour gastronomic tourism in Chaozhou, China. The internet celebrity’s detailed flavor reviews of various local delicacies and the quick transitions between scenic spots create an energetic and engaging viewing experience.				
Date	13 April 2024	Duration	158 sec	No. of Viewer	1.2 mil
Detail	60,000 like, 3297 comments, 56,000 favorites and 33,000 shared				
	Video 3: The distinguishing feature of this video is the focused exploration of two specific food districts in Fuzhou, China, where the internet celebrity offers in-depth commentary on the unique characteristics of various dishes. The casual vacation vibe adds to the relaxed atmosphere of the video.				
Date	2 May 2024	Duration	63 sec	No. of Viewer	0.8 mil
Detail	40,000 like, 1260 comments, 33,000 favorites and 21,000 shared				

Table 3.14 *continued*

	Video 4: This video features a unique combination of cultures as a foreign internet celebrity and his Chinese wife enjoy the authentic Chengdu dish “Mao Cai.” The real-life dining experience and natural interaction between the couple make the video feel relatable and inviting.				
Date	10 May2024	Duration	266 sec	No. of Viewer	1.3 mil
Detail	67,000 like, 2368 comments, 18,000 favorites and 11,000 shared				
	Video 5: The highlight of this video is its focus on a lifestyle approach to gastronomic tourism in Zhongshan, China. The internet celebrity’s personal and down-to-earth evaluations of local dishes provide an intimate look into the everyday gastronomic scene in the city.				
Date	7 June 2024	Duration	184 sec	No. of Viewer	1.2 mil
Detail	58,000 like, 2643 comments, 33,000 favorites and 33,000 shared				
	Video 6: The video stands out for its fast-paced exploration of Nanning’s diverse gastronomic scene, with the internet celebrity using map navigation to uncover a wide array of meals, including snacks and full-course meals. The variety of gastronomic and quick transitions between dishes create a dynamic and engaging experience.				
Date	13 June 2024	Duration	73 sec	No. of Viewer	3.5 mil
Detail	176,000 like, 6643 comments, 96,000 favorites and 62,000 shared				
	Video 7: The unique element of this video is the internet celebrity’s visit to a rotating noodle restaurant in Xi’an, China, where they sample 15 different types of noodles. The video captures their expressive reactions and adds value with travel tips, combining gastronomic exploration with tourism.				
Date	10 July 2024	Duration	220 sec	No. of Viewer	3.6 mil
Detail	182,000 like, 8851 comments, 41,000 favorites and 52,000 shared				
	Video 8: The video is distinguished by its 50-yuan food challenge in Shandong, China. The internet celebrity takes viewers on a budget-friendly gastronomic tourism, highlighting the process of purchasing and tasting local delicacies while also showcasing the city’s scenic views.				
Date	19 July 2024	Duration	106 sec	No. of Viewer	1.7 mil
Detail	84,000 like, 5927 comments, 15,000 favorites and 18,000 shared				
	Video 9: The cultural depth of the gastronomic tourism guide in Huizhou, China, sets this video apart. The internet celebrity presents a well-rounded two-day itinerary that includes famous attractions and a wide array of local delicacies, creating a balanced cultural and gastronomic experience.				
Date	27 July 2024	Duration	191 sec	No. of Viewer	2.1 mil
Detail	104,000 like, 3037 comments, 116,000 favorites and 38,000 shared				
	Video10: The highlight of this video is the integration of gastronomic tourism, as the internet celebrity explores seven traditional dishes in Beijing, China, with a mix of real-life experiences and footage from a celebrity variety show. This blend of media offers both culinary and travel insights, creating a unique and engaging narrative.				
Date	21 August 2024	Duration	201 sec	No. of Viewer	3.8 mil
Detail	188,000 like, 5068 comments 178,000 favorites and 60,000 shared				

For content analysis, this study collected all user comments from the short video samples as primary data. Based on the research objectives, after careful reading of all

comments, three comments were selected from each short video, resulting in 60 comments as the analysis sample. Comments unrelated to the study, such as advertisements, emojis, and other off-topic remarks, were excluded. The selected comments primarily focus on the characteristics of internet celebrities or product feedback and encompass diverse perspectives. The selection of comments was guided by the findings from the in-depth interviews to ensure that the content analysis to support and validate the themes identified in the interviews. Therefore, this study employed content analysis to investigate the comments made by fans and consumers on internet celebrities. Through analyzing comment content, researcher can identify key factors influencing consumer behavior. This process helps develop a deeper understanding of how consumers perceive and evaluate internet celebrity information, thereby further exploring the influence of these factors on eWOM dissemination.

3.3.4 Instrument

The researcher composed the instrument in English, adapted from Ohanian's (1990; 1991) Source Credibility Model. The instrument was undergoing translation into Mandarin Chinese to facilitate comprehension for respondents who favor the use of this language. After conducting the interviews, the Chinese transcripts were translated into English and an academician specializing in translation at the Chinese University was engaged to authenticate the accuracy of the translations. See appendix for interview questions (D, E, F, G).

Sofaer (2002) posits that the personal characteristics of the informant have the

potential to introduce bias in the analysis of in-depth interview data. The responses provided by the informant may exhibit inconsistencies with their ideas or activities. Hence, this attribute is regarded as a risk factor in any study involving qualitative methodologies. Hence, the interview instrument utilized in this study was meticulously designed, considering several factors. The researcher conducted interviews with a total of twenty-five informants. The data gathered from these interviews were carefully examined and compared, allowing the researcher to delve further into significant topics and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

The utilization of the NVivo 14 software was significant in both the construction of the research instrument and the subsequent analysis of the gathered data. NVivo 14 is a software application designed to facilitate computer-assisted qualitative data analysis. The main purpose of its use in this research was to facilitate the organization and administration of the data about the amassed short video content produced by internet celebrities, alongside user comments and interviews conducted with a specific subset of participants. The system possesses the capability to efficiently process textual, auditory, and visual materials, hence offering a valuable instrument for doing qualitative research.

This study employed NVivo 14 to examine fans and consumers responses to 20 short videos obtained from popular gastronomic tourism internet personalities. Prior studies on the credibility of eWOM have commonly employed NVivo as a tool for analyzing research data (Blas and Buzova, 2016; Ferreira et al., 2020). In their eWOM

investigation, Blas and Buzova (2016) employed NVivo to quantify word frequencies in a text corpus. Ferreira et al. (2020) employ NVivo to examine textual and content data to investigate the impacts of eWOM, utilizing the methodology outlined in Veal (2017). Prior research has demonstrated that NVivo is an appropriate approach for examining eWOM material related to internet celebrities. Hence, it was selected as the coding technique for doing content analysis on eWOM and purchase intention influencing factors in this study.

This study employed the utilization of NVivo 14 software to develop and implement the interview guide. During the design phase, the researcher generated the data through NVivo 14 software. Audio recordings were utilized during the interview process, employing the NVivo 14 program to capture and save the data. To enhance the future analysis of the data, suitable labels and annotations were incorporated into the software. In the phase of data analysis, the researcher accurately transcribed the interview recordings using NVivo 14's theme analysis tool. Subsequently, the transcribed text was coded and categorized by the researcher. The researcher generated a set of themes and sub-themes derived from the research questions and objectives. These themes utilized to establish connections between pertinent content using the NVivo 14 tool. By employing this approach, the researcher was capable of discerning significant insights, discernible patterns, and notable trends, thereby facilitating a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the data. One advantage of utilizing NVivo 14 software for topic analysis is its capacity to generate visual qualitative outcomes, like word frequency data, topic distribution maps, and relational network diagrams. These

aspects facilitate the presentation and interpretation of facts more lucidly, hence offering precise and robust substantiation for the thesis.

3.4 Reliability and Validity

Reliability pertains to the constancy and replicability of research findings (Golafshani, 2003). The study assesses reliability by examining the consistency of thematic analysis of online interviews. According to Creswell (2012), reliability in qualitative research is enhanced through consistent coding procedures and peer review. Hence, this study utilized the standardized coding and categorization system advocated by Krippendorff (2018) to analyze the interview data. The coding themes were employed to structure the data, with source credibility, information quality, review quantity, consumer needs, personality, and communication skills were served as the primary classifications. The thematic analysis was independently conducted by the researcher for coding consistency. To enhance reliability, an academicians and from the industry was selected as interrater. There are from Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) and from the industry which is the General Manager of media company. They were invited to review the coded data samples and provide feedback to refine the coding framework. The coding sheet developed is shown in Table 3.15.

Table 3.15

Coding Sheet

Dimensions of factor	Measures factor	Coding strategy
Source Credibility	Expertise	The internet celebrity's knowledge and professionalism in gastronomic tourism.
	Trustworthiness	The internet celebrity's genuine experiences and honest views on gastronomic tourism.

Table 3.15 *continued*

Dimensions of factor	Measures factor	Coding strategy
Source Credibility	Attractiveness	The internet celebrity's appearance, popularity, and how they express their passion and charisma in presenting gastronomic tourism content, including their tone and style.
	Opinions on products or services	Quantity, ratio of positive to negative reviews, growth trends, depth, and user engagement of consumer reviews reflect interest and satisfaction.
Review Quantity	Factions about the product or service	Internet celebrity video quantity on products/services and consumer use of the platform as a search engine.
	Detail	The depth and level of detail in the information content.
Information Quality	Accuracy	The correctness and non-misleading nature of the information.
	Completeness	The comprehensiveness of the information.
	Relevance	The degree to which the information content matches consumer needs and interests.
Consumer Needs	Timeliness	The currency of the information, ensuring that the data or content received by consumers is up to date.
	Personal Needs	Identify mentions of personal preferences, habitual engagement with specific content, or alignment with individual tastes.
	Product Price	Categorize statements related to price evaluation, affordability concerns, and comparisons of cost-effectiveness.
Personality	Affinity	Capture expressions that indicate perceived friendliness, approachability, or authenticity.
	Uniqueness	Identify descriptions of originality, differentiation, or distinctive content characteristics.
Communication Skills	Clarity	Categorize mentions of comprehensibility, structured explanations, and the effectiveness of information delivery.
	Engagement	Code for references to communication tone, presentation methods, and the internet celebrity's ability to engage consumers.

Simultaneously, in this study, the researcher used the kappa agreement value (Cohen's) to verify the reliability of the thematic analysis of in-depth interviews (Cohen, 1960). The agreement of these experts in the kappa assessment was very important to determine the reliability of themes and sub-themes that the researcher produced. The calculation process is outlined below. The thematic analysis of agreement data between the two experts is summarized in the following table:

	Expert 2: Agree (1)	Expert 2: Disagree (0)	Total
Expert 1: Agree (1)	20	2	22
Expert 1: Disagree (0)	3	7	10
Total	23	9	32

The observed agreement (P_o) represents the proportion of cases where both experts provided the same coding decision (either agreeing or disagreeing). It is calculated using the following formula:

$$P_o = \frac{a+d}{N} \quad (3.1)$$

Substituting the values from the table:

$$P_o = \frac{20+9}{32} = 0.90625$$

This indicates that the experts agreed on 90.63% of the cases.

The expected agreement (P_e) accounts for the agreement that might occur by chance, based on the marginal totals of the contingency table. It is calculated as follows:

$$P_e = \frac{(a+b)(a+c)+(b+d)(c+d)}{N^2} \quad (3.2)$$

Substitute values:

$$P_e = \frac{(22 \times 23) + (9 \times 10)}{32^2} = 0.58203$$

Cohen's Kappa (κ) is computed using the formula:

$$k = \frac{P_o - P_e}{1 - P_e} \quad (3.3)$$

Substituting the values:

$$k = \frac{0.90625 - 0.58203}{1 - 0.58203} = 0.776$$

According to Landis and Koch (1977), a Kappa value of 0.776 represents substantial agreement between the two experts. This suggests that the coding scheme is reliable, although minor refinements may further improve consistency. The high level of agreement supports the validity of the thematic analysis and enhances the robustness of the study's findings. This study utilized online interviews as the primary means of collecting data, considering the increasing significance of this approach in contemporary research methodology. Wimmer and Dominick (2014) state that online interviews are a highly effective and adaptable approach of gathering data, especially for studies with geographically dispersed or difficult-to-access target populations. Simultaneously, Rubin and Rubin (2011) stress the importance of implementing uniform and established protocols for all in-depth interviews to enhance reliability. Utilizing those basic principles, a convergent interview protocol has been created for this investigation and rigorously adhered to during the interviews with individuals from diverse backgrounds, including consumers, internet celebrities, fans, academicians, and advertisers (See Appendix C). Furthermore, considering the possible technological obstacles linked to online interviews, the researcher implemented preventive measures to ensure the seamless execution of the interviews. Before the interviews, it is advised to conduct comprehensive testing and preparation of communication equipment and software, as suggested by Lo Iacono et al. (2016), to prevent any possible technical issues that may impact the data collection process. Furthermore, to augment the reliability of the research, the researcher asked the informants review the transcription that has been made based on the interview data.

This practice, also known as “member checking” (Maykut & Morehouse, 2002), is a valuable technique for bolstering the reliability of qualitative research. To maintain consistency between the interpretation of data and the real experiences and viewpoints of participants, researchers might enable participants to scrutinize and authenticate the findings.

Validity pertains to the veracity and precision of research findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The study assesses the validity by examining whether the findings from the content analysis and online interviews accurately represent the influence of internet celebrities on eWOM and the criteria the advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities. Maxwell (2005) suggests that the validity of qualitative research can be strengthened by many means, such as seeking contradictory evidence, conducting prolonged observations, thick descriptions, and participant feedback. This study aims to enhance the validity of the research by employing various methodologies.

To acquire comprehensive fans and consumers feedback for content analysis, this study adheres to Miles and Huberman’s (1994) approach to collecting fans and consumers reviews from multiple platforms. This study specifically examined two prominent social media platforms in China, namely TikTok and RED. These two platforms are extensively utilized to share and discuss gastronomic tourism experiences, rendering them optimal sources of data. By selecting these platforms, one may ensure that the gathered reviews are both pertinent and varied, hence enhancing the breadth and excellence of the data. Furthermore, this study employed the diverse

sample selection approach suggested by Yin (2009) to guarantee that the findings accurately and thoroughly reflect the target group. This study specifically chooses social media consumers, fans, internet celebrities specializing in gastronomic tourism, academicians, and advertisers as informants for in-depth interviews. The purpose of this varied sample selection is to encompass a range of viewpoints and experiences, hence improving the applicability and thoroughness of the study's results.

To bolster the validity of in-depth interviews, it is crucial to guarantee the pertinence and comprehensiveness of the interview inquiries. According to Seidman (2013), interview questions should be closely aligned with the research objectives and should encompass all aspects of the research question. Consequently, this study formulated the interview questions as a reference, considering research all objectives. Furthermore, according to Wimmer and Dominick (2014), online interviews tend to provoke more thoughtful, thorough, and impartial responses from individuals, regardless of whether they are outgoing or introverted. This study employed online interviews to enhance the pertinence and comprehensiveness of the research aims. In addition, this study employed a multi-source data validation methodology to verify the interrater of transcript data from three parties which are from the industry, academicians, and experts from the media. The triangulation method (Denzin, 1978) suggests that enhancing the reliability and validity of a study can be achieved by cross-validating data from multiple sources.

3.5 Pilot Test

Pilot testing is an integral part of the interview preparation process. If the researcher does a pilot test, he or she was able to see any problems with the study's interview structure and adjust before the full study is carried out (Kvale& Brinkmann, 2009). The researcher employed a systematic sampling technique to identify a demographically diverse sample of participants, including internet celebrities, consumers, fans, advertisers and academicians. The primary objective of the pilot project is to target a certain demographic consisting of actively involved persons aged 19 to 35, together with internet celebrities and advertisers or academicians who possess a certain level of prominence and impact. Identify and rectify to ensure alignment with the research objectives. Upon careful examination of the data derived from the preliminary investigation, the researchers enhanced the survey instrument to procure more precise and reliable outcomes.

3.6 Data Analysis

3.6.1 In-depth Interview

This study applies thematic analysis to in-depth interview data to systematically identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data. Folkestad (2008) points out that the analytical process is dynamic and continuous, where researchers cannot simply separate the phases of data collection, reduction, and analysis. This perspective aligns with the core principles of thematic analysis, which requires researchers to repeatedly review data and continuously adjust and refine themes throughout the analysis process. Miles and Huberman (1994) propose that data can be managed and

analyzed through three concurrent procedures: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Saunders et al. (2009) further emphasize that data display helps researchers identify patterns and connections within the data, which is a key objective of thematic analysis. Therefore, this study employed thematic analysis to identify informants' perceptions of internet celebrity credibility, to refine the core factors influencing eWOM, to establish advertisers' criteria for choosing internet celebrities, and to suggest a model of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities.

To be able to accomplish all the research objectives. This study employed the Six Phase Thematic Analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to systematically identify, analyze and report themes within the data. To ensure a rigorous and transparent process, the researcher followed Creswell's (2012a) recommendations: transcribing the interviews, reading through the transcripts to gain a general understanding, and coding the data by segmenting text and labeling meaningful units, preferably using the participants' own words. Similar codes were then grouped into broader themes. NVivo 14 software was employed to facilitate this process, as it supports efficient data management, improves accessibility, and enhances analytical precision without influencing research design (Bazeley, 2007; Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). (See Appendix K: Interrater for Thematic Analyses). Table 3.16 presents steps of thematic analysis for this study.

Table 3.16

Steps of Thematic Analysis for this study

Step	Description	Application in This Study
1. Familiarization with Data	Repeatedly reading and listening to interview recordings while noting initial thoughts.	The researcher transcribes the interviews and takes preliminary notes, focusing on informants' discussions about the credibility of internet celebrities (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
2. Generating Initial Codes	Labeling meaningful text fragments using open coding.	The researcher extracts relevant content related to attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, information quality, and review quantity (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).
3. Identifying Potential Themes	Grouping similar codes together to form themes	The researcher identifies core themes such as the influence of credibility on consumer purchase intention and the credibility of internet celebrities (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
4. Reviewing Themes	Assessing whether themes are clear, representative, and consistent with the data.	The researcher revisits all codes to ensure that the themes accurately reflect informants' perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).
5. Defining and Naming Themes	Refining theme names to ensure they clearly convey the core meaning.	The researcher finalizes theme names, such as "The influence of internet celebrities on eWOM and purchase intentions, advertisers' chosen criteria, and the gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
6. Writing the Report	Presenting findings in a logical manner, supported by interview excerpts.	The researcher organizes the interview data, writes the analysis section, and compares findings with existing literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King & Brooks, 2017).

Throughout the analysis, the researcher consistently searches for patterns, distinctions, and similarities by conducting cross-case comparisons and theory saturation testing. This process continued until the fresh interview data cease to offer any novel insights. During the report writing step, the results of the thematic analysis are arranged in an organized manner. This involves providing a detailed description of each subject and using particular facts to support the interpretation. The researcher illustrates the process of addressing the study objectives by finding and analyzing themes that offer significant insight into the influence of internet celebrities on eWOM (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By employing these procedures and methods, the thematic analysis not

only identify the intricate dynamics between internet celebrities and eWOM, but it also offers the criteria that advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities. Additionally, it establishes a theoretical basis for constructing credibility models. Implementing this methodology highlighted the significance of qualitative research in acquiring a more profound comprehension of social scientific matters, offering abundant insights into the theory and implementation of associated disciplines.

3.6.2 Content Analysis

The data analysis process for the content analysis of this study was divided into five steps. See Table 3.17.

Table 3.17
The Data Analysis Process for Content Analysis

Step	Analysis Method	Description
1. Data Preparation	Text Transcription and Preprocessing	Export comments from TikTok and RED, remove duplicates, clean the data, and eliminate irrelevant content (e.g., emojis, advertisements, meaningless characters) (Krippendorff, 2018).
2. Thematic Analysis	Coding and Categorization	Use NVivo 14 for coding and classify comments based on key themes identified from interviews (e.g., trustworthiness, information quality, review quantity, consumer needs) (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
3. Sentiment Analysis	Emotion Polarity Detection	Apply manual annotation and software assistance to categorize comments into positive, neutral, or negative sentiments, identifying consumer attitudes toward internet celebrities and their content (Cambria et al., 2013).
4. Semantic Analysis	Keyword Extraction	Conduct word frequency analysis to extract high-frequency words and phrases (e.g., "authentic," "useful," "exaggerated," "impulse-buy"), revealing key discussion topics (Neuendorf, 2017).
5. Expert Validation	External Review by Experts	Two experts are invited to review the coded data to ensure accuracy, confirm thematic relevance, and refine the final categorization (Nowell et al., 2017).

To achieve the objective of research 1, the researcher undertakes the process of extracting and analyzing the content included within the chosen short videos about

gastronomy tourism. The initial step entails the identification and categorization of the 20 highest-liked short videos within the domain of gastronomic tourism. The extraction process involves gathering general information about the videos, including their titles, sources, durations, upload dates, number of views, likes, comments, and shares. Next, the fans and consumers comments that corresponded to the topic were retrieved and the data was carefully organized to remove any advertising or extraneous information. Ultimately, the refined user comments were migrated to NVivo 14, a software designed to assist in the interpretation of comments. This study was coded based on the key theme identified in the in-depth interviews. The content analyses performed were intercoder analyses. See Appendix I Intercoder for Content Analysis. Also, the researcher categorized specific criteria for consumer reviews during the coding process based on the SCM for internet celebrities. Table 3.18 presents the criteria for thematic categorization.

Table 3.18

Content Analysis for Thematic Categorization Criteria

Theme	Example Comment	Analytical Dimension
Trustworthiness	<i>"Following your guide for gastronomic tourism, it's really zero missteps. "</i>	Evaluates whether the internet celebrities' information is trustworthy and based on real experiences (Ohanian, 1990; Pornpitakpan, 2004).
Information Quality	<i>"The copywriting in your video content is also amazing! "</i>	Assesses the accuracy, depth, and usefulness of the provided information (Cheung et al., 2009).
Review quantity	<i>"The comment section is full of locals interacting. "</i>	Measures the level of consumes engagement and interaction with the content (Thomas et al., 2019).
Consumer Needs	<i>"How can I do gastronomic tourism locally using public transportation? "</i>	Identifies how well the content meets consumer needs and preferences (Zhang et al., 2014).

Table 3.18 *continued*

Communication Skills	<i>"The internet celebrity's Shandong dialect is very authentic and friendly. Shandong dialect sounds like Henan dialect. "</i>	Examines the internet celebrities' ability to convey information effectively and persuasively (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016).
Personality	<i>"This short video showed your deep love for Chengdu, local Chengdu people totally resonated with you. "</i>	Analyzes the distinctiveness and relatability of the internet celebrity's character and style (Aggad & Ahmad, 2021).
Attractiveness	<i>"You're so pretty and cute, I love you so much. "</i>	Assesses the internet celebrity's ability to attract viewers through appearance, aesthetics, or presentation style (Ohanian, 1990; McGuire, 1985).
Expertise	<i>"You're truly professional, even better at creating guides than locals. "</i>	Measures whether the internet celebrity possesses sufficient knowledge and experience in the field (Hovland et al., 1953; Ohanian, 1990).

Based on the literature review, the researcher developed a coding scheme. Specifically, the coding dimensions were drawn from two sources: on the one hand, the credibility dimensions—including attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise—were adapted from Ohanian (1990); on the other hand, themes identified through the interview analysis were incorporated. A combined theory-driven and data-driven coding strategy was adopted to enhance the validity and explanatory strength of the study. The researcher defined clear coding criteria and application contexts for each category and compiled a detailed coding manual accordingly. The coding was carried out by the researcher. To ensure the applicability and consistency of the coding scheme, two experts in qualitative research and the media industry were invited as an intercoder to review a sample of the data. After comparing the coding outcomes, the researcher integrated the feedback from the experts to revise and refine the initial coding results and category definitions. This process contributed to improving the reliability of the coding and the overall credibility of the research findings.

The researcher in coding utilized NVivo 14 to allocate labels or codes to the characteristics in each comment to indicate credibility and eWOM related material. Arrange the encoded data into a format that can be analyzed, such as constructing a data table where each row corresponds to a comment and each column corresponds to a distinct encoded characteristic. These items are specifically developed to quantify the influence of internet celebrities on eWOM. Meanwhile, the evaluation of the content's credibility is based on heuristic signals given by the system, such as the number of likes, comments, and shares (Wang et al., 2018). After coding is finished, a thorough examination of the coding outcomes concentrates on the main themes, patterns, and trends in the data. It also investigated the connections between these themes and how they demonstrated the influence of internet celebrities on eWOM and purchase intention. Ultimately, the findings included a detailed account of the main discoveries and research conclusions, shedding light on the mechanisms by which internet celebrities influence consumers via eWOM.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This study employed content analysis and in-depth interviews to investigate the influence of the credibility of internet celebrities on eWOM towards fans and consumers purchase intentions, the criteria the advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities and suggest a gastronomic tourism model of the internet celebrity. This study aims to do a qualitative content analysis by collecting comments from fans and consumers of internet celebrities across various short video platforms. The analysis focused on identifying the elements of eWOM that can accurately represent

the thoughts and opinions of consumers regarding internet celebrities. Additionally, it utilizes comprehensive interviews with fans and consumers to further enhance the comprehension of how internet celebrity credibility influences eWOM.

This study collected primary data through in-depth interviews with consumers, fans, internet celebrities, advertisers, and academicians. This study has established rigorous criteria for selecting informants and has implemented precise interview methods. By employing carefully crafted interview questions and a systematic process of data analysis, it is possible to accurately gauge the consumer's experience about the effectiveness of eWOM with internet celebrities. Afterward, the interview material was processed and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis process utilized the three fundamental components of the SCM - attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise-as a theoretical framework. This framework guided the coding of data and the generalization of themes, ensuring that the study achieved both theoretical depth and practical relevance.

Additionally, it explores the criteria the advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities. and ultimately suggest a model for assessing the credibility of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities. The purpose of the approach is to enable advertisers to evaluate the potential market influence of internet celebrities more scientifically and systematically when choosing to collaborate with them. Overall, the study's methodological design and analytical process offer valuable guidance and practical insights for future research in the field of internet celebrity.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter consists of two parts, divided into the research objectives' findings and discussion based on the research methods applied. In obtaining the study findings for the first study objective, the researcher applied the in-depth interview method with informants from various categories: consumers, fans, advertisers, internet celebrities and academicians. The researcher believes it is appropriate if the findings for research objective 1 are supported through the content analysis method of 10 videos from the RED platform and 10 from the TikTok platform. The second part of this chapter explains the study findings and discussion based on the 2nd and 3rd study objectives, which use the same method: in-depth interviews. Even though the theme was created, this research found a new theme related to the subject matter.

4.2 Research Objective 1: To investigate the influence of the credibility of internet celebrities on eWOM towards fans and consumer purchase intentions (Interview data)

To address research objective 1, the researcher conducted in-depth interview with fans and consumers informants to examine the role of internet celebrity credibility in shaping the eWOM and purchase intention. Based on the elements of the source credibility theory, the researcher formed from the results the following themes. See Figure 4.1.

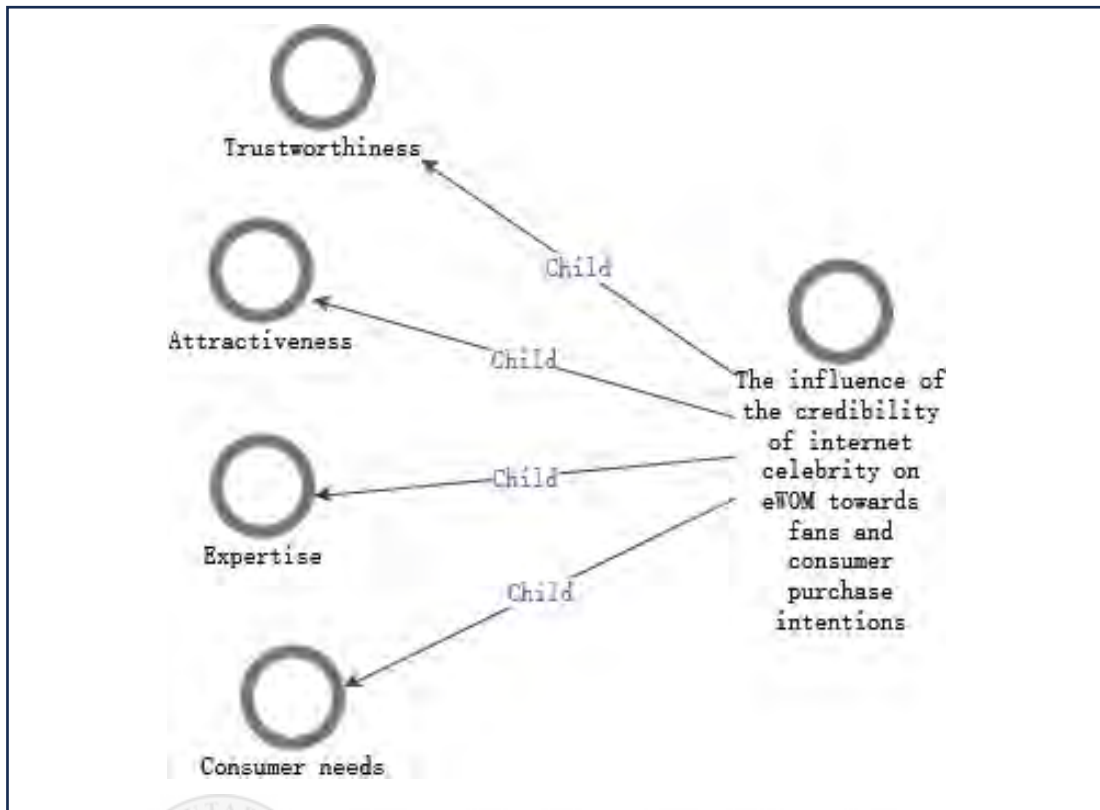


Figure 4.1 Mapping of the research findings for credibility of internet celebrities on eWOM and purchase intention.

Figure 4.1 presents the breakdown of the findings for research objective 1 according to the interview data. Four themes emerged from the analysis. The findings from analyses indicate that the key factors of trustworthiness, namely information quality, and review quantity have the greatest influence on eWOM, followed by personality within attractiveness and communication skills within expertise. In contrast, physical attractiveness and expert background play a more limited role in shaping eWOM towards fans and influencing consumer purchase intentions. In addition, the study revealed consumer needs as an important influencing factor representing a new theme. The single most striking observation to emerge from the data comparisons was the theme of trustworthiness, which indicates its key role in fan eWOM and consumer purchase intentions.

4.2.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness has significantly contributed to the influence of the credibility of internet celebrities on eWOM and the purchase intentions of fans and consumers. As mentioned before, credibility elements in the source credibility theory consist of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. Therefore, these elements were raised during the in-depth interview with informants. Following the thematic analysis, the researcher categorized trustworthiness on five key subthemes: Information quality, Review quantity, Past recommendations, Perceived honesty and authenticity, Familiarity. These sub-themes emerged because informants emphasized the importance of authenticity of video content, consistency of interactive comments, past performance, authenticity and interactive relationships in influencing the perception of internet celebrity credibility. See Figure 4.2.

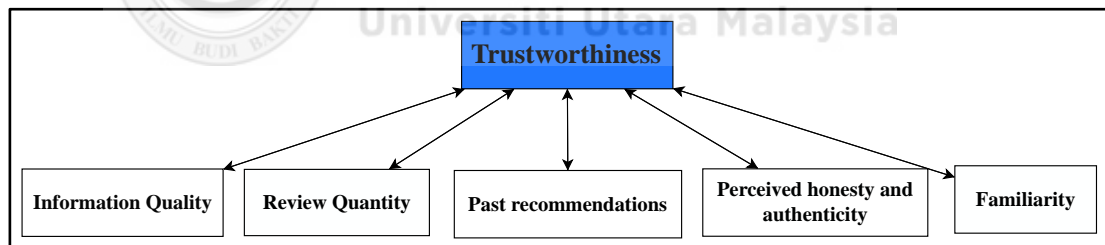


Figure 4.2 Trustworthiness Groups

a. Information Quality

Turning to the empirical evidence concerning information quality, this factor was consistently identified by participants as a critical determinant of internet celebrities' credibility in shaping eWOM dissemination. Previous research shows that information quality plays a central role in influencing consumer cognition and purchase intention. For example, Thomas et al. (2019) point out that high-quality information can enhance

consumers' trust in information sources, thereby significantly strengthening eWOM dissemination effects. Additionally, Thomas et al. (2019) emphasize that comprehensiveness and authenticity of information are two important dimensions in evaluating information quality. Therefore, information quality is mainly reflected in three aspects: quality of video content, professionalism in video content and authenticity of video content.

Regarding information quality, it refers to the comprehensiveness, accuracy, relevance, and richness of the information provided by video content. Consumers unanimously consider high information quality a crucial factor because it directly affects their trust and confidence in the content being shared. When information is detailed, reliable, and relevant, it helps consumers make informed decisions, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will engage in eWOM dissemination. For example, informant C2 explicitly stated:

"Whether information is comprehensive and rich is an important aspect affecting eWOM dissemination." (C2)

This view was further supplemented by informant C3:

"I believe information quality is the core of short video content. Based on information quality, other factors can reflect its authenticity." (C3)

This indicates that comprehensive, rich information can provide consumers with sufficient purchase intention basis while laying the foundation for eWOM dissemination. This view is supported by Susanti and Yulianita (2021), who stressed in their study on advertisement quality in Indonesia that the information quality is the variable with the most positive and significant influence on purchase intention.

Meanwhile, when discussing the quality of video content, informants emphasized that the quality of video content is particularly prominent, especially innovation and novelty becoming key factors in attracting consumers. Informants C1 and C2's reports further reveal this:

"The uniqueness of the script is an important factor. Overly common scripts seem false, while innovative scripts can ensure content quality and attract me to search for advertisements." (C1)

"Her short videos are very down-to-earth, without using video special effects or exaggerated performances, but naturally highlighting the deliciousness of food." (C2)

From these reports, innovative content not only enhances consumer interest but also establishes content credibility. At the same time, internet celebrities win consumers' trust by delivering high-quality information content through simple and natural presentation methods. Hussain et al. (2024) highlighted that creative expression in short videos helps to increase viewer attention and engagement, thus enhancing information communication. Notably, the influence of the quality of video content on consumer evaluations and behavior was also widely recognized by informants. Multiple informants (B1, B4, B6, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6) mentioned content quality as a core element. Consumers generally pointed out that the quality of video content and its match with products directly influence consumer purchasing intentions. For example, informants C3 and C5 respectively stated:

"The recommended content should match the product being sold. Usually, internet celebrities recommend products through natural native content, rather than deliberate advertisements." (C3)

"For instance, gastronomic tourism internet celebrities showcase cooking processes, ingredients, real tastes, and provide comparative descriptions, which would attract me to further search for advertisements." (C5)

These views suggest that high compatibility between content and products is an important manifestation of information quality. Meticulous and authenticity-focused content presentation can significantly enhance consumer interest in recommended products, thereby promoting eWOM dissemination. For this, Seiler and Kucza's (2017) findings support the argument that content-product fit is crucial in e-commerce environments, and that highly compatible information enhances consumer trust and purchase intentions, thus facilitating the effective dissemination of eWOM. In further analysis of information quality, the professionalism of video content is also a key subtheme affecting information quality. Informants specifically mentioned that professionalism is reflected not only in content presentation methods but also in detail control. Informant C5 pointed out:

"Professionalism. The layout and design of images should be professional." (C5)

Informant B1 further explained from a detail perspective:

"The level of detail in recommendations. For example, gastronomic tourism internet celebrities showing cooking processes and real experiences to consumers--these all affect my evaluation or feeling about the internet celebrity and content." (B1)

This emphasis on professionalism indicates that content professionalism is reflected not only in image layout and design but also in the detailed level of information presentation. Professionalism of video content can further enhance the credibility of information quality, thereby influencing consumers' purchase intentions. Similarly, Shen et al. (2021) highlighted that professional content increases consumers' perceived trust, enhances the persuasiveness of the information, and facilitates eWOM in the social media environment. On the other hand, regarding the emphasis on the

authenticity of video content, informants unanimously considered as an important aspect in evaluating information quality. Authenticity of video content directly relates to consumers' trust level in information. Informant B4 emphasized:

"Information quality reflects the authenticity of video content. For example, basic product information like food prices, discount levels, and categories cannot be falsified; information quality is a key factor in eWOM transmission." (B4)

Informant C6 further pointed out:

"Internet celebrities who genuinely describe food and provide cultural output content will influence my purchasing intentions." (C6)

This further indicates that the authenticity of video content concerns not only data accuracy but also emotional delivery and cultural dimension innovation, further enhancing eWOM dissemination effects. What is more, in the composition of video content authenticity, content richness and visual presentation cannot be ignored, as both similarly affect information dissemination effectiveness. The views of informants C4 and B6 further prove this point:

"Internet celebrities who provide intuitive comparisons and unique content are more persuasive than those using repetitive, exaggerated sales techniques." (C4)

"Precise and detailed content in advertisement thumbnails will make me further search for advertisements." (B6)

This feedback indicates that information quality also needs to enhance dissemination effectiveness through good visual presentation and content organization. Zhai et al. (2022) support the view that the visual appeal of videos and the rich presentation of information contribute to the enhancement of consumers' attention, thereby increasing the influence of eWOM.

Synthesizing the interview evidence shows that information quality significantly influences consumer cognition and behavior through the quality of video content, professionalism in video content and authenticity of video content. Real and consistent information can enhance consumers' trust in internet celebrities and their content, thereby promoting eWOM dissemination effects (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018).

b. Review quality

Further to the above, review quantity as another important sub-theme influencing eWOM communication and purchase intention deserves further analysis. Review quantity refers to the volume of fans and consumers' reviews or responses that a product, service, or content receives, and is often seen as a signal of popularity and credibility. A recurrent theme in the interviews was review quantity, which informants considered an important factor influencing consumers' trust in internet celebrity-recommended content and eWOM. As highlighted by Reyes-Menendez et al. (2019), review quantity can significantly influence consumers' cognitive and purchase intention processes. Therefore, based on analytical data, this study divides review quantity is dominated by the perceived reviews and interaction volume.

Perceived reviews are mainly reflected in two aspects: consumers' perception of review authenticity and evaluation tendency. The research found that consumers particularly focus on the authenticity and positivity of reviews. As informant B2 stated:

"Internet celebrities possess a high level of fan evaluation, such as the internet celebrity 'Xinba' who has great influence and positive fan reviews. Most review content is positive. Authentic positive reviews are key to internet celebrity dissemination and the core of eWOM." (B2)

This indicates that authentic and positive reviews enhance consumer trust by increasing the perceived credibility of the recommended content, thereby significantly promoting eWOM dissemination. This situation was also supported by the findings of Shen et al. (2021). Further analysis shows that perceived reviews play multiple roles in consumer purchase intention processes. Feedback from informants B3 and B4 indicates that consumer evaluations in review sections directly influence their following and trust decisions:

"Fan feedback and reviews. I judge whether to follow based on fans' reviews in the comment section." (B3)

"High interaction reviews. I pay attention to whether consumer reviews of advertisements in the comment section are authentic and reliable." (B4)

This consumer behavior of relying on reviews for purchase intention was similarly found in Lim and Van Der Heide's (2014) study, which confirmed that consumers tend to evaluate information credibility through review content. Notably, informant B6 emphasized the importance of consumers' actual usage experience evaluations:

"Consumer product usage evaluations. I judge internet celebrities' credibility based on consumer evaluations to determine whether to purchase." (B6)

However, while affirming the importance of reviews, the research also found controversy regarding review authenticity. Informants C2 and C4 raised concerns about commercial manipulation:

"Reviews are easily manipulated, with many 'water army' generating fake reviews, thus they are not trustworthy. However, reviews also contain genuine consumer evaluations that can enhance transmission rates." (C2)

"Although reviews might be commercially controlled, when measuring review quantity from an authenticity perspective, I would be more believing if reviews come from genuine user evaluations." (C4)

This vigilance reflects that consumers have developed relatively mature review filtering abilities, which aligns with the findings of Thomas et al. (2019) on consumer identification of fake reviews. Meanwhile, Informants C5 and C6's views further highlight the dual importance of authenticity and interactivity:

"Genuine consumer evaluations, such as a certain food being very good or a scenic area experience being excellent, would attract me to further search advertisements." (C5)

"Real feedback and numerous interactive comments in the comment section would influence me to search for advertisements." (C6)

Compared to the qualitative characteristics of perceived reviews, interaction volume provides more objective quantitative indicators. The research found that interaction volume directly reflects the popularity and credibility of recommended content through data like likes, comments, and shares. Informants B2, B3, and B6 consistently believed that high interaction volume could significantly enhance advertisement content's attractiveness and trustworthiness. As informants B2 and B3 stated:

"High interaction volume would influence my advertisement search. When an advertisement has numerous likes, comments, or shares, I would check the consumer reviews in the comment section." (B2)

"If an internet celebrity advertisement has high likes, comments, and share counts, I would feel the recommendation is worth purchasing." (B3)

This indicates that high interaction volume reflects the broad influence of recommended content through multiple dimensions while further enhancing consumer interest in internet celebrities' recommendations. This phenomenon was also verified in Hu et al.'s (2020) study, their data showing that social media interaction data indeed significantly influences consumer purchase intention. Particularly noteworthy, informant B6 proposed the multidimensional characteristics of interaction volume:

"High interaction volume includes product sales volume, view count, likes, and share volume. These indicators would affect my trust in the advertisement." (B6)

This multidimensional interaction data reflects not only content dissemination breadth but also consumer engagement depth. As demonstrated in Syrdal and Briggs' (2018) study, various forms of social media interaction have differing impacts on consumer purchase intention.

c. Past recommendations

Further analysis of the data reveals that internet celebrities past recommendations, including the quality and evaluation of recommended content, are important bases for consumers to judge their trustworthiness. As informants C2 put it:

"I pay attention to the reviews of products they've recommended in the past. If the reviews are positive, it shows that the internet celebrity has good judgment about products." (C2)

Informants C1 similarly states that the type of past recommendations directly affects their search behavior:

"The types of products that internet celebrities have recommended in the past influence my search for advertisements." (C4)

Additionally, two informants emphasized that internet celebrities' multiple experiences with recommended products or services can increase the authenticity and trustworthiness of their recommendations. As informants B6 and C1 stated:

"Multiple experiences of internet celebrities with recommended products or services can ensure the authenticity and safety of their recommendations." (B6)

"An internet celebrity's personality includes their values, especially their attitude towards money. Internet celebrities should not change their true attitude because of advertisers' interests. Whether past recommendations have had serious issues will also affect consumer trust." (C1)

This indicates that consumers not only pay attention to internet celebrities' recommendation content but also judge their integrity and professionalism based on their past recommendations. This is supported by Djafarova and Rushworth (2016), who argue that internet celebrities past behavior has a significant impact on their trustworthiness.

d. Perceived honesty and authenticity

Based on the above, perceived honesty and authenticity is considered one of the key criteria for measuring internet celebrities' trustworthiness. Some informants attributed internet celebrities' selective brand collaborations to perceived honesty. Three informants believed that internet celebrities who are not completely driven by commercial interests are more trustworthy. For example, informant C1 said:

"Internet celebrities who collaborate with only a few brands are more trustworthy than those who accept collaborations from all brands, because the former are less likely to be driven by interests." (C1)

Another informant C4 also emphasized the importance of perceived honesty:

"I am influenced by internet celebrities who directly present the taste of food and compare different price points of merchants, rather than those who use formulaic promotions and deceptive tactics." (C4)

These views suggest that perceived honesty not only makes consumers more willing to accept their recommended products or services but also helps internet celebrities build long-term trust relationships. This characteristic makes consumers believe that internet celebrities' recommendations are based on real feelings rather than content posted only for financial gain. As existing literature points out, perceived honesty is a core sub-factor of brand endorsement credibility (Ohanian, 1990). Thus, consumers'

trust in internet celebrities is often built on their perceived honesty, leading them to further examine their authenticity to verify trustworthiness. In the interviews, informants generally believed that the authenticity of internet celebrities' recommendations could eliminate the stereotypical impression of commercial advertisements, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of recommended content.

Informants C3 and C4 noted:

"I observe the facial expressions of internet celebrities in videos. Some advertisements appear too commercial, while others demonstrate the internet celebrity's authenticity about the product." (C3)

"If internet celebrities invest more time and effort in recommending products, I would feel they are serious, and I would more easily accept their suggestions." (C4)

These perspectives indicate that internet celebrities' micro-expressions and behavioral details are directly seen as manifestations of their authenticity. Consumers with different viewpoints believe that internet celebrities can more effectively establish emotional connections with their consumers through authenticity expression and continuous trust-building. For example, informant C5 noted:

"When my favorite internet celebrity sincerely expresses a recommendation for a product, I would buy it without hesitation." (C5)

Informants C4 also added a similar view:

"I conduct searches based on the internet celebrity's authentic persona and established trust foundation." (C4)

These views emphasize the important role of authenticity in building trust and influencing consumer behavior. However, if consumers believe that an internet celebrity's recommendation is purely paid advertising, their authenticity will be seriously questioned. For example, informant C6 stated:

"If the internet celebrity is conducting direct paid advertising, I will consider it false promotion for profit. I won't develop trust in such internet celebrities." (C6)

Therefore, this trust is based not only on internet celebrities' influence but also on whether their delivered content is authentic and credible. This is supported by Audrezet et al. (2018), who emphasize that authenticity is a key factor in building trust relationships between internet celebrities and consumers. Similarly, Kim and Kim (2021) highlight that authenticity in online endorsements significantly enhances consumer trust and engagement. Thus, authenticity becomes a dimension that internet celebrities must value in their interactions with consumers, helping them stand out in the competitive eWOM environment.

e. Familiarity

More than that, familiarity is another key factor influencing trustworthiness mentioned by informants. Long-term interaction relationships with internet celebrities significantly increase trust. Informants C6 and B3 emphasized:

"The longer I follow an internet celebrity, the higher my trust in them becomes." (C6)

"As a long-term fan, I tend to believe that the products they recommend are worth buying." (B3)

This indicates that fans' trust in internet celebrities is a long-term relationship accumulated over time, benefiting from sustained positive interaction experiences. Moreover, consumption experiences further reinforce this trust relationship. Informant C2 pointed out that if long-followed internet celebrities have previously recommended effective products, consumers are more likely to continue trusting their recommendations:

"I will consider the length of time I've followed them. If I've followed them for a long time and previously purchased products they recommended with great results, I will continue to buy based on their recommendations." (C2)

This perspective aligns with Dong and Tarofder's (2024) study, which found that long-term social interactions and successful consumption experiences can enhance consumer brand trust. Additionally, fans' trust in internet celebrities is not only based on consumption experiences but is also related to the depth of established relationships.

Informant B4 mentioned:

"Familiarity. I've established a long-term trust relationship with the internet celebrities I follow. I will be interested in the content or products they recommend." (B4)

This demonstrates that fans' familiarity with internet celebrities stems not only from long-term following but also from interaction frequency, social media communication, and content style compatibility. Marknadsföring (2023) emphasized that when internet celebrities' values and lifestyles resonate with fans, fans are more likely to accept their recommendations and establish long-term loyalty. Notably, familiarity also influences consumer personal preferences. Informant B6 added:

"Likeability. The degree of my familiarity with internet celebrities also influences me." (B6)

This indicates that consumers are affected by emotional factors when evaluating products recommended by internet celebrities. If an internet celebrity's style, expression method, or recommendation habits align with consumers' preferences, consumers are more likely to accept their recommendations and perceive their content as highly credible. Dong and Tarofder (2024) also support this view, stating that consumers' preferences for social media internet celebrities directly impact their

perceived credibility of recommendation information. Additionally, emotional resonance was considered an important component of familiarity. Informants B1 and B2 added:

"If an internet celebrity's life experiences or emotional experiences are similar to mine, I would more easily make a decision to follow and trust them." (B2)

"I follow internet celebrities like 'Li Ziqi' because her lifestyle is consistent with the life philosophy I like, which makes me full of trust in her recommendations." (B1)

The degree of familiarity between fans and internet celebrities is reflected not only in follow duration but is also closely related to the internet celebrity's personal image and content style. Audrezet et al. (2028) support this perspective; when an internet celebrity's values align with consumers, consumers' trust and loyalty are further enhanced.

Based on the above findings, indicates that internet celebrities' credibility significantly impacts eWOM dissemination and consumer purchase intentions. Of these, the information quality directly influences eWOM dissemination. High-quality, professional, and authentic information not only enhances consumer trust but also promotes further search and purchase of recommended products. Research on information quality indicates that video content quality plays a crucial role in consumer cognition and purchase intention. Consumers generally believe that the comprehensiveness and richness of information directly affect eWOM dissemination. Meanwhile, innovation and novelty are also important components of content quality. Research also shows that innovative scripts and relatable expressions can enhance content attractiveness and strengthen consumer trust in the information.

Simultaneously, the professionalism of video content is another important factor affecting information quality. Professionalism is reflected not only in layout and visual presentation but also in the level of detail in recommended content. For example, internet celebrities who provide detailed product features and professional descriptions can enhance information credibility.

In addition, the authenticity of video content is considered a core factor in evaluating information quality. Consumers highly value content authenticity, particularly the accuracy of information, naturalness of emotional expression, and cultural innovation. Comments collected from the content analysis echoed these insights. Many emphasized the importance of detailed, trustworthy, and creative recommendations, reinforcing the interview finding that information quality is a critical aspect of internet celebrity influence. Therefore, internet celebrities should focus on the comprehensiveness, professionalism, and authenticity of information when creating content to enhance eWOM dissemination effects and influence.

Apart from this study found that review quantity was considered by informants as an important factor affecting eWOM dissemination and consumer purchase intention. Research results show that perceived reviews influence consumers' trust in internet celebrity-recommended content. Consumers particularly focus on the authenticity of comments and the degree of positive evaluations. Positive user evaluations can enhance the credibility of internet celebrity, while negative or fake comments may weaken eWOM dissemination effects. Therefore, internet celebrities should maintain

authenticity and interactivity in their comment sections when managing social media comments to enhance consumer trust. Additionally, Interaction volume is regarded as a key metric for measuring recommended content credibility. Interaction data such as likes, comments, and shares can directly reflect the popularity of recommended content and significantly influence consumer search and purchase behavior. Therefore, internet celebrities should focus on consumer interaction while maintaining their content quality to enhance eWOM dissemination effects and increase consumer trust and purchase intention.

Noteworthy, past recommendations serve as an important criterion for consumers in assessing internet celebrities' trustworthiness. Consumers tend to reference the quality and reviews of products previously recommended by internet celebrity to judge their expertise and integrity. In this case, past recommendation means not only the specific products that internet celebrities have endorsed previously, but also the consistency, depth, and authenticity with which they presented those recommendations over time. Meanwhile, perceived honesty is an important basis for consumers to judge the trustworthiness of internet celebrities. Informants generally believed that internet celebrity who are selective in their collaborations and not entirely driven by commercial interests are more credible. Those who carefully choose advertising partnerships often hold strong, unshakable beliefs about the products they promote. Interview results also showed that internet celebrities who directly present authentic product features, compare different price points, and avoid formulaic marketing are more trusted by consumers. This suggests that perceived honesty not only increases

the likelihood of consumers accepting recommendations but also helps internet celebrities establish long-term trust relationships.

In addition, authenticity is the core of the Internet celebrity's trustworthiness. Finding from the study showed that authentic expression methods, natural facial expressions, and invested time and effort can increase consumer trust. In this case, it creates a parasocial relationship which means that followers often feel a personal connection to the internet celebrity. Authenticity strengthens this bond, making recommendations feel like advice from their "friend" rather than the salesperson. However, if consumers perceive recommendations as purely paid advertisements, the internet celebrity's authenticity will be questioned, thereby affecting their credibility. These interview findings are further supported by the content analysis. Meanwhile, familiarity affects consumers' acceptance of internet celebrity-recommended content. Familiarity is reflected not only in the length of the following time but also in the compatibility of internet celebrity' content style and values, as well as the frequency of fan interaction. Therefore, internet celebrity needs to maintain long-term content consistency to cultivate loyal fan bases.

In summary, internet celebrities' trustworthiness influences eWOM and purchase intentions through five subthemes: Information quality, Review quantity, Past recommendations, Perceived honesty and authenticity, Familiarity. These findings not only support the applicability of source credibility theory but also further reveal the important role of internet celebrities in shaping eWOM. The next section of the

interviews was concerned with the influence of attractiveness on internet celebrities' credibility regarding eWOM and purchase intentions.

4.2.2 Attractiveness

Further analysis of the data reveals attractiveness is an important dimension mentioned by informants to the influence of the credibility of internet celebrities on the spread of eWOM, which can significantly increase the attention and purchase intention of fans and consumers. Attractiveness is not solely determined by the physical appearance of internet celebrities but also includes their personality traits and the visual as well as emotional appeal embedded in their content presentation—an aspect particularly salient in the context of short video platforms (Jin & Phua, 2014). Based on informants' responses, this study categorizes attractiveness into three sub-themes: physical appeal, personality, and user-generated videos. See Figure 4.3.

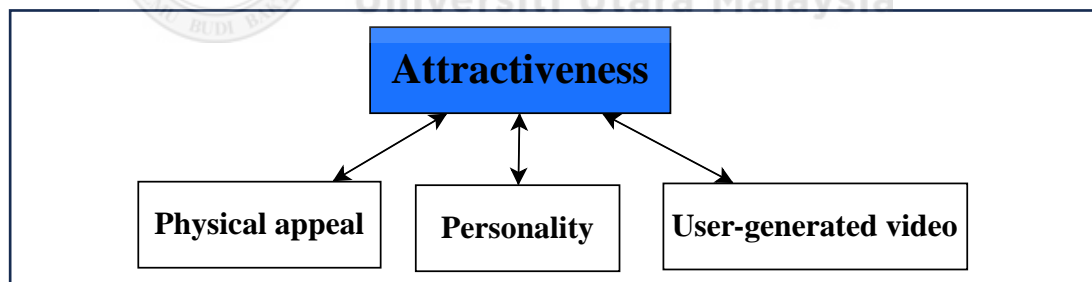


Figure 4.3 Attractiveness Groups

a. Physical appeal

Physical appeal includes celebrity charisma, persona, and image appearance. Internet celebrities' personal charisma and fame are important factors in attracting consumers. Ruiz-Gomez (2019) highlighted that internet celebrities with high personal charisma are more likely to attract consumers' attention and influence their consumption

decisions. This is further supported by the findings from the interview analyses. For example, informant B3 mentioned:

"High-influence internet celebrities or celebrity endorsements make me more likely to accept advertising content." (B3)

This view emphasizes the authority and attractiveness of high-influence internet celebrities in consumers' minds. This view was supported by informant B5:

"When I like a particular internet celebrity, I will buy the products they recommend. This celebrity effect can even trigger impulsive consumption." (B5)

This finding suggests that internet celebrities' charisma can spark consumer interest in products and enhance trust in recommended content. Moreover, internet celebrities' charisma not only influences consumers' purchase intentions but may also trigger emotionally driven consumption behavior. Informant C1 further strengthened this argument by emphasizing that internet celebrities' personal traits and charisma largely determine their attractiveness:

"I think the personal qualities, exceptional abilities, and personal charm of the recommender attract me to search for advertisements." (C1)

This indicates that internet celebrities' personal traits and charisma largely determine their attractiveness. This view is supported by Meng et al. (2021), who argue that this personal charisma can evoke emotional identification and drive impulse consumption. Beyond personal charisma, internet celebrities further enhance their attractiveness through crafting specific personas.

The personas crafted by internet celebrities are one of the important factors in attracting consumers. Von Mettenheim and Wiedmann (2023) highlighted personas are

a strategy for creating a long-term character image to establish deep emotional connections with fans. Informants C4 mentioned:

"I will search for related products based on the internet celebrity's persona." (C4)

This finding suggests that persona, as a form of internal attractiveness, can guide consumers' product awareness and interest. Unlike personal charisma, the persona is more reflected in internet celebrities' self-role creation and emotional connection with consumers. Through specific personas, internet celebrities can establish deep connections with fans, thereby enhancing attractiveness and influence. Von Mettenheim and Wiedmann (2023) supported the finding that successful persona creation can not only promote consumer trust in products but also significantly enhance their purchase intentions.

Besides persona as an internal attractiveness factor, internet celebrities' image and appearance also hold an important position in the attractiveness dimension. Image and appearance are direct sensory factors that can immediately attract consumers' attention, laying the foundation for subsequent content dissemination. Further analysis illustrates the significant impact of appearance on consumers' attention to internet celebrities. For example, informant B3 mentioned:

"Whether their appearance meets my preferences and whether their voice has uniqueness will affect whether I follow them." (B3)

This view suggests that physical attractiveness is reflected not only in whether appearance meets aesthetic preferences but also includes consumers' comprehensive perception of other sensory elements such as voice. Additionally, informant C5 further

emphasized the impact of image and appearance on consumer behavior:

"The image and appearance of internet celebrities will attract me to purchase products." (C5)

This indicates that appearance, as an explicit attractiveness factor, can directly trigger consumer interest in internet celebrities and their recommended products. Joseph (1982) highlighted that physical attractiveness is one of the initial motivations for consumers to pay attention to internet celebrities. Internet celebrities' physical attractiveness can convey a positive image and enhance the persuasiveness of recommended content (Martensen et al., 2018).

b. Personality

Apart from the external and internal characteristics of internet celebrities. Personality, as a key characteristic of internet celebrities, significantly influences consumers' acceptance of recommended content. Scholarly research also demonstrates that personality traits can impact information dissemination on social media, particularly in internet celebrity marketing, where personality can enhance consumer trust and brand attachment (Abid et al., 2024). In this study, the interaction methods of internet celebrities were frequently mentioned in the interviews, especially when a friendly attitude was displayed, as it tended to lessen the psychological distance with consumers. Informants C2 and C4 pointed out:

"Internet celebrities' friendly attitudes make them closer to consumers." (C2)

"I like internet celebrities who are willing to maintain a friend-like relationship with consumers, who leave contact information on social media and invite fans to contact them anytime." (C4)

A friendly attitude can enhance consumer trust by creating genuine interactions that make fans feel valued, thereby strengthening the influence of internet celebrities in eWOM transmission. Rajput and Gandhi (2024) support this view, arguing that internet celebrities' affinity and interactive behaviors significantly increase consumer engagement, thereby influencing purchase intentions. Noteworthy, internet celebrities' uniqueness is also considered an important personality trait for attracting consumers. Information providers B1 and B5 emphasized:

"Whether an internet celebrity's personality is unique and different from other internet celebrities will affect whether I decide to follow them." (B1)

"An internet celebrity's unique personality and the appropriateness of their recommendation rhythm can enhance their attractiveness." (B5)

Uniqueness provides internet celebrities with a distinct personal label, helping them stand out among numerous recommenders and further enhancing consumer interest and loyalty. Djafarova and Rushworth (2016) noted that internet celebrities can enhance consumers' perception of their authenticity and authority by establishing a unique personal brand image, thereby increasing eWOM influence.

c. User-generated videos

What is more, User-generated videos, as a form of communication, further amplify the attractiveness of internet celebrities. The quality of user-generated videos influences consumer interest and trust in recommended content to some extent. Originality, eye-catching reels, and visual effects can enhance the viewing experience and strengthen the attractiveness of recommended content. User-generated videos, by their nature, serve as a content format that embodies interactivity and engagement, effectively

enhancing internet celebrities' attractiveness and thereby indirectly influencing consumers' purchase intention. Informants C4 and C6 emphasized:

"Internet celebrities set attractive scenes in the first 5 seconds of short videos to attract consumers. If the opening scene or language is unique and enticing, such as phrases like 'most delicious' or 'spiciest', it will stimulate my interest and prompt me to search advertisements." (C4)

"Visual presentation is crucial. If the short video is about gastronomic tourism, its visual impact will attract my interest." (C6)

Furthermore, genuine user experiences combined with excellent visual presentation can form a unique label for internet celebrities. Informants B1 and C2 further pointed out:

"Original videos by internet celebrities form personalized tags. The higher the creative quality and the more authentic and richer the content, the greater its impact on eWOM transmission." (B1)

"User-generated videos are original content by internet celebrities, recommending based on real experiences. Such videos increase credibility and thus promote eWOM transmission." (C2)

This finding aligns with Lou and Yuan's (2019) study, which suggests that the visual quality of video content can enhance consumer attention to brands. User-generated videos serve as a communication format that enhances content attractiveness and authenticity, subtly promoting consumers' purchase intention.

Based on the above, while not the core determinant, physical appeal can still serve as a catalyst in capturing initial consumer attention. For instance, when scrolling through social media, a consumer might pause on a short video simply because the internet celebrity appears stylish, confident, or charming. This momentary interest, driven by visual appeal, can increase the likelihood of engaging with the content. Although such

appeal may not sustain long-term influence, it often acts as an entry point that makes consumers more receptive to the internet celebrity's product recommendations, especially when combined with credible messaging and consistent persona presentation. Therefore, while physical appeal can enhance internet celebrities' credibility in the short term, its long-term effect still needs to be combined with o personality and user-generated video factors.

This study shows that internet celebrities' personality play an important role in eWOM dissemination, particularly friendly attitudes and uniqueness. Friendly attitudes strengthen the interaction between internet celebrities and consumers, making it easier for consumers to build trust. Unlike corporate brands, internet celebrities' personal image credibility on social media highly depends on their interaction with fans. Notably, uniqueness helps internet celebrities stand out in the competitive social media environment. Unique personality not only affects fan attention but can also increase eWOM influence, as consumers are more willing to establish long-term trust relationships with internet celebrities who have strong personality traits. The quality of UGV influences consumer interest and trust in recommended content to some extent. UGV as an enhanced approach to content dissemination increases the credibility and interactivity of eWOM. Therefore, high-quality user-generated videos can enhance the attractiveness of information dissemination.

Overall, attractiveness works through three subthemes: Physical appeal, Personality, and User-generated videos. Physical appeal attracts attention and enhances trust,

personality enhances lasting influence through emotional connection, and User-generated videos trigger interest through sensory appeal. However, the influence of internet celebrities does not only rely on attractiveness; their performance in content depth and information authoritativeness should not be ignored as well. Key factors in the SCM attractiveness and expertise together influence consumers' trust in recommended content. In the next section, further explores how expertise influences internet celebrity credibility.

4.2.3 Expertise

Surprisingly, although expertise is considered an important factor influencing consumer attitude change (Ohanian, 1990), this study finds that informants' attention to internet celebrities' expertise primarily focuses on their video production and content presentation skills. In short video recommendation scenarios, internet celebrities' video editing skills are recognized by multiple informants as having a significant role in enhancing content attractiveness, improving viewing experience, and promoting eWOM communication. Compared to knowledge base or domain authority, informants place greater emphasis on internet celebrities' abilities in colloquial language use, expression style, and precise communication. Therefore, this study defines expertise as the manifestation of technical skills, highlighting its key supporting function in the dissemination of short video content. Consequently, this research divides expertise into two sub-themes: communication skills and video editing skills. See Figure 4.4.

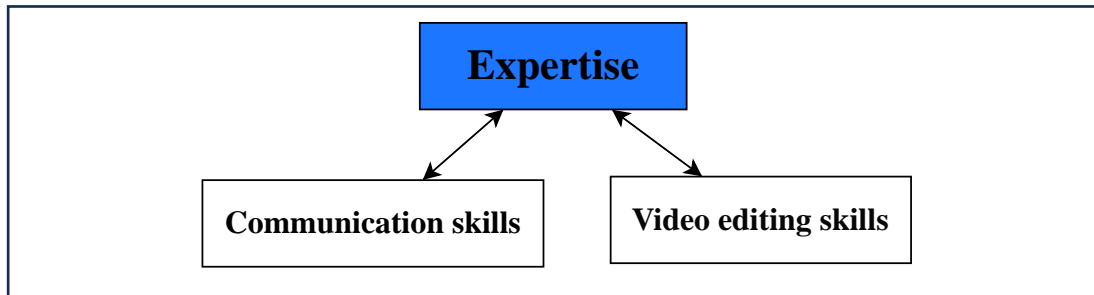


Figure 4.4 *Expertise Groups*

a. Communication skills

Based on the interviews, consumers generally perceive that internet celebrities do not need to be experts in each field; rather, possessing a certain level of practical experience and communication skills is considered sufficient. This informant C1 reported:

"If an internet celebrity is an expert in the product type and highly aligned, this will influence my purchase intention." (C1)

This finding aligns with Hovland et al.'s (1953) source credibility theory, which posits that source expertise can enhance information persuasiveness. However, many informants expressed different views, believing that internet celebrities don't necessarily need professional backgrounds, but rather it's more important to have the ability to convey information clearly and intuitively. For instance, informants C2, B5, and B6 consistently stated:

"Regarding professional knowledge, they don't need to be experts. Having expertise is just an advantage for them as internet celebrities." (C2)

"I think internet celebrities don't necessarily need to be experts but should possess relevant professional knowledge. They should be able to explain their understanding of products using professional terms or actions in an easily understandable way." (B5)

"Internet celebrities don't need to be experts; as long as they have sufficient practical experience and master relevant skills, they can gain trust." (B6)

This trend indicates that in the short video eWOM transmission environment,

consumers' demand for expertise is not high; instead, they value internet celebrities' communication skills and practical experience more. This aligns with Pornpitakpan's (2004) study, which indicates that in low-involvement decision processes, consumers tend to rely more on trustworthiness and attractiveness rather than expertise.

This is a remarkable finding, with informants generally believing that internet celebrities' communication skills significantly impact the dissemination of their recommended content and purchase intentions. This conclusion is consistent with Dong and Tarofder's (2024) study on communication clarity persuasiveness and support. The analysis of this study indicates that communication skills are primarily manifested in distinct aspects, including narrative style, personal style of expression, the use of colloquial language, the construction of coherent narratives, and the precise expression of information. First, narrative style can enhance content attractiveness, making consumers more likely to accept recommended information. Informants C1 and C2 emphasized:

"Their narrative style makes the content interesting. For example, the internet celebrity 'Mabao' vividly presents content through simple oral narration." (C1)

"I follow an internet celebrity focused on gastronomic tourism. She introduces the food she encounters during her travels using plain and easily understandable narrative methods, with a peaceful and comfortable environment, which I really like about her recommendations." (C2)

Simple, friendly, and appropriate narrative characteristics can make consumers feel relaxed and pleasant, thereby improving content acceptability. Rao et al. (2024) emphasize that vivid narratives can enhance emotional connections and improve information memorability, which is consistent with this study's findings. Notably,

compared to precise expression, narrative style focuses more on emotional resonance and consumer immersion rather than comprehensive information.

Personal style of expression is a crucial means for internet celebrities to establish emotional connections with consumers. Unlike narrative style, it more prominently reflects the internet celebrity's personalized characteristics, thus triggering different emotional resonances. Informant C2 pointed out:

"Lastly, whether their personal expression style resonates with me. For example, some internet celebrities explain products in an excited and noisy way, while others are quiet and comfortable. For instance, internet celebrity Li Jiaqi's style is lively and noisy, while Dongfang Zhenxuan's style is calm and comfortable. Different expression styles affect my feelings." (C2)

Informants B5 and C5 also mentioned that the language expression rhythm, tone, and sense of humor of internet celebrities are important factors influencing consumer purchase intentions. C5 specifically stated:

"Internet celebrities recommend content through humorous language, and this unique expression method affects my purchasing intentions." (C5)

Berger (2014) emphasizes that personalized communication can increase information relevance and establish deeper emotional connections, further substantiating the importance of personal expression style. However, unlike narrative style, the impact of personal expression style may vary depending on consumer preferences and cultural backgrounds, requiring further analysis.

The use of colloquial language enhances the affinity and credibility of internet celebrity recommendations, especially when the expression has personalized characteristics. This language style makes information more authentic and easier to

understand. Informants C3 and C5 emphasized:

"I prefer internet celebrities using colloquial language when recommending advertisements, especially content with highly personalized expression." (C3)

"Language expression ability is crucial. Whether internet celebrities can accurately describe advertisement content is a key factor." (C5)

According to Leung et al.'s (2022) study, the use of colloquial language can reduce the psychological distance between consumers and information, thereby enhancing consumer engagement. This further verifies the critical role of colloquial expression in improving content affinity. Compared to narrative style and personal expression style, colloquial language focuses more on immediate understanding and rapid information transmission but may lack narrative depth and coherence.

The construction of coherent narratives is an important manifestation of internet celebrities' short video attractiveness. Advertising the construction of coherent narratives demonstrates the attractiveness of internet celebrities who created short videos. For example, Informant C6 emphasized:

"Internet celebrities can recommend food as if it were a game mission, using a story plot, or directly recommend a restaurant. Another aspect is the degree of cooperation between internet celebrities and advertisers and their vested interests. " (C6)

Moreover, narrative recommendation methods, such as presenting content through story plots or game missions, can enhance consumer interest and engagement. Rao et al. (2024) emphasize that narrative frameworks help improve brand memory and consumer intention to engage, providing theoretical support for the importance of the construction of coherent narratives in eWOM transmission. It should be noted that the

construction of coherent narratives not only enhances content attractiveness but also provides a structured presentation of information, complementing precise expression.

The precise expression of information is a crucial skill for internet celebrities to win consumer trust. When colloquial expression is combined with precision, recommended content becomes not only more consumer-friendly but also provides authentic and high-quality information. Informants B3 and B4 mentioned that language expression clarity and information accuracy can enhance the professionalism of recommended content:

"Language expression is accurate and detailed. When internet celebrities introduce or promote advertisements, they can recommend enthusiastically and in detail." (B3)

"Internet celebrities' language expression is clear and precise. For example, they can use precise language skills to describe product advantages and disadvantages in detail." (B4)

Additionally, the precise expression of information is a crucial skill for internet celebrities to win consumer trust. is also reflected in the information richness of recommendations. Informant B1 and B5 added:

"Language expression and information richness are key to influencing consumer perception. For example, details such as food texture, source information, and characteristics need to be conveyed through clear expression." (B1)

"Internet celebrities have precise language expression and broad knowledge." (B5)

This finding is similar to Hovland et al. (1953), who proposed that the precise expression of information is a crucial skill for internet celebrities to win consumer trust. And broad knowledge can significantly enhance information credibility, further supporting this study's conclusions. Compared to other themes, the precise expression

of information is a crucial skill for internet celebrities to win consumer trust. Emphasizes logic and content authority, making it particularly outstanding in influencing consumers' rational purchase intention.

b. Video editing skills

What is more, internet celebrities' video editing skills were considered by a few information providers as one manifestation of expertise. Information providers B3 and C5 stated:

"The advertising content is beautifully made with stunning visual effects. The filming techniques and editing skills are novel and unique." (B3)

"Internet celebrities' video editing skills directly influence whether I decide to make a purchase." (C5)

This finding echoes Hur et al.'s (2019) study, which suggests that the visual quality of content production can significantly influence consumers' brand perception and attitudes. High-quality video production not only enhances viewers' watching experience but also imperceptibly improves internet celebrities' professional image. This technical persuasive effect of visual presentation has a subtle influence on consumers' purchase intentions. Nevertheless, overall interview results indicate that consumers' attention to internet celebrities' expertise is notably lower than factors such as trustworthiness and attractiveness. This suggests that expertise may not be a core element influencing consumer trust, but rather a context-dependent factor that might be more important in specific situations (such as high-involvement products or technically strong content). This finding also aligns with Baig and Shahzad's (2022) study, which indicates that expertise's impact on brand attitudes and purchase

intentions varies with product types and consumer needs.

Compared to attractiveness, the research results indicate that internet celebrities' expertise does not significantly impact their eWOM and purchase intention. In short video recommendation scenarios, consumers tend to rely more on internet celebrities' trustworthiness, attractiveness, and communication skills rather than their professional background. Consumers generally believe that internet celebrities need not be experts in a particular field but only need to possess certain practical experience and expression abilities. Therefore, the research findings indicates that internet celebrities' communication skills significantly impact eWOM dissemination effects. The study found that vivid narrative methods can enhance consumers' emotional resonance and immersive experience, thereby improving information retention. However, compared to precise expression, narrative style focuses more on emotional connection rather than information comprehensiveness and rigor. Therefore, in short videos, narrative styles with strong emotional resonance may be more effective in promoting eWOM dissemination than rational information delivery. Meanwhile, personal expression style reflects internet celebrity's personality traits, with different expression styles evoking different emotional resonances from consumers.

Additionally, colloquial language can enhance the affinity and credibility of internet celebrity-recommended content, making it easier for consumers to understand information and develop trust. However, compared to narrative style and personal expression style, colloquial language focuses more on immediate understanding and

rapid information delivery, potentially lacking narrative depth and coherence. Therefore, in practical applications, internet celebrity needs to find a balance between vivid narrative and concise expression to ensure content is both attractive and accurately conveys key information. Furthermore, narrative expression mainly enhances consumer interest and engagement through storytelling, while precise expression ensures information professionalism and credibility. Therefore, communication skills play a crucial role in eWOM dissemination. Different communication strategies have their unique characteristics in affecting consumer perception and purchase intention, promoting the dissemination of internet celebrity-recommended content.

Meanwhile, video editing skills and visual presentation can enhance consumers' viewing experience and imperceptibly enhance internet celebrities' professional image. However, consumers still focus more on internet celebrities' communication skills and social influence rather than their video production level. Therefore, in the short video dissemination environment, expertise has a relatively limited impact on consumers. In low-involvement consumption scenarios, the importance of expertise is relatively low, while its role may be more prominent in high-involvement or technically strong product recommendations. In further analysis, this study surveys how consumer needs influence internet celebrities' credibility.

4.2.4 Consumer Needs

The most striking result to emerge from the data is that the theme of consumer needs

was mentioned repeatedly by the informants. Consumer needs are an important factor influencing fans' and consumers' search for advertising content and trust in internet celebrities' recommendations. As Zhang et al. (2014) state, the degree of consumer needs satisfaction directly affects their intention to accept recommendations from online opinion leaders. Leung et al. (2022) further point out that personalized needs matching and price factors are two core elements affecting consumer resonance with internet celebrity marketing content. Therefore, this study divides consumer needs into two subthemes: personal needs and product price. See Figure 4.5

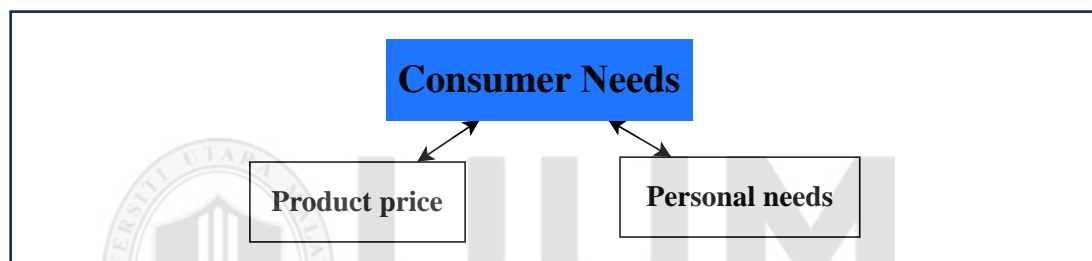


Figure 4.5 Consumer Needs Groups

a. Personal needs

Among the two subthemes of consumer needs, personal needs embody consumers' core driving force for advertising content. Belanche et al. (2021) emphasized that the compatibility of the content with personal interests directly influences consumers' information-searching intentions. This view was confirmed in interviews. Informants C4 and B6 mentioned:

"I search for content based on my interests or needs, and I also try to explore new things according to my preferences. If I accidentally see an internet celebrity recommendation on a social media platform that matches my interests or needs, this will prompt me to further search these advertisements." (C4)

"Personal needs and interests are important factors. For instance, if a restaurant offers Thai or Japanese cuisine, which exactly matches my preferences." (B6)

The importance of personal needs is also reflected in its guiding role in consumers' selective attention. Multiple informants (C1, C5, C6) emphasized the decisive role of personal preferences in content filtering. For example, informants C1, C5, and C6 all mentioned:

"I focus on food-related products. If an internet celebrity promotes barbecue, I won't pay attention, but if it's Sichuan cuisine, I will." (C1)

"If I'm interested in the product and it's something I currently need, I will further search for that advertisement." (C5)

"I consider whether the product matches my interests. For example, if the restaurant offers Thai food or Japanese cuisine that matches my preferences." (C6)

This finding further reveals consumers' strong goal orientation in need satisfaction. Personalized, precise recommendations are more likely to spark consumer interest and prompt action. This selective attention aligns with Zhang et al.'s (2014) findings that consumers tend to prioritize processing information highly relevant to their own needs. Not only that, but geographic convenience is also an important component of personal needs. As informant B5 points out:

"Close distance, meeting personal needs." (B5)

Close distance is an important factor to consider, reflecting that consumers weigh multiple practical aspects—such as saving time and cost, and feeling familiar or comfortable with the location—when making decisions to satisfy their personal needs. Feedback from informants C2 and C3 further corroborates the core position of personal needs in driving information search behavior. They emphasized:

"My personal needs drive me to search for product-related advertisements." (C2)

"My personal needs attract me to search for these advertisements." (C3)

b. Product price

Complementary to personal needs, the product price similarly significantly influences consumer behavior. Sherli et al.'s (2023) study confirm that price factors are often important triggers for consumers' in-depth information searches. Multiple informants B2, B4, and B6 consistently believed that product value for money and discount prices are important criteria influencing their choices. Informant B2 points out:

"The recommended product's price and my personal needs are the basis for deciding whether to continue searching advertisements. Internet celebrity-recommended products often have better cost-effectiveness." (B2)

Price sensitivity varies across different consumption contexts or scenarios. Informant B6 mentioned:

"Price factors are the most important. When purchasing gastronomic tourism products, I usually first focus on price. Advertisements with high cost-effectiveness are more attractive to me." (B6)

To sum up, price attention aligns with the concept of context dependency in consumer behavior theory (Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2021). Additionally, Informant B4 emphasized the attractiveness of discount prices, indicating that promotional strategies have significant effects in triggering consumer search behavior:

"Discount prices are also a reason for me to search advertisements. For example, I will judge whether the product price is within my consumption capacity or whether it aligns with the brand's official price guidelines." (B4)

Consumer attention to price transparency and discount strength reflects their needs for economic value. Recommendations with high value for money are more likely to win consumer trust and further exploration. Notably, the combination of visual presentation and price information can produce synergistic effects. As informant B5 states:

"If content presents beautiful visual effects and price discounts, it will attract me to search for advertisements." (B5)

This suggests that combining visual presentation and price information can increase engagement, thereby enhancing purchase intention, as supported by Kotler and Keller (2016), who emphasize that consumers are more likely to be persuaded by content that addresses their immediate personal or social needs. As shown above, consumer needs referring to the specific products or services they seek. Consumers tend to actively search for and engage with internet celebrity recommendations only when those recommendations align with their current needs or interests. Personal needs determine consumers' selective attention to information. Informants generally indicated that they tend to search for and focus on content related to their interests and preferences. For example, food enthusiasts pay more attention to restaurant recommendations, while travel enthusiasts tend to check travel-related eWOM content.

People tend to consider the price of goods or services before deciding to buy. This is true regardless of whether the goods or services were bought online or physically. This also applies to the key factors influencing users' decisions to select ads that feature products or services. Informants in this study emphasized the impact of price factors on their purchase intention process, particularly in selecting gastronomic tourism products. Informants mentioned that discounts, promotional information, and high-value-for-money products are more likely to spark their interest. The findings of this study further support the "needs-oriented" characteristic in eWOM dissemination. That is, when searching for advertising content, consumers first consider the match with

personal needs, followed by price factors. When internet celebrities can precisely meet consumer needs, their recommended content is more likely to resonate with consumers, thereby enhancing eWOM dissemination effects. To further verify the reliability of interview findings and examine internet celebrities' credibility from a broader consumer perspective, this study conducted content analysis of consumer comments on short videos on social media platforms to supplement and deepen the interview analysis themes.

4.3 Research objective 1 based on Content Analysis

This research selected 20 of the most popular gastronomic tourism short videos from TikTok and RED platforms, extracting 3 comments from each video, totaling 60 comments. These comments were coded according to key factors refined from interviews, including trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise and consumer needs. The purpose of content analysis was to support interview findings and explore fans' and consumers' authentic feedback on internet celebrity content. Table 4.1 presents a content analysis for comments. This table provides empirical support for the alignment between interview findings and user-generated comments on social media platforms.

Table 4.1

Table of Content Analysis for Comments

No.	Code	Comments	TikTok	RED
1	Trustworthiness	<i>"Thank you for promoting my hometown, Lanzhou. I have been following you for a long time and really like you!"</i>	Video 1	
2	Trustworthiness	<i>"Oh my! The internet celebrity Nana I've been following for a long time has actually come to my hometown!"</i>	Video 9	

Table 4.1 *continued*

3	Trustworthiness	<i>"Your recommendations are truly accurate, unlike other internet celebrities' unreliable recommendations."</i>	<i>Video 3</i>
4	Trustworthiness	<i>"As a local, I think you're right. Leshan has indeed become more expensive."</i>	<i>Video 6</i>
5	Trustworthiness	<i>"The gastronomic tourism experiences you recommended are consistent with my experiences, truly reliable."</i>	<i>Video11</i>
6	Trustworthiness	<i>"As a local, I found excellent gastronomic tourism spots following your guide."</i>	<i>Video12</i>
7	Trustworthiness	<i>"Following your gastronomic tourism guide was absolutely flawless."</i>	<i>Video11</i>
8	Trustworthiness	<i>"Each gastronomic item has a detailed explanation. The blogger truly explains content seriously."</i>	<i>Video 2</i>
9	Trustworthiness	<i>"Her recommendations are truly correct and worth experiencing."</i>	<i>Video 8</i>
10	Trustworthiness	<i>"Your video script is also great!"</i>	<i>Video15</i>
11	Trustworthiness	<i>"As a local, I rely on your recommendations for gastronomic tourism experiences."</i>	<i>Video 4</i>
12	Trustworthiness	<i>"Not as dramatic as recommended in the video, too much false advertising. Everyone should understand clearly before coming."</i>	<i>Video16</i>
13	Trustworthiness	<i>"As a Shandong person, I say internet celebrities' gastronomic tourism statements are all fake, just video promotional effects."</i>	<i>Video18</i>
14	Trustworthiness	<i>"After saving the short video and checking comments, I found many negative evaluations and finally decided not to save it."</i>	<i>Video20</i>
15	Trustworthiness	<i>"Comment section is full of local people's interactions."</i>	<i>Video15</i>
16	Attractiveness	<i>"This short video showed your deep feelings for Chengdu. Local Chengdu people can completely resonate with you."</i>	<i>Video 2</i>
17	Attractiveness	<i>"Your sense of humor is so distinctive; I find your recommendations interesting every time!"</i>	<i>Video 7</i>
18	Attractiveness	<i>"It feels like you're recommending food like a friend, without any sense of distance, making people want to try it."</i>	<i>Video12</i>
19	Attractiveness	<i>"Your outfit is very fashionable."</i>	<i>Video 2</i>
20	Attractiveness	<i>"Your makeup is exquisite, and the lipstick color looks great."</i>	<i>Video 3</i>

Table 4.1 *continued*

21	Attractiveness	<i>"You're so beautiful and cute, I love you so much."</i>	<i>Video17</i>
22	Attractiveness	<i>"You're so beautiful."</i>	<i>Video19</i>
23	Attractiveness	<i>"Video quality is high and very aesthetically pleasing."</i>	<i>Video 3</i>
24	Attractiveness	<i>"Video production quality is high, even using aerial shots."</i>	<i>Video 9</i>
25	Attractiveness	<i>This short video showed your deep love for Chengdu, local Chengdu people totally resonated with you.</i>	<i>Video 2</i>
26	Attractiveness	<i>"Your sense of humor is so distinctive; I find your recommendations interesting every time!"</i>	<i>Video 7</i>
27	Attractiveness	<i>"It feels like you're recommending food like a friend, without any sense of distance, making people want to try it."</i>	<i>Video12</i>
28	expertise	<i>"Your way of speaking is so interesting."</i>	<i>Video 5</i>
29	expertise	<i>"There's a pronunciation error in your language expression. It should be 'Luo (third tone)' instead of 'Lao'."</i>	<i>Video 7</i>
30	expertise	<i>"As a foreigner, your Chinese is so authentic, and your dialect is truly pure. Your intonation sounds just like a Chinese person."</i>	<i>Video14</i>
31	expertise	<i>"I love hearing Sichuan girls speak! Sichuan people's accent sounds cute and soft."</i>	<i>Video17</i>
32	expertise	<i>" The internet celebrity's Shandong dialect is very authentic and friendly. Shandong dialect sounds like Henan dialect."</i>	<i>Video18</i>
33	expertise	<i>"You are truly professional, even better than local guides."</i>	<i>Video 8</i>
34	expertise	<i>"You are very professional. I have saved this to recommend to out-of-town friends."</i>	<i>Video12</i>
35	Consumer Needs	<i>"How to use public transportation for gastronomic tourism?"</i>	<i>Video 6</i>
36	Consumer Needs	<i>"I super like this type of gastronomic shop, perfect for someone like me with a small appetite who wants to try multiple gastronomic."</i>	<i>Video17</i>
37	Consumer Needs	<i>"Do you have a concise 1–2-day Huizhou travel guide? I'm planning to take my parents but worried too many attractions might tire them."</i>	<i>Video19</i>

Table 4.1 *continued*

38	Consumer Needs	<i>"Recommended noodles are only 8 yuan, but beef requires additional charges. Don't simply say it's cheap; many working-class people can't afford it."</i>	<i>Video 1</i>
39	Consumer Needs	<i>"Locals think prices are indeed expensive, not tasty, and even double during holidays."</i>	<i>Video 6</i>
40	Consumer Needs	<i>"Wow! So cheap! Each gastronomy's price is unexpectedly low."</i>	<i>Video18</i>
41	Consumer Needs	<i>"Commercial area prices are high, while hidden old shops in small alleys are authentic and affordable."</i>	<i>Video16</i>
42	Consumer Needs	<i>"Could you provide the restaurant's name and address?"</i>	<i>Video10</i>

From analyzing comments on TikTok and RED platforms, fans' and consumers' evaluations of internet celebrity trustworthiness primarily focused on four aspects: information quality, review quantity, perceived honesty, authenticity and dependability. Analysis of comments about information quality revealed that fans and consumers evaluated content quality focusing on detail, accuracy, and creativity. As Table 4.1 shows, comments 8 and 9 emphasize the meticulousness and accuracy of the content. This indicate that detailed explanations provided by internet celebrities enhance information trustworthiness, making consumers feel the information is authentic and reliable. Such comments further emphasize the importance of content authenticity.

Additionally, comment 10 mentioned video content creativity. This suggests that beyond information accuracy, consumers also expect innovative expression forms and creative content can enhance information dissemination effectiveness. Consumer evaluations of information quality largely supported interview conclusions about information authenticity and detail's positive impact on propagation effects. While most comments positively affirmed content quality, some criticized content deviation

or beautification, suggesting researchers should consider consistency between authenticity and user experience as key factors when exploring internet celebrity information quality impacts.

Analysis of comments about review quantity revealed two aspects: consumers' perceived reviews and interaction volume. As Table 4.1 comment 11 emphasized local consumers' sharing in comment sections for content verification. However, comments also exhibited content authenticity doubts, e.g. comments 12 and 13. Comment 14 indicated changing perspective after reading comments. This demonstrate that negative comments significantly weaken fans' or consumers' trust in recommended content, reflecting review quantity and content's direct impact on user behavioral decisions. In contrast, active comment sections attract more fans and consumers interactions, enhancing content credibility and propagation power. Comment interaction volume was mentioned in comment 15. The findings of these analyses indicate that review quantity and content significantly influence fans' or consumers' judgments of information authenticity and behavioral decisions. Numerous local consumer or fan comments can enhance content credibility, while negative comments might weaken recommendation impacts. These findings support interview discoveries about consumer dependence on comments and review quantity's importance in influencing information dissemination effects.

The analysis of the comments also revealed that fans and consumers not only demonstrated approval of internet celebrity content but also expressed emotional

identification. Their long-term follow-up and hometown associations enhanced consumers' perception of authenticity, as in Table 4.1, comments 1 and 2. Comments 3 and 4 state that fans and consumers are highly sensitive to the authenticity of internet celebrity recommendations and highly appreciate content perceived as "authentic". This direct comparison reflects consumers' expectations of content honesty. Simultaneously, consumers validate the consistency of internet celebrity recommendations through personal experiences, a process that enhances trust in their content, as comments 5 and 6. Comment 7 emphasized that internet celebrity recommendations are also viewed as highly dependable information sources. This demonstrate that consumers view internet celebrities as trustworthy guides whose content has real purchase intention impact. The trustworthiness dimension analysis strongly resonates with the results of the interviews, especially regarding the importance of information quality and review quantity.

Analysis of comments indicates that fans' and consumers' evaluations of internet celebrities' attractiveness primarily concentrate on image and appearance. They pay attention to internet celebrities' image construction, particularly in makeup and clothing details, e.g., comments 19 and 20. Comment 21 and 22 further illustrate internet celebrities' beauty as an attractiveness factor. These findings are consistent with interview findings about "attractiveness" as an important component of internet celebrity credibility, particularly in emphasizing how internet celebrities' appearance and fashion style directly influence consumer perception. In addition, internet celebrities' personality has also become a highlight of discussion among consumers

and fans. When internet celebrities display unique emotions and passions, local consumers or fans are more likely to resonate with them, thereby enhancing trust in the recommended content, e.g., comment 25 in table 4.1. The personality traits of internet celebrities, such as humor and approachability, have also played a positive role in eWOM transmission. For example, comment 26 expressed approvals of internet celebrities' unique style and expression methods, believing that their personality can enhance the attractiveness and memorability of their content.

Meanwhile, internet celebrities' friendly attitude and affinity also increase consumer trust, making consumers more willing to accept their recommended content. Comment 27 indicates that internet celebrities' personalities not only affect consumer emotional resonance but can also strengthen their influence in eWOM transmission to some extent. What is more, high-quality user-generated videos, especially visual effects, played a positive role in recommendation content propagation. As mentioned in comments 23 and 24, video quality, visual effects, and aerial shots were mentioned. These high-quality visual presentations made recommendations appear more authentic and professional, thereby enhancing credibility.

Moreover, in analyzing comments about expertise, although mentioned less frequently, consumers highly acknowledged internet celebrities' professional capabilities. Comments explicitly mentioned internet celebrities' content mastery and excellent performance. As shown in table 4.1, comments 33 and 34 state that consumers perceive internet celebrities' professional levels in information transmission and content

production, which enhances trust and acceptance of recommended content. Their intention to further propagate this content reflects confidence in the internet celebrities' knowledge level. Although comments about expertise were limited, they significantly reflected consumers' recognition of internet celebrities' professional abilities. This recognition is evident not only in content creation quality but also in consumers viewing them as reliable information sources they would recommend to others.

Analysis of communication skills in expertise revealed consumer expectations in content expression, primarily focusing on three aspects: personalized expression style, precise expression, and colloquial language. These comments reflect the importance of communication skills in enhancing content attractiveness and dissemination effectiveness. As shown in Table 4.1, Comment 28 indicates that consumers are particularly sensitive to whether internet celebrities' expression methods have personal characteristics. This positive feedback demonstrates that humorous and entertaining expressions can enhance emotional connections with the consumer, thereby increasing consumer acceptance of recommended content. Furthermore, consumers pay attention to language details in internet celebrity recommendations. Comment 29 pointed out the impact of accurate expression on credibility. Comments 30, 31 and 32 all mentioned that by using authentic languages, especially local dialects, consumers and fans can feel the internet celebrity's close connection with the local culture, thus enhancing content's affinity and credibility. The analysis of communication skills comments demonstrates their significant impact on content dissemination effectiveness. Internet celebrities can enhance content credibility by attracting

consumers through humorous expressions, increasing professionalism through precise expression, and bridging consumer distance by using colloquial language and dialects. This closely relates to interview findings about communication skills' influence on eWOM propagation.

Analysis of consumer needs revealed two primary focus points: product price and personal needs. These comments reflected consumer expectations of internet celebrity recommendation content, concentrating on price transparency, information availability, and personalized needs satisfaction. Consumers demonstrated sensitivity to pricing information in recommended content, especially regarding cost-effectiveness and price authenticity. As shown in table 4.1, comments 38 and 39 emphasized the accuracy of pricing information. This indicates consumers desire comprehensive, authentic price descriptions to avoid misleading promotions, further emphasizing pricing's importance in consumer perception and recommendation content authenticity requirements. Conversely, comments 40 and 41 expressed surprise and praise for low prices, integrating price differences and local gastronomic characteristics. These positive price comments highlight pricing transparency and attractiveness's core role in consumer needs, further explaining consumers' desire to make wise decisions by combining consumption scenarios.

Consumers also expressed the need for specific information and personalized recommendations, involving travel planning, transportation convenience, and gastronomic preferences, e.g. comments 35 and 42 in table 4.1. These comments

demonstrate consumers' desires to obtain detailed and practical reference information to assist purchase intention. Additionally, personalized needs were reflected in travel planning and special population considerations. For instance, comments 36 and 37 reflected consumers' gastronomic preferences. Consumer focus on pricing and personalized information demands further proof of the practicality and authenticity of internet celebrity recommendations in eWOM propagation. These needs align with interview findings, strengthening consumers' emphasis on transparent, specific, and diversified content.

Comprehensive content analysis findings reveal that "information quality" and "review quantity" were the two most focused themes in consumer comments, involving factors such as content authenticity, familiarity, and genuine emotions. This trend highly consistent with interview findings indicates that information quality and review quantity are core drivers of eWOM propagation. Additionally, "communication skill" and "consumer needs" were also reflected in comments, particularly discussions about product cost-effectiveness and personalized needs. Furthermore, comments revealed phenomena not deeply discussed in interviews. For instance, TikTok comments tend to be more interaction-oriented and entertaining, while RED comments prioritize content practicality. TikTok comments mentioned video rhythm and background music enhancing content attractiveness, which was not explicitly mentioned in interviews. These findings provide a more comprehensive research perspective and lay the groundwork for subsequent discussion chapters.

4.4 Research Objective 2: To explore the criteria the advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities

To obtain findings for research question 2, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with six advertisers (D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6). The interviews focused on core consideration factors in advertisers' decision-making process. Based on the main elements of source credibility theory, researchers extracted relevant themes from the interviews, demonstrate advertisers' criteria and preferences when evaluating potential collaborations with internet celebrities. Figure 4.6 is mapping the research findings of the criteria for advertisers to choose internet celebrities.

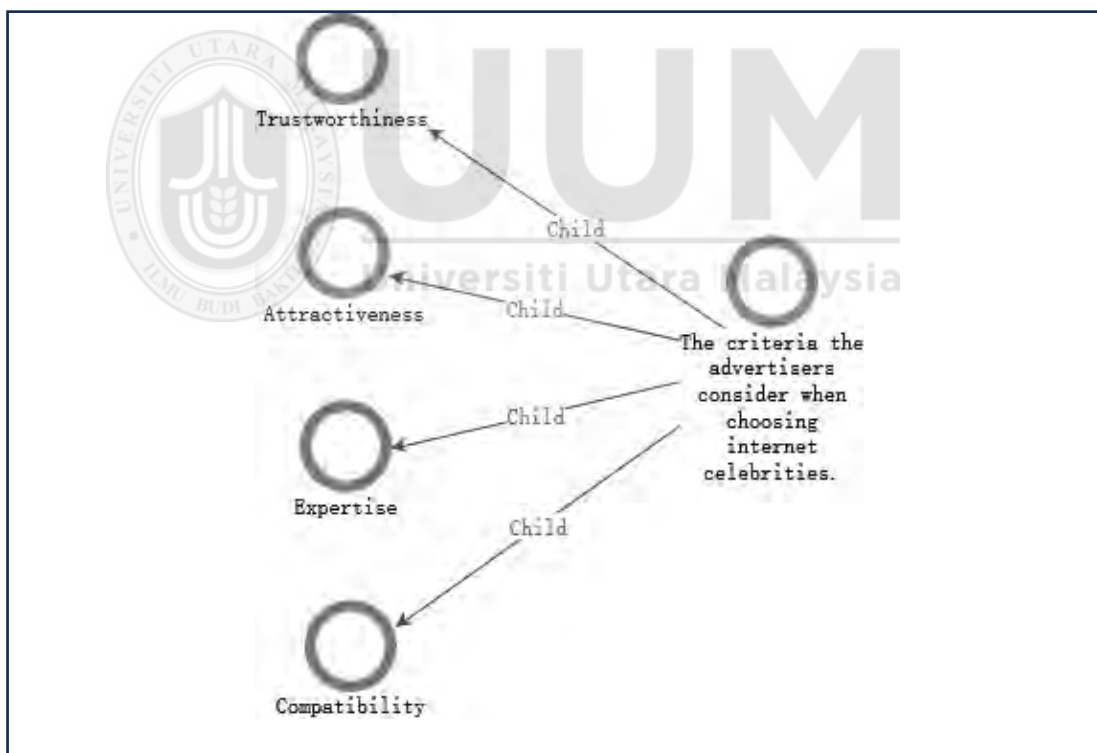


Figure 4.6 Mapping the research findings of the criteria for advertisers to choose internet celebrities

Figure 4.6 presents the findings of the analysis for objective 2, which was refined based on the interview data, with a total of themes identified. The analysis of the study finds

that the physical attractiveness or expert status of an internet celebrity is not a key criterion for advertisers' decision-making. In contrast, past performance, consumer stickiness, personality and compatibility are the core factors influencing advertisers' choices. Among them, trustworthiness is particularly prominent, as highlighted by the informants, indicating that advertisers are most concerned about whether they have a truthful and reliable reputation and whether they can build long-term trust among their target consumers when choosing internet celebrities.

4.4.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is one of the important decision factors for advertisers when choosing internet celebrities. Ohanian's (1990) SCM suggests that the source's trustworthiness directly affects the consumer's acceptance of its transmitted content. Furthermore, Hovland and Weiss (1951) proposed that the communicator's trustworthiness has a greater influence on consumers attitudes and behaviors than the information itself. In the social media marketing environment, Ismagilova et al. (2019) further pointed out that effective eWOM transmission depends not only on content quality but is also closely related to the informants' trustworthiness. Therefore, this study divides trustworthiness into two sub-themes: qualities of honesty and integrity, past performance. These subthemes emerged from recurring perspectives in the interviews. Honesty and integrity reflect the moral credibility perceived by audiences. Past performance demonstrates real product usage. See Figure 4.7.

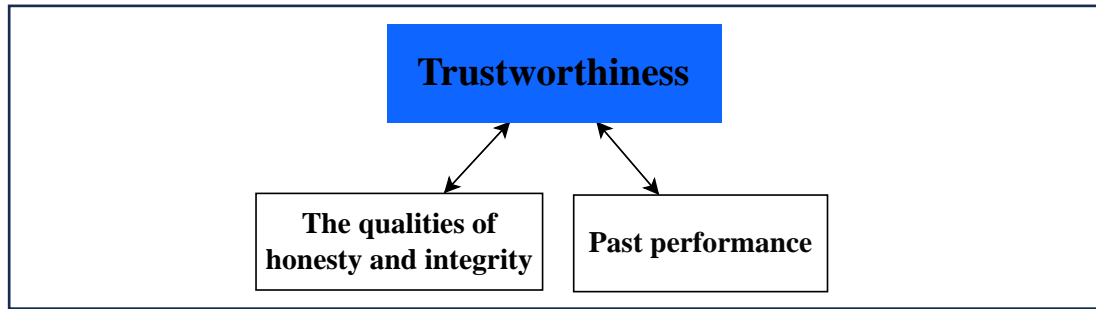


Figure 4.7 Trustworthiness Groups

a. The qualities of honesty and integrity

The qualities of honesty and integrity are some of the core elements advertisers use to measure internet celebrities' trustworthiness. Informants D3 and D4 consistently believe that internet celebrities should possess authentic, professional, and honest qualities, especially demonstrating a high degree of responsibility and time management ability during promotion. D3 and D4 emphasize:

"Internet celebrities must possess qualities of authenticity, professionalism, and integrity. They need to have a sense of responsibility, for example, showing a positive attitude in handling issues when problems arise with recommended products or services." (D3)

"Internet celebrities must be honest and trustworthy and possess time management skills and a sense of responsibility. Meanwhile, authenticity is their most important quality." (D4)

These views indicate that responsibility and integrity are fundamental to enhancing internet celebrities' trustworthiness. Internet celebrities possessing these qualities not only win consumers' trust but also lay a solid foundation for brand cooperation. This aligns with Wellman et al.'s (2020) research, which suggests that when internet celebrities demonstrate professional attitudes and honesty in commercial collaborations, they are more likely to gain consumer trust and enhance brand communication persuasiveness. When selecting collaboration partners, advertisers

typically evaluate their past cooperation performance to ensure they possess stable professional ethics and strong credibility awareness.

b. Past performance

Further interview analysis shows that when choosing internet celebrities, past performance is a key evaluation indicator, covering internet celebrities' brand cooperation records, professionalism in product recommendations, and how historical behavior affects their reputation. Djafarova and Rushworth (2016) emphasize that internet celebrities' historical behavior, brand cooperation records, and previous recommendation content directly affect brands' trust in them. Similarly, Leung et al.'s (2022) research indicates that internet celebrities' past marketing performance (such as sales ability and fan interaction) can serve as important indicators for predicting future cooperation effects. Therefore, when choosing internet celebrities, advertisers focus not only on their current traffic and fan data but also deeply examine their past cooperation experiences to reduce brand reputation risks. The interview findings of this study further validate these views and characterize past performance primarily in aspects of past cooperation, past recommendations, past records, and authentic experiences.

Past cooperation refers to the depth of cooperation between internet celebrities and brands and their commercial influence. Informant D1 pointed out:

*"If an internet celebrity has many deep collaborations with brands, then negative news about the brand will directly affect the internet celebrity's and our brand image."
(D1)*

This indicates that although deep cooperation can reflect internet celebrities' commercial value, the potential brand risks cannot be ignored. This view aligns with Von Mettenheim and Wiedmann's (2023) research, which suggests that brand crises might affect related internet celebrities through endorsement effects, impacting their credibility. Therefore, when selecting internet celebrities, advertisers need to consider not only their previous brand cooperation types but also evaluate long-term stability and potential risks. Additionally, informant D5 further emphasizes:

"The internet celebrity's past sales data records are the main reference factors." (D5)

This indicates that advertisers particularly value internet celebrities' sales ability. By analyzing objective indicators such as sales data, they can assess whether internet celebrities possess stable commercial conversion ability, thus providing an important basis for cooperation decisions. Abidin's (2021) research supports this view, internet celebrities with strong sales ability are often more favored by brands, especially in the context of short video e-commerce rise, where sales data has become an important basis for advertisers to measure promotional effects. Therefore, advertisers comprehensively consider internet celebrities' cooperation history with brands to evaluate their long-term marketing value.

Past recommendations reflect the types and professionalism of products previously promoted by internet celebrities, directly affecting advertisers' selection. Informants D1, D3, and D4 all state:

"Internet celebrities cannot have completely homogeneous products in their previous recommendations, especially competing products." (D1)

"We examine the data of products previously recommended by internet celebrities." (D3)

"Check whether internet celebrities have previously recommended the same brand or product, which we try to avoid." (D4)

These views indicate that internet celebrities recommending similar or competitive brand products weaken their brand exclusivity and reduce communication effects. Advertisers tend to select internet celebrities with no association records with competitive brands to ensure brand communication uniqueness. This view aligns with De Veirman et al.'s (2017) research, which points out that if internet celebrities too frequently promote similar category products, it might lead to reduced consumer brand loyalty and affect promotional persuasiveness. Therefore, when selecting internet celebrities, advertisers carefully examine the professionalism and market influence of their past recommendation content to ensure brand promotion precision.

Past records mainly involve internet celebrities' historical behavior and their public reputation. As stated by informants D2 and D4:

"Internet celebrities' previous negative controversy events are key examination content, internet celebrities with good reputation are preferred cooperation partners." (D2)

"We will review whether internet celebrities have had negative or controversial cases in the past." (D4)

These views indicate that advertisers carefully examine internet celebrities' public evaluations of past activities to avoid potential reputation risks. Von Mettenheim and Wiedmann's (2023) research supports this view, internet celebrities' public image is crucial in brand communication, and negative news might cause irreversible impacts on brand trust. Informants D2 and D3 further add:

"Internet celebrities need to perform well in cooperation success rate, cooperation benefits, fan stickiness support, etc." (D2)

"We investigate the reasons for internet celebrities' fan growth, and whether attention was drawn due to certain positive or negative events." (D3)

These statements indicate that advertisers' comprehensive consideration of internet celebrities' overall past performance covers multiple dimensions including brand cooperation, communication benefits, and fan interaction. Ruiz-Gomez (2019) emphasizes that internet celebrities whose traffic surges due to negative events often have lower fan stickiness and pose greater brand risks. Therefore, when evaluating internet celebrities, advertisers focus not only on their traffic scale but also particularly on their traffic sources and quality to avoid brand image impacts from poor records.

Internet celebrities' authentic experience also holds an important position in advertisers' decision-making process. In content creation, authentic experience is a crucial factor in enhancing internet celebrities' trustworthiness. As reported by informant D2:

"The authentic experience of internet celebrities is very important. They should possess lifestyle characteristics, such as showing real-life conditions when recommending gastronomic tourism experiences." (D2)

This view emphasizes that internet celebrities' authentic experience helps enhance content credibility, making their recommended products or services more persuasive and establishing deeper emotional connections with consumers. This view echoes Ismagilova et al.'s (2017) eWOM theory, which emphasizes that when internet celebrities make recommendations based on personal experience rather than purely relying on commercial promotion, their content is more likely to gain consumer trust.

Authentic experience not only makes internet celebrities' content more vivid and persuasive but also helps them build deeper emotional connections with target consumers (Zniva et al., 2023). Besides content authenticity, advertisers also pay attention to internet celebrities' personal lives, especially private matters that might affect public perception. Informant D1 points out:

"An internet celebrity's private romantic life can also become a consideration factor. Even if an internet celebrity has great influence, if their romantic partner has a poor reputation, it will affect the brand." (D1)

This view indicates that internet celebrities' personal life has certain linkages with brand image. Leung et al. (2022) emphasize that internet celebrities' private image directly affects the trustworthiness of their brand endorsements, and negative news might weaken the effectiveness of brand cooperation. Therefore, when selecting cooperation partners, advertisers not only focus on their content creation ability but also evaluate potential risks from their personal lives.

Although interview findings show that trustworthiness is an important consideration criterion for advertisers, not all advertisers view it as the primary factor. D5 and D6's views differ from the informants, as they focus more on the match between internet celebrities and brands in their decision-making process, such as brand image consistency, target market matching degree, and content style compatibility. This aligns with Leung et al.'s (2022) research, which points out that in brand marketing strategy, internet celebrities' trustworthiness might not be the most crucial selection criterion, especially when brands hope to promote in specific markets, internet celebrities who match target consumers' cultural background and interests might be

more attractive than those with high credibility. Therefore, in different commercial cooperation contexts, advertisers will weigh between trustworthiness and brand matching degree.

As per the above findings, it is indicated that advertisers generally consider internet celebrity trustworthiness as one of the core criteria in determining cooperation. Honest and integrity internet celebrities can establish long-term brand partnerships and enhance brand image. However, this study also found that some advertisers may lower trustworthiness requirements to some extent based on short-term marketing objectives. For example, for promotional activities, some advertisers focus more on internet celebrities' dissemination power rather than their long-term reputation. Therefore, internet celebrity trustworthiness has long-term value in brand partnership decisions, and advertisers should balance short-term traffic with long-term brand impact. When choosing internet celebrities, advertisers should thoroughly evaluate their qualities of honesty and integrity to reduce potential brand risks.

Advertisers highly value internet celebrities past performance when evaluating them, particularly focusing on the dissemination effects of previous advertising content, brand cooperation history, and follower reactions. Internet celebrities past recommendation is one of the primary bases for advertisers to evaluate their commercial potential. Although homogeneous product recommendations or negative incidents in internet celebrity' past might pose risks to future cooperation, advertisers can maximize internet celebrities' market impact through flexible cooperation

strategies and data analysis. In this case, some advertisers particularly focus on consumer feedback, such as comment quality and interaction patterns, when examining past performance. This indicates that advertisers consider not only hard data (like views and likes) but also authentic consumer reactions to judge internet celebrities' market impact and potential risks. Therefore, past performance is an important reference criterion for advertisers evaluating internet celebrities, especially the quality of interaction between internet celebrity and their followers. Advertisers can predict future marketing effects by analyzing internet celebrities past cooperation cases.

In conclusion, trustworthiness is an important reference criterion for advertisers when choosing internet celebrities, encompassing multiple dimensions including internet celebrities' personal qualities and past performance. These factors collectively form the trust foundation for internet celebrities in brand cooperation and determine their long-term development potential in commercial collaboration. Additionally, while trustworthiness is an important criterion affecting advertisers' choice of internet celebrity collaboration, its role still needs to be considered comprehensively along with other factors such as attractiveness and expertise. Therefore, the following analysis addresses how internet celebrities' attractiveness influences advertisers' choices.

4.4.2 Attractiveness

Attractiveness is an essential component of the SCM referring to the appeal that information communicators generate for consumers in terms of visual, social

interaction, and overall image (Ohanian, 1990). Research shows that highly attractive internet celebrities can enhance brand communication effectiveness and increase fan engagement and purchase intentions (Till & Busler, 2000). The interview analysis in this study further validates these views, as advertisers generally focus on attractiveness factors when selecting internet celebrities, believing that attractiveness includes two sub-themes: physical appeal and personality. These qualities collectively shape internet celebrities' overall image, making them more valuable for communication and commercial potential. See Figure 4.8.

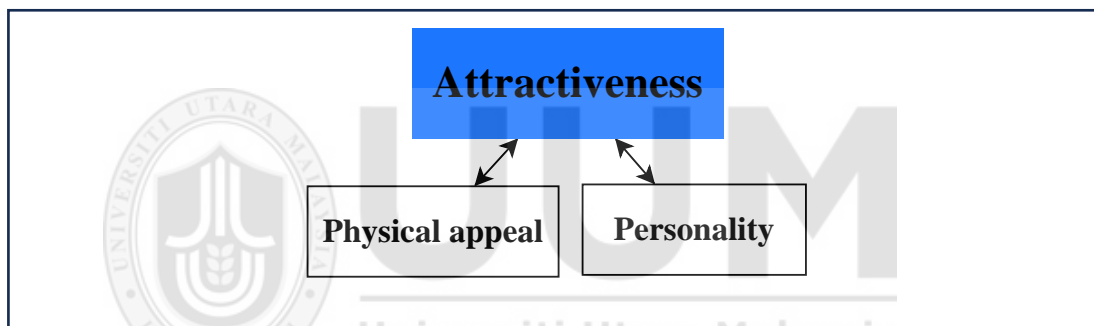


Figure 4.8 Attractiveness Groups

a. Physical appeal

Physical appeal includes appearance and dresses up being mentioned by informants. Appearance is usually seen as an intuitive manifestation of attractiveness, but advertisers' interview analysis shows that their requirements for appearance are not standardized but rather focus more on compatibility with the brand's target consumer.

For example, informants D2 and D6 consistently emphasize:

"We consider internet celebrities with good looks, but won't have excessive requirements, as long as their features are regular and presentable." (D2)

"Attractiveness, especially appearance, is quite important to us. We prioritize female internet celebrities with good looks and figure." (D6)

These interview findings indicate that while appearance carries certain weight in attractiveness, advertisers are more concerned with overall image harmony rather than purely pursuing perfect looks. AlFarraj et al. (2021) emphasize that physical attractiveness can influence consumers' attitudes toward brand endorsers, but if appearance doesn't match the brand image, it might reduce communication effectiveness. Therefore, while appearance can enhance internet celebrities' first impressions, brand fit and content quality are key to advertisers' final decisions.

Besides appearance, internet celebrities' dress up is also an important factor affecting attractiveness. Advertisers believe that appropriate makeup, clothing, and overall visual style can enhance content aesthetics and strengthen brand communication effects. For example, informants D2 and D5 mention:

"The atmosphere created by internet celebrities is key to attractiveness, with styling being a supplementary tool for attractiveness." (D2)

"Internet celebrities' styling should be fresh and natural." (D5)

These views indicate that advertisers want internet celebrities to demonstrate unique personalities and attractiveness through dress-up that matches the brand image. This carefully designed image not only attracts target consumers but also enhances brand communication effects. Hur et al. (2019) support this view, showing that visual image on social media directly influences users' brand image perception, and dress up that matches brand tone can enhance brand communication consistency. However, informant D1 believes that compared to attractiveness, internet celebrities' expertise has a greater impact on brand promotion effectiveness. Therefore, attractiveness's

influence may vary under different brand and market environments.

b. Personality

Interestingly, personality was found through interview analysis to be another sub-theme of attractiveness, significantly enhancing their appeal among fan groups and brand fit. Aggad and Ahmad (2021) emphasize that internet celebrities' personalities not only affect their popularity on social media but also influence fans' brand identification and purchase intentions. Similarly, Lee and Eastin (2021) agree that the authenticity and uniqueness of internet celebrities' personality traits can enhance the credibility of their information dissemination and improve brand promotion effectiveness. Personality of internet celebrities in this study is characterized by four aspects: affinity, empathy, sense of humor, and uniqueness. These collectively shape the quality of interaction and communication effects between internet celebrities, their consumer, and brands.

Affinity is viewed by informants as an important component of internet celebrities' personality, helping them establish deeper emotional connections with fans. Rajput and Gandhi (2024) emphasize that internet celebrities' affinity can enhance fans' trust in their recommended content, thereby improving brand promotion effectiveness.

Informant D3 emphasizes:

"An internet celebrity's attractiveness is quite important, especially that they must have affinity." (D3)

Informant D4 also agrees with this view:

"Internet celebrities should match public aesthetics while possessing strong

affinity." (D4)

Furthermore, informant D5 points out:

"Internet celebrities' image should demonstrate affinity, giving fans a sense of friendliness, kindness, and accessibility." (D5)

These views indicate that advertisers prefer choosing internet celebrities who can demonstrate affinity through natural interaction, as this quality can reduce psychological distance with fans and strengthen the trust foundation for brand collaboration. Jha's (2020) research support this view, showing that internet celebrities can significantly improve user brand loyalty through approachable image creation. However, not all advertisers consider affinity as a primary factor; for example, D1 focuses more on internet celebrities' expertise, believing that affinity's role is relatively weak in certain specific fields (such as technology or finance).

Empathy is seen as key for internet celebrities to establish emotional bonds with fans, directly impacting consumers' purchase intentions. Dovzhik et al.'s (2021) research emphasizes that internet celebrities with strong empathy are more likely to win fans' trust and generate positive effects in brand communication. Interview results show that advertisers generally believe internet celebrities should possess empathy to enhance fans' emotional value and acceptance of brand messages. For example, informants D1, D4, and D5 consistently stated:

"Internet celebrities should have strong empathy. If they have an intimate relationship with fans, strong empathy ability can stimulate consumers to make purchase intentions." (D1)

"Internet celebrities should have empathy, able to consider what types of fans like and establish emotional connections." (D4)

"Empathy can provide certain emotional value to consumer groups." (D5)

Furthermore, informant D3 points out that empathy is reflected not only in interaction methods but also involves the creation of internet celebrities' personas:

"Internet celebrities can set up accurate personas according to their personality, establishing a precise character image, such as a rural internet celebrity with millions of fans or one who helps farmers through public welfare." (D3)

This indicates that advertisers prefer to collaborate with internet celebrities who have credible personas, leveraging their strong emotional resonance with fans to enhance brand identification and communication effects. Ying et al.'s (2020) research supports this view, suggesting that internet celebrities' authenticity and personality creation can enhance fans' trust in their brand recommendations, thereby improving product promotion effectiveness.

A sense of humor is another important personality trait that can enhance interaction between internet celebrities and fans, making communication content more attractive.

Guo et al. (2020) emphasize that humorous social media content is more likely to attract consumers than serious content and can significantly increase user engagement.

Informant D1 holds a similar view:

"Internet celebrities should be interesting; they can create closeness with fans." (D1)

Similarly, informant D3 adds:

"The internet celebrity should have a sense of humor in language expression, able to interact with fans like a next-door brother or sister." (D3)

Meanwhile, sense of humor not only enhances the watchability of short videos but also strengthens the entertainment value of brand promotion. As informant D5 states:

"Internet celebrities should have unique personalities and language expression abilities; they are interesting or humorous." (D5)

This indicates that humor gives internet celebrities unique advantages in content dissemination, not only improving short video watchability but also adding entertainment value and appeal to brand promotion. This view is supported by Lee et al. (2018), who found that humorous internet celebrity content can significantly enhance brand promotion interaction effects and promote users' content sharing intention. Therefore, humor gives internet celebrities a stronger social appeal, making their promotional content more likely to spread.

Notably, besides empathy and a sense of humor, internet celebrities' uniqueness is also one of the core criteria evaluated by advertisers. Djafarova and Rushworth (2016) emphasize that internet celebrities' personality uniqueness can enhance their competitiveness in social media environments and increase fan loyalty. For example, informants D1, D5, and D6 all emphasize:

"We look for internet celebrities who are introverted and peaceful, giving people a warm and gentle speaking impression." (D1)

"The internet celebrity's unique style is key to selection." (D5)

"The personality presented by internet celebrities in short videos should tend toward entertaining personas." (D6)

Meanwhile, informant D4 further emphasizes the consistency between internet celebrities' uniqueness and brand image:

"Internet celebrities should have unique personalities consistent with the brand, gastronomic tourism internet celebrities usually have touring characteristics, able to match brand image according to their personality." (D4)

These views indicate that internet celebrities' uniqueness not only enhances their

personal brand recognition but can also strengthen associations with brands, thereby enhancing the appeal and marketing effects of communication content. Argyris et al. (2020) support this view, believing that brands prioritize content creators whose personalities align with brand tone when choosing internet celebrity collaborations to enhance brand communication consistency and influence.

Findings based on the above show that advertisers focus on personality when choosing internet celebrities for attractiveness. While physical appeal is an important component of attractiveness, advertisers focus more on whether internet celebrities' overall image aligns with brand positioning rather than purely pursuing perfect looks. What is more, dress up affects internet celebrities' visual image and brand dissemination effects. Advertisers believe that appropriate makeup and attire can enhance brand dissemination consistency and increase consumer acceptance. In this case, some advertisers leaning more toward content attractiveness rather than physical attractiveness.

Personality is another important criterion of attractiveness for advertisers when choosing an internet celebrity. Advertisers focus on internet celebrities' affinity, empathy ability, sense of humor, and uniqueness. Empathy helps internet celebrities establish emotional connections with followers and enhances brand dissemination credibility. Advertisers tend to cooperate with internet celebrities who possess empathy ability to enhance consumer brand identification. Meanwhile, humor enhances the interaction between internet celebrities and followers, making disseminated content

more attractive. Humorous short videos are more likely to attract consumers and promote brand dissemination than serious styles. In addition, uniqueness enhances internet celebrities' recognizability and strengthens their compatibility with brands.

Comprehensive interview findings show that attractiveness plays a crucial role when advertisers choose internet celebrities, with its connotation far exceeding physical appeal, emphasizing the comprehensive performance of personality. However, different brands may focus on different aspects of attractiveness; for example, some advertisers emphasize internet celebrities' expertise rather than purely external attractiveness. Therefore, the following analysis addresses another key factor in the SCM expertise, and its consideration standards in advertisers' choice.

4.4.3 Expertise

Expertise is a key dimension in the SCM, referring to communicators' knowledge, skills, and experience in specific fields, which can influence consumer trust in their information (Hovland et al., 1953; Ohanian, 1990). Djafarova and Rushworth (2016) further found that in product promotion, consumers are more likely to trust internet celebrities with professional knowledge and skills, rather than merely relying on their attractiveness. Particularly in industries like gastronomic, tourism, and fitness, advertisers place greater emphasis on internet celebrities' professional backgrounds to ensure the accuracy and credibility of their promotional content.

The interview findings of this study also support these views, indicating that expertise is a crucial evaluation criterion when advertisers choose internet celebrities. Expertise

is reflected not only in internet celebrities' professional attitudes and skills but also covers strategic marketing, relevant qualifications, and industry experience. Therefore, this study divides professionalism into five sub-themes: professional attitude, consumer stickiness, filming skills, communication skill, qualifications and experience, which collectively determine whether internet celebrities can effectively deliver brand messages and attract target consumers. See Figure 4.9.

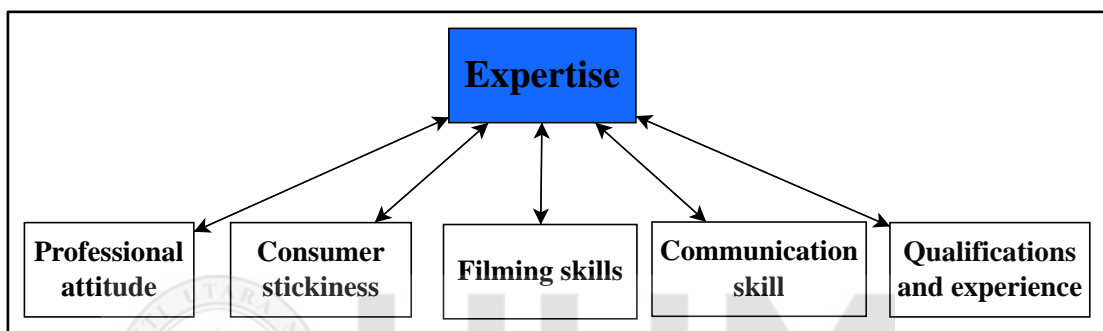


Figure 4.9 Expertise Groups

a. Professional attitude

Professional attitude is the foundation of internet celebrities' professionalism, involving their sense of responsibility, dedication, and ability to thoroughly research brand products. Informant D1 emphasizes:

"Internet celebrities must possess professional and dedicated attitudes. They should be able to explore our product characteristics and must treat any product with professional and dedicated attitudes." (D1)

This view indicates that advertisers care not only about internet celebrities' content expressiveness but also hope they can deeply understand brand characteristics rather than simply completing promotional tasks. A professional attitude can enhance brands' trust in internet celebrities and ensure the quality and authenticity of promotional content. Belanche et al. (2021) support this view, noting that in social media, internet

celebrities' professional attitude directly affects their influence and subsequently affects fans' acceptance of brands.

b. Consumer stickiness

Turning now to the interview evidence on consumer stickiness. Consumer stickiness is an important indicator for advertisers to evaluate internet celebrities' ability, directly relating to their continuous conversion ability when communicating brand information (Hu et al., 2020). Hu et al (2020) emphasize that in social media environments, consumer stickiness manifests not only in fans' loyalty to internet celebrities but also includes fan interaction behaviors, content dissemination effects, and brand acceptance. Similarly, Vu et al. (2024) research shows that high-stickiness internet celebrities more easily facilitate consumer brand identification, improve purchase conversion rates, and thus increase advertisers' return on investment. This study's interview analysis further confirms these views; advertisers generally believe that consumer stickiness determines internet celebrities' long-term influence in brand promotion, examining five aspects: strategic marketing abilities, creative storytelling, creating topics, fan stickiness, and interaction data.

Internet celebrities need professional strategic marketing abilities to accurately perceive consumer needs and effectively deliver brand messages. Informants D1 and D5 both emphasize the importance of strategic marketing:

"Internet celebrities must be very professional. They must be able to directly target consumer pain points and analyze product advantages. Only by doing this can internet celebrities convert fans into consumers." (D1)

"An internet celebrity's expertise is reflected in their promotional ability and memory." (D5)

These interviews indicate that advertisers prefer selecting internet celebrities with precise marketing abilities rather than just physical attractiveness or fan numbers. Jayasinghe (2021) emphasizes that internet celebrities' marketing strategies directly influence fans' purchase intentions, and professional promotion methods can improve information dissemination effectiveness. Therefore, professional strategic marketing requires internet celebrities to possess not only product interpretation abilities but also the ability to develop effective content strategies to make promotional information more persuasive.

Creative storytelling plays a key role in enhancing consumer stickiness. Internet celebrities enhance brand information attractiveness through contextualized and narrative content, making it easier for consumers to develop emotional resonance.

Informant D1 points out:

"Whether internet celebrities' works have uniqueness and show life-like short videos through storytelling, this can increase the effect of product recommendations." (D1)

Informants D5 and D6 also emphasize the necessity of storytelling:

"Storytelling is an essential factor. Internet celebrities must recommend products through story-based forms." (D5)

"Internet celebrities need to recommend products reasonably and logically through storytelling forms and have high similarity with consumers." (D6)

This shows that internet celebrities need not only logically content creation but also to be close to consumers' lifestyles, thus enhancing content authenticity and attractiveness, and laying an emotional foundation for brand communication. This

view is supported by Li et al. (2019), suggesting that narrative content better stimulates consumer emotional resonance and brand identification than pure product introductions, thereby enhancing consumer stickiness. However, not all advertisers consider creative storytelling a decisive factor; some advertisers focus more on data performance rather than content presentation methods. Therefore, although creative storytelling is an effective means to enhance consumer stickiness, its importance may vary across different brand strategies.

Creating topics is an important standard for measuring internet celebrities' influence and communication ability. Whether internet celebrities can generate widespread discussion and interaction is also an important dimension in evaluating their consumer stickiness. As stated by informant D2:

"Internet celebrities can generate topics, with strong discussion and interaction with fans. This can drive topic generation and spread, promoting gastronomic tourism -related products or services." (D2)

Through creating topics or generating resonance, internet celebrities can effectively promote short video content dissemination, further expanding brand exposure and market influence. High-topic content not only enhances internet celebrities' communication effectiveness but also provides a reference basis for advertisers' cooperation choices. Nurfadila (2020) emphasizes that high-topic social media content can enhance consumers' brand interaction intention and increase social media user engagement. Additionally, topic generation depends not only on internet celebrities' content creation ability but is also influenced by social media algorithms and platform traffic mechanisms. Therefore, when evaluating internet celebrities' consumer

stickiness, advertisers need to comprehensively consider both content's communication effects and platform environment.

Internet celebrities' fan base is an important manifestation of their market influence. Fans' reputation is the basis of consumer stickiness. Informants D1 and D2 both emphasize that fans' evaluations of internet celebrities are important indicators for assessing their trustworthiness:

"We consider fans' evaluations of internet celebrities, especially whether these evaluations are accumulated through original content or triggered by negative news." (D1)

"Internet celebrities must have a good reputation. They cannot have negative controversial incidents." (D2)

This indicates that advertisers prefer choosing internet celebrities who have accumulated fan reputation through original content over time, rather than those who gain traffic through hype or negative news. A stable fan reputation not only enhances internet celebrities' trustworthiness but also provides reliable guarantees for brand cooperation. Kim and Kim's (2021) research support this view, suggesting that internet celebrities' fan loyalty positively correlates with their trustworthiness, and a long-term accumulated good reputation can effectively enhance their brand cooperation value. Meanwhile, fan stickiness reflects consumers' loyalty and trust in internet celebrities, directly affecting brand cooperation conversion effects. Informants D1, D2, and D4 all emphasize the key role of fan stickiness. For example, informants D1 and D2 point out:

"Whether internet celebrities have strong fan stickiness is an important factor in our selection." (D1)

"Higher fan stickiness can significantly improve consumers' purchase conversion rate." (D2)

Informant D4 further adds:

"Higher fan stickiness can increase fans' trust in internet celebrities, thus enhancing purchase intention. We tend to prefer young female internet celebrities because female fans have higher stickiness than male fans." (D4)

This indicates that when choosing cooperation partners, advertisers focus not only on internet celebrities' fan numbers but more on their consumer group's loyalty and interaction depth. Hu et al. (2020) support this view, consumer trust in internet celebrities is an important factor affecting purchase behavior, and high-stickiness fan groups usually show higher brand loyalty and recommendation intentions. Notably, interaction data, as a quantitative manifestation of consumer stickiness, directly reflects internet celebrities' communication potential and actual performance. Informants D2, D4, and D6 all point out that fan numbers, interaction volume (such as likes, comments, shares), and short video playback data are key indicators for evaluating internet celebrities' stickiness. They emphasize:

"Mainly examining internet celebrities' post count, fan count, and interaction count (likes, comments, and shares)." (D2)

"Whether fan volume and interaction volume meet brand needs, especially focusing on like count, save count, and exposure volume." (D4)

"Internet celebrities' short video play count, complete playthrough rate, and exposure volume are important reference indicators." (D6)

These data not only reflect internet celebrities' current influence but can also predict their future growth potential through trend analysis, providing the scientific basis for advertisers' selection. Sun et al. (2021) emphasize that high-interaction-rate internet celebrities usually bring higher brand exposure and consumer conversion rates.

However, while interaction data can provide an objective reference, its authenticity still needs advertisers' in-depth evaluation to avoid misleading from fake traffic or inflated numbers. Notably, not all advertisers make interaction data their main consideration factor; for example, informant D3 focuses more on internet celebrities' personalities rather than consumer stickiness.

c. Filming skills

Moreover, internet celebrities' expertise is also reflected in their content production skills, especially filming skills. Filming skills have become one of the important factors in evaluating professionalism. Informant D4 states:

"We have basic professional requirements for internet celebrities' filming skills, especially aesthetic sense in filming." (D4)

This finding indicates that high-quality visual content is an important factor in attracting consumer attention. Hussain et al. (2024) supports this view, noting that excellent visual presentation helps enhance consumer viewing experience and increase brand credibility. Therefore, through sophisticated filming skills and good aesthetic ability, internet celebrities can not only more intuitively display product features but also effectively enhance brand image.

d. Communication skills

According to Liao and Chen (2024), internet celebrities with good communication skills can more effectively deliver brand messages to consumers and enhance consumer understanding and acceptance. In interviews, informants D1, D2, and D5 all emphasized the impact of communication skills on promotional effects:

"Having good Mandarin expression ability is a basic requirement for cooperation with internet celebrities." (D1)

"As long as internet celebrities have clear and accurate language expression ability and basic understanding of gastronomic tourism, we will choose to cooperate." (D2)

"Internet celebrities' communication ability and clear accurate expression ability can effectively drive consumer purchase intentions." (D5)

These views indicate that advertisers consider language expression ability as internet celebrities' basic quality, especially in brand promotion, where clear, fluent language expression can ensure accurate message delivery and improve consumer acceptance of brand information. Liao and Chen (2024) support this view, noting that on short video platforms, internet celebrities with strong expression abilities can better attract user attention and make brand promotion more persuasive. Additionally, standard Mandarin expression helps cover broader consumer groups, enhancing brand communication effects.

e. Qualifications and experience

Notably, in certain specific industries, advertisers tend to choose internet celebrities with industry qualifications or professional qualifications to enhance their promotional content credibility. For example, in the gastronomic, fitness, and health fields, advertisers prefer internet celebrities with professional backgrounds. For instance, Informant D6 points out:

"Internet celebrities should have their own qualification assessments, such as chef certificates, fitness trainer certifications, or nutritionist certifications. These qualifications should be transparent and public." (D6)

This view reflects advertisers' emphasis on internet celebrities' professional

backgrounds. Jia's (2022) research also emphasizes that internet celebrities holding relevant industry qualifications can increase information persuasiveness, making consumers more likely to accept their recommended content. However, informant D3 values internet celebrities' trustworthiness and attractiveness more, believing that expertise isn't necessary, especially in entertainment and lifestyle promotion, where being too professional might weaken closeness with fans. Meanwhile, experience is another important criterion for measuring internet celebrities' expertise. Informant D2 adds that internet celebrities' industry experience is another important dimension for measuring their expertise:

"Expertise, especially past experience, is very important. Internet celebrities with rich experience in gastronomic tourism fields can drive fan effects." (D2)

This view indicates that advertisers prefer selecting internet celebrities with rich experience in specific fields rather than just theoretical knowledge or industry qualifications. Ruiz-Gomez (2019) supports this, noting that when internet celebrities have long-term deep involvement in the industry, their content becomes more authoritative and more likely to gain fans' trust. Therefore, industry experience becomes an important consideration factor when advertisers screen internet celebrities.

Based on the above, advertiser consider expertise more in terms of practical expression skills and content dissemination ability rather than traditional academic or technical backgrounds. Among these, a professional attitude is the foundation of internet celebrity professionalism, involving their sense of responsibility and dedication to brand content. Advertisers generally hope internet celebrities can understand product

characteristics rather than merely completing promotional tasks. Meanwhile, consumer stickiness often reflects the commercial value of internet celebrities, shaping both the continuity of brand exposure and the return advertisers can expect. Strategic marketing ability is advertisers' evaluation of internet celebrity professionalism, especially on short video platforms where internet celebrity needs to accurate insight into consumer needs and formulate effective content strategies.

Storytelling creation enhances information attractiveness, making it easier for consumers to emotionally resonate with content. Internet celebrities should embed product information through narrative techniques to make recommended content more authentic and emotionally connected. Meanwhile, high-topic content can effectively drive follower interaction and secondary dissemination, enhancing brand exposure. However, the dissemination effect of topics depends not only on internet celebrities' content creation ability but is also affected by social media platform algorithms, requiring advertisers to consider the platform environment when weighing this factor. Additionally, fans' stickiness reflects consumer loyalty and trust in internet celebrities, directly affecting brand conversion rates. However, fans' stickiness may be influenced by the content style and target consumer groups, with different brands potentially adjusting their weight accordingly.

Research results also show that interaction data, as a quantitative manifestation of consumer stickiness, can provide objective dissemination effect assessment. Key indicators advertisers focus on include likes, comments, share rates, and view counts,

which directly affect internet celebrities' market attractiveness. However, research also reveals that interaction data may be affected by fake traffic or engagement manipulation, requiring advertisers to conduct comprehensive evaluations combining other dimensions. Therefore, consumer stickiness is an important consideration factor for advertisers evaluating internet celebrity impact, and advertisers need to weigh storytelling content, topic generation, follower stickiness, and interaction data when selecting cooperation partners to ensure long-term marketing investment benefits.

In this case, filming skills have become one of internet celebrities' competitive advantages, particularly important in the gastronomic tourism sector. Internet celebrities' language expression ability and clear communication methods can enhance brand information dissemination effects. In specific industries, advertisers prefer internet celebrities with relevant industry qualifications to enhance promotional content credibility. In contrast, some advertisers value internet celebrities' influence and attractiveness more, believing that excessive professionalism might weaken affinity with followers. Notably, internet celebrities with long-term experience in specific fields have more authority and can more effectively drive follower effects. This indicates that experience not only enhances internet celebrities' credibility but also strengthens their influence in eWOM dissemination.

Overall, advertisers consider expertise when choosing internet celebrities in five subthemes: professional attitude, consumer stickiness, filming skills, communications skill, qualifications and experience. However, some advertisers tend to consider

matching factors, especially in cases where brand image and market positioning accuracy requirements are high. Therefore, the next section of the interviews covered the influence of compatibility in advertisers' decisions and analyzed how it plays a key role in brands' choice of internet celebrities.

4.4.4 Compatibility

According to Liao and Chen's (2024) research on internet celebrity marketing effectiveness, the compatibility between internet celebrities and brands directly affects their communication effectiveness in target markets, especially in social media environments, where high compatibility can enhance brand information credibility and influence. Furthermore, De Veirman et al.'s (2017) research emphasizes that the overlap between fan groups and brand target consumers determines the precision and conversion rate of promotional activities. Therefore, compatibility is a key evaluation criterion for advertisers when choosing internet celebrities. When choosing internet celebrities for cooperation, advertisers focus not only on their personal characteristics but also particularly emphasize their overall compatibility with the brand. The interview findings of this study further validate these scholars' views, indicating that compatibility is one of the core factors brands focus on and can be divided into product compatibility, fans compatibility, style compatibility and fees and cooperation. See Figure 4.10.

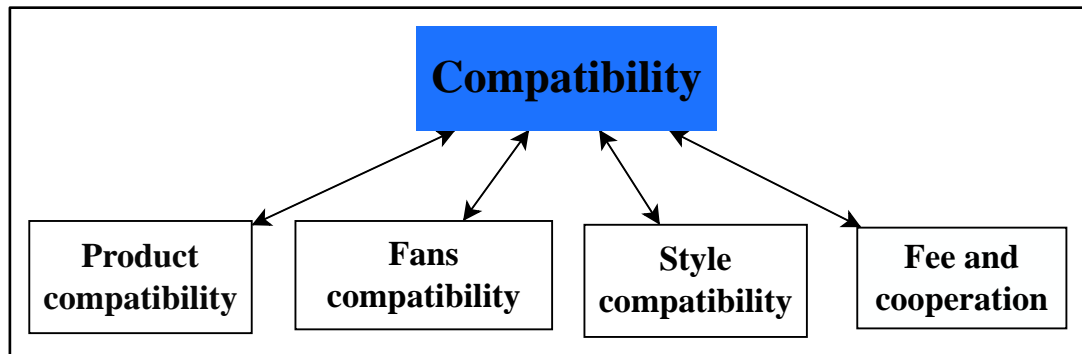


Figure 4.10 Compatibility Groups

a. Product compatibility

Product compatibility is the most direct connection between brands and internet celebrities, determining the professionalism and credibility of promotional content.

Informants D1 and D2 believe:

"Internet celebrities must be interested in the products or services they recommend. The vertical categories of products previously recommended by internet celebrities need to be related to our product content, and their development type should be consistent with the gastronomic tourism field." (D1)

"Internet celebrities recommend gastronomic tourism products or services with high compatibility based on their personal characteristics." (D2)

These views indicate that internet celebrities' interests need to maintain consistency with the vertical field of recommended products; otherwise, it's difficult to form effective brand communication. This view aligns with Kim and Kim's (2021) research, which found that if internet celebrities have strong professional relevance to promotional products, their recommendations' persuasiveness and consumer acceptance significantly increase. Additionally, informants D5 and D6 further supplement:

"The internet celebrity's career type matches with the product consumer. Whether their personality type aligns with the product's consumer group is also a factor we consider." (D5)

"I will choose internet celebrities who match the product. For example, for coffee

products, I won't choose comedic internet celebrities, but rather food-focused ones." (D6)

This indicates that the product compatibility degree involves not only content field relevance but also the compatibility between internet celebrities' personalities and brand positioning to ensure brand image consistency.

b. Fans compatibility

Fans compatibility is another important factor advertisers focus on. Compatibility is a crucial factor in determining whether internet celebrities can precisely reach brand target consumers. As reported by informants D1 and D3:

"Whether the internet celebrity's fan profile matches our product target consumer is very important, for example, food product consumers mainly come from southern or coastal regions of China." (D1)

"The internet celebrity's fan group needs to match the product's target consumer; and the conversion rate brought by their short video quality and comment volume is a key consideration." (D3)

These views indicate that internet celebrities' fan profiles, geographical distribution, and consumption ability need to be compatible with the brand's target market to enhance marketing activity precision. This view is supported by Dong and Tarofder (2024), who point out that fan group similarity directly determines brand promotion conversion rates. If fans' interests and consumption ability don't match the brand's target consumer, even if the internet celebrity has a high influence, promotional effects might still be significantly diminished. Furthermore, informants D5 and D6 emphasize:

"We consider the purchasing power of the internet celebrity's fans; an active fan base with high purchasing power is an important criterion." (D5)

"The fan group should be consumers of our products." (D6)

These views indicate that fan activity is also a key factor; brands tend to prefer internet celebrities with high interaction rates and loyal fan groups rather than those who simply win with fan numbers. This aligns with De Veirman et al.'s (2017) research findings that fan engagement better predicts internet celebrity marketing effects than total fan count. Therefore, when choosing internet celebrities, advertisers often combine considerations of their fan group composition, activity, and consumption ability to ensure brand messages precisely reach target consumers.

c. Style compatibility

Internet celebrity style compatibility is another key criterion for advertisers when choosing cooperation partners. Informants D2 and D4 believe:

"Internet celebrities can accurately describe the feelings brought by scenic spots or food in the gastronomic tourism field, their personal style is consistent with their work style, and they have influence over potential consumers among their fans." (D2)

"The internet celebrity's personal style should match the characteristics of gastronomic tourism and present a positive and energetic image." (D4)

These views indicate that internet celebrities' content style is compatible with the brand's core tone, for example, gastronomic tourism brands usually prefer choosing internet celebrities who express vividly and can enhance emotional resonance through storytelling rather than bloggers who simply display product features. This finding aligns with Rao et al.'s (2024) research on narrative marketing, which suggests that through storytelling expression, brands can more effectively influence consumers' brand cognition and purchase intentions. Advertisers tend to choose internet celebrities whose image and tone match the brand to enhance emotional connections between

brands and consumers. Meanwhile, informant D6 adds:

"Internet celebrities are preferably young females and best if they are locals, their video style should match the content." (D6)

This finding further emphasizes that brands focus not only on whether internet celebrities' personal style matches the brand tone but also consider their cultural background and regional characteristics to optimize brand communication's contextualization effects. Although interview findings show that advertisers generally believe compatibility is the foundation for successful brand cooperation, some advertisers disagree on the specific priority of compatibility. Some informants (such as D5 and D6) focus more on fans compatibility, believing that precisely reaching target consumers is key to promotional success, while others (such as D1 and D2) emphasize product compatibility more, believing that only field-relevant internet celebrities can enhance brand information expertise and trustworthiness. This difference indicates that different types of brands might prioritize different dimensions of compatibility when choosing internet celebrities, based on their marketing strategies and market positioning.

d. Fees and cooperation

In advertising cooperation, fees and cooperation intention are important economic and strategic considerations affecting brand decisions (Xie et al., 2024). When choosing internet celebrities, brands need to weigh their cost-effectiveness within budget constraints while considering their influence and content quality. Informants D1 and D2 both point out that excessive fees might hinder cooperation:

"If internet celebrities meet our selection criteria but the team negotiated endorsement fee is too high, we won't cooperate." (D1)

"Internet celebrities' attitude towards premium pricing determines the premium negotiation for cooperation." (D2)

This view reflects advertisers' consideration of cost-effectiveness. Even if internet celebrities' qualifications and abilities meet brand needs, excessive cooperation fees might still reduce their competitiveness. Jin et al. (2019) support this view, noting that advertisers tend to choose cost-effective internet celebrities rather than purely pursuing high-traffic celebrities, as cost-effective cooperation ensures more sustainable marketing investment returns. Besides fees, cooperation intention is also a factor some advertisers focus on. Informant D2 further points out:

"Internet celebrities' cooperation willingness is a key examination point. If internet celebrities have strong cooperation willingness, we will consider next-step deep cooperation." (D2)

Cooperation intention not only reflects internet celebrities' interest in brands but may also affect cooperation smoothness and long-term relationship establishment. Casaló et al. (2018) emphasize that when internet celebrities have high brand identification, their promotional content appears more authentic, thereby enhancing consumer trust and purchase intention. Therefore, advertisers prefer establishing stable cooperative relationships with internet celebrities willing to cooperate long-term and have positive attitudes toward brands. However, other informants (D3, D4, D5, and D6) all indicate that for choosing cooperative internet celebrities, they focus more on their influence and compatibility, willing to pay premiums even if fees are high. This indicates that under different brand strategies, fees and cooperation intentions may have different weights. For small and medium-sized brands, cost control is key, so they tend to choose

internet celebrities with reasonable fees and strong cooperation intention while for large brands, traffic and brand compatibility are the most important consideration factors.

The most evident finding according to the above is that compatibility is undoubtedly the criterion determining cooperation effectiveness and efficiency. Advertisers primarily consider compatibility from four subtheme: product, fans, style, fees and cooperation. Advertisers comprehensively analyze internet celebrities' personalities, follower bases, past recommendation records, and professional backgrounds to ensure high compatibility with the brand. This not only enhances the brand's market influence but also ensures the long-term sustainability of cooperation. What is more, advertisers adopt flexible compatibility strategies in practical operations. In this case, such as high-end gastronomic tourism services, tend to select high-end internet celebrities who match their brand image, while fast-moving consumer goods brands focus more on internet celebrities' follower size and interaction rates rather than strict content compatibility.

However, some advertisers are willing to compromise on compatibility in exchange for greater dissemination impact. For example, in certain marketing campaigns, advertisers might choose to cooperate with internet celebrities who have vastly different styles but extremely high traffic to maximize brand exposure. Therefore, compatibility is a core criterion for advertisers when evaluating cooperation feasibility, laying a solid foundation for successful brand marketing. Fees and cooperation

intention are economic consideration factors for brands. In this case, some advertisers tend to select cost-effective internet celebrities, while large brands focus more on their influence and compatibility. Consequently, this indicate that different brands might focus on different aspects of compatibility when choosing cooperation partners.

4.5 Research Objective 3: To suggest a gastronomic tourism model of the internet celebrity

To obtain the findings of Research Objective 3, which aims to construct a model of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities to understand better the core elements of their credibility in the gastronomic tourism field. Based on the source credibility model, researchers integrated the findings from research objectives 1 and 2 and further incorporated interview perspectives from internet celebrities and academicians, thereby establishing a model of internet celebrity credibility that reflects the interaction of multiple factors. Figure 4.11 presents the findings of the gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model for the study.

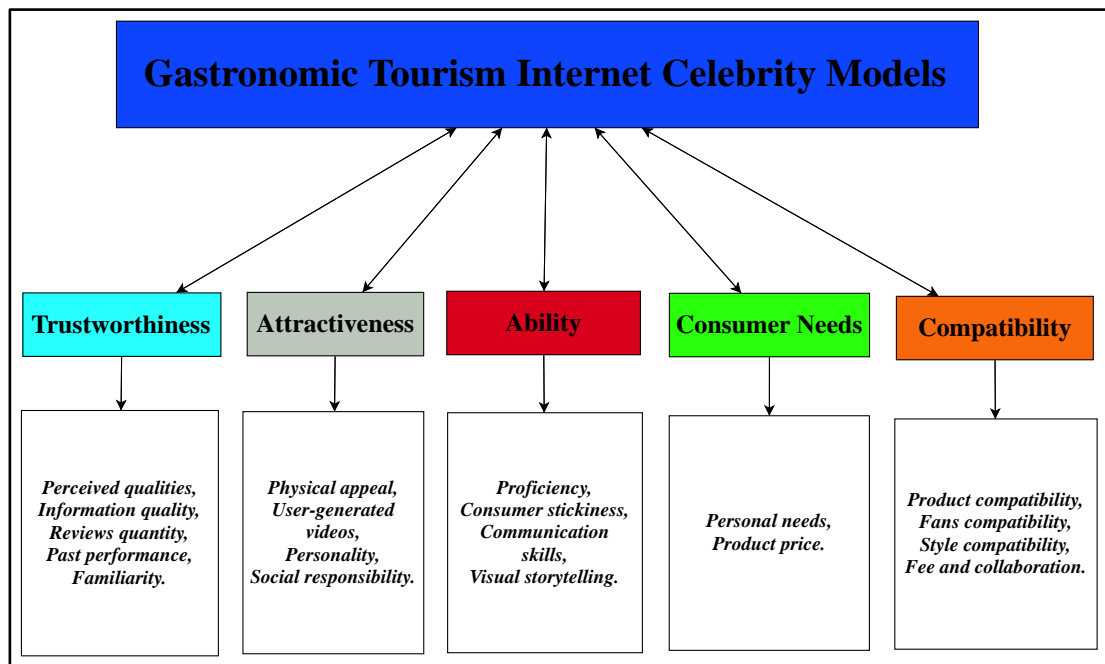


Figure 4.11 Mapping the research findings of the gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model

Figure 4.11 presents the factors of the gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model. The research found that the new gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model consists of five key factors: trustworthiness, attractiveness, ability, consumer needs and compatibility. Among the constituent factors of the new model, trustworthiness emerged as the most prominent core element, with informants generally emphasizing that gastronomic tourism internet celebrities must possess high credibility to establish influence in the industry and win the trust of both consumers and advertisers.

Trustworthiness is one of the core components of the SCM and a key factor in the gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model constructed in this research. Through combining the findings from objectives 1 and 2 of the study and analyzing the in-depth interviews with internet celebrities and academicians, the researchers categorized

trustworthiness into five elements: perceived qualities, information quality, reviews quantity, past performance, familiarity. In analyzing research objectives 1 and 2, this study found that the qualities of internet celebrities include honesty, integrity, sincerity and authenticity. Internet celebrities who demonstrate these qualities not only secure consumers' trust but also establish a solid foundation for brand collaboration. Informants A4 emphasize that fans are increasingly able to identify content authenticity, so internet celebrities must maintain integrity:

"Integrity are indeed very important in short-video creation. Fans or consumers are increasingly able to identify content authenticity, especially locals who can more easily determine whether recommendations match reality." (A4)

Informant A2 further points out:

"The individual performs very sincerely, with an approachable image and voice." (A2)

Moreover, Academicians support this view. Informants E1 emphasized:

"Internet celebrities can establish a sincere, transparent image by showing product usage processes, sharing behind-the-scenes work daily, and real-time answering consumer questions, further strengthening the credibility of their discourse." (E1)

Informant E3 further emphasizes

"Internet celebrities' love for gastronomic tourism can make the consumer feel their sincerity." (E3)

Informant A4 emphasizes that authenticity are key factors enhancing recommended content credibility on short video platforms:

"On platforms like TikTok or RED, authenticity are key factors in enhancing credibility." (A4)

The perspective regarding the qualities that internet celebrities should possess to

enhance their credibility is also supported by informant E2, who summarized:

"Internet celebrities need to comply with platform rules, maintain good professional ethics, and avoid violations or inappropriate behavior, which is also a key factor in maintaining their credibility" (E2).

This viewpoint further corroborates that the qualities of internet celebrities constitute the primary element of their trustworthiness. Good professional ethics, impartial expression, and adherence to platform regulations form the foundation upon which audiences develop trust in internet celebrities. According to the analytical findings of research objective 1, information quality emerges as a key factor in how internet celebrity trustworthiness influences eWOM transmission. Specifically, video content quality, the professionalism of video content, and the authenticity of video content significantly impact consumers' cognitive and behavioral responses to information. In this regard, informants A1 and A3 supplemented the value of authenticity in video content from a creator's perspective:

"In the gastronomic tourism, the quality of video imagery affects the overall effectiveness of short videos. I usually pay attention to weather, environment, and atmosphere during filming, striving to present authentic visuals that are close to real life." (A1)

"The biggest factor why fans enjoy watching my short videos is authentic presentation. They watch my short videos because they find the information presented useful to them." (A3)

These perspectives all indicate that only when content is close to reality and possesses life authenticity can it inspire fan resonance and enhance trust. Additionally, authenticity is closely related to comprehensive information presentation. Informant A4 pointed out:

"If internet celebrities selectively display only positive, favorable content or

completely ignore negative information in reality, audiences will perceive the internet celebrities as inauthentic." (A4)

This further illustrates that excessive beautification or information concealment triggers consumers' doubts about authenticity, thereby weakening word-of-mouth transmission effects. These viewpoints received support from academician. Informants E1 and E2 connected information quality trustworthiness with professional depth:

"Internet celebrities' credibility can be enhanced through in-depth understanding of food culture, unique tourism insights, and authentic local customs experiences. If internet celebrities can personally demonstrate cooking techniques, share interesting anecdotes from their journeys, and provide practical travel advice, they will better win consumers' or fans' trust and affection." (E1)

"High-quality content is the foundation for enhancing credibility. Internet celebrities need to provide reliable, authentic, and in-depth gastronomic tourism information, such as detailed restaurant reviews and travel guides, ensuring content provides practical help to audiences." (E2)

Informant E3 particularly emphasized:

"Internet celebrities need to ensure that the video information they transmit is authentic and reliable, avoiding false advertising and misleading audiences." (E3)

Therefore, information quality serves as the core foundation of trustworthiness. From content depth and structure to the authenticity and transparency of information presentation, and to visual professionalism, these factors collectively influence consumers' perception of information, thereby determining internet celebrities' influence in eWOM transmission. According to the analytical findings of research objective 1, review quantity is regarded as an important factor influencing consumers' trust in internet celebrities' recommended content and eWOM transmission effects. Review quantity significantly affects eWOM transmission and purchase intention through perceived review and interaction volume. Further analysis indicates that

substantial authentic, differentiated comments often enhance consumers' perceived review, while the growth of comment quantity is essentially closely related to internet celebrities' interaction capabilities. Informant A1 and A3 pointed out:

"Fans often resonate with or even debate specific travel destinations or foods, thereby generating considerable discussion and interaction. These comments serve as excellent reference points for my content creation. I extract interest points that fans focus on and use them as thematic directions for creation." (A1)

"For my personal creation, during the short video creation process, I pay particular attention to interaction with each place and the people in each place. Such interaction brings more actual fan or consumer comments." (A3)

Informant E2 summarized:

"Actively interacting with fans is also an effective way to enhance credibility. By responding to fan comments and answering questions, internet celebrities can close the distance with fans and enhance their sense of participation." (E2)

Therefore, review quantity serves as an important basis for consumers to evaluate internet celebrities' credibility and as an important mechanism for promoting eWOM transmission and enhancing user participation and loyalty. Additionally, research objective 1 findings indicate that internet celebrities past recommendations, including content quality and evaluation, serve as important bases for consumers to judge their trustworthiness. This finding was also echoed in the analysis of the research objective 2, where internet celebrities past performance serves as advertisers' standard for evaluating their commercial reputation and cooperation, primarily reflected in past collaborations, past recommendations, and past records. As informant E1 stated:

"Internet celebrities establish credibility by continuously demonstrating product usage processes, providing high-quality content and travel advice. This long-term past performance gradually makes them trusted information sources for fans." (E1)

Informant E2 further supplemented:

"Emphasizing internet celebrities' quality control of products and past recommendation performance is an important foundation for establishing reliability. If internet celebrities frequently recommend low-quality products, they will quickly lose fan trust; conversely, consistently maintaining high-quality recommendations will enhance fans' continued trust and support." (E2)

Meanwhile, informant E3 pointed out that internet celebrities' good reputation on social media further enhances the credibility of their past performance:

"Internet celebrities' good reputation among other consumers also increases their credibility." (E3)

Thus, maintaining good past performance is not only key to attracting consumers but also one of the core standards for maintaining advertiser cooperation relationships. Familiarity emerges as another key factor of trustworthiness discovered in research objective 1 analysis. Research findings show that familiarity can significantly enhance consumers' acceptance of internet celebrities' information and strengthen their trust in recommended content. Informant A3 provided vivid evidence:

"Fans' consistent evaluation of me is 'Guangdong people's Dianping.' The works I shoot involve self-funded authentic experiences to find valuable food. I shoot food from a self-immersive perspective. I believe I am an ordinary consumer just like my fans." (A3)

Informant A4 further demonstrated:

"Actually, many fans' evaluations of me stem from my promotion or recommendation of their hometowns. Many fans' evaluation of me is: 'Working away from home, seeing hometown recommendations feels so warm.'" (A4)

Informant E1 emphasized:

"Internet celebrities' personal style, consistent content style, and platform activity enhance consumers' familiarity, which strengthens consumers' acceptance of and trust in their content." (E1)

Informant E2, approaching from dimensions of expression methods, personality

presentation, and interactive communication, pointed out that familiarity formation is a comprehensive and dynamic process:

"Personalized expression, personal storytelling, interactive communication, and other methods can help consumers better understand and develop familiarity, thereby establishing trust." (E2)

Therefore, if internet celebrities wish to continuously enhance trustworthiness, they must persist in long-term stable content output and maintain high levels of fan interaction to strengthen familiarity and trust relationships.

The above findings from the analysis suggest that trustworthiness is the primary factor in the gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model constructed in this research. The trustworthiness of internet celebrities directly affects information dissemination effectiveness and consumers' trust in recommended content. The qualities of an internet celebrity include honesty, sincerity, integrity, and authenticity. In this case, the success of gastronomic tourism short videos depends not only on the content but also on the visual presentation, which enhances the information quality of the video through authentic, professional, and structurally lucid visual expression. This makes recommended content more persuasive, enhancing consumers' trust.

In addition, consumer evaluations of the trustworthiness of internet celebrities are contingent upon the quality of past recommendations and reviews. Reputation is a key external factor in measuring internet celebrity reliability, with past controversies, conduct, and values directly affecting their credibility. A positive fan reputation helps enhance internet celebrity credibility, while a negative fan reputation may trigger trust

crises. Therefore, trustworthiness is the primary factor in the gastronomic tourism social media internet celebrity model.

The findings of this study, analyzed by combining objectives 1 and 2, further confirm that attractiveness as a significant factor that constitutes the credibility of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities is manifested in multiple aspects of consumer relationships in its content presentations, researchers categorized attractiveness into four elements: physical appeal, user-generated videos, personality, social responsibility. Following the previous analysis of physical appeal in this study, in the analysis of objective 1, fans and consumers consider physical appearance to be the primary sensory stimulus, capable of immediately attracting consumers' attention and establishing the foundation for subsequent content dissemination. In contrast, Advertisers emphasize that internet celebrities' dress-up style is an equally significant factor influencing attractiveness. Appropriate make-up, attire, and overall visual style can enhance the aesthetics of the content, thereby improving brand communication.

Although physical appearance and style plays a certain role in short-term attractiveness, its impact on long-term credibility is relatively limited. This indicates that in an environment of increasingly rich short video content, the importance of appearance is being diminished, while factors that better reflect personality and professional value are gradually becoming the core of attractiveness. Therefore, although appearance can attract attention in the short term, its contribution to long-term influence is relatively limited. Informants widely acknowledged the central role of personal charm in

attracting followers, considering it the primary sub-factor of physical appeal and key to internet celebrities' fan attraction. As informants A2, A3, and A4 stated:

"Personal charm is definitely necessary; it is the premise for attracting fans. However, a beautiful image is only an advantage, not the main factor." (A2)

"A good image is indeed an advantage, but comparatively, personal charm plays a larger role." (A3)

"Personal charm of internet celebrities certainly has a significant effect on attracting fans, but image is not important in short-video creation. Sustained attractiveness comes more from demonstrating personal charm." (A4)

Informants E3 further noted:

"Appearance, temperament, and personality can attract consumer attention, but physical attractiveness is actually secondary." (E3)

This indicates that personal charm isn't merely about external characteristics, but rather long-term attractiveness established through unique personality, communication style, and content expression. Besides, in the analyses of research objective 1, it was found that fans and consumers perceived persona as an inner attractiveness of personal charisma, which guides consumers' perception and interest in products. Informants A4 support this view:

"Character setting is crucial. The personality and style of internet celebrities can leave a profound impression on fans and help consumers quickly identify them." (A4)

Thus, persona not only enhances internet celebrities' recognizability but also promotes fan brand loyalty and eWOM communication. Notably, voice characteristics are also an important component of physical appeal, especially in enhancing internet celebrities' recognizability and immersion in short video communication. Based on their personal experience, informants A2 and A4 noted:

"My voice characteristics attracted many fans. My work presentations are always

from the back, without showing my face, and this sense of mystery enhanced attractiveness." (A2)

"My voice characteristics are often discussed by fans, further enhancing their attention to me." (A4)

Thus, this indicates that voice, as a personalized characteristic, can become a unique strategy for internet celebrities to enhance attractiveness, especially in the highly fragmented social media environment. Furthermore, among the constituent factors of attractiveness, User-generated videos' importance was highly recognized by informants. Informants A1 and A4 pointed out:

"For fans in this domain, continuous and in-depth video content and genuine experience sharing are more important, with the image being a secondary factor." (A1)

" For attracting fans is the presentation of video content, most of the fans are attracted because of the effect of the content presentation or copywriting." (A4)

Informants E1, E2, and E3 also particularly emphasized that excellent content not only enhances internet celebrities' influence but also increases consumer trust:

"Internet celebrities need personalized, creative content to stand out." (E1)

"The richness, interest, and production quality of content are key. Consumers are more easily attracted to content with depth and insight." (E2, E3)

This demonstrates that user-generated videos play an irreplaceable role in enhancing internet celebrities' attractiveness and credibility. Therefore, continuously outputting high-quality content is a key strategy for enhancing attractiveness. In the informants' discussions, emotional value emerged as an indispensable factor in user-generated videos, enhancing trustworthiness by meeting fans' or consumers' emotional needs.

Informants A1, A2 and A3 explicitly emphasized:

"The content fans like usually contains emotional value, which is also a focus of my creation. I will think from the perspective of fans or consumers, create content around their needs and emotions, to better meet their expectations." (A1)

"It's worth noting the factor of emotional value. Emotional value is the knowledge and skill value provided to consumers or fans, value with benefits, and so on. Only by providing videos with valuable content can consumers or fans possibly follow you." (A2)

"Besides the visual, internet celebrities must be able to provide fans with sufficient emotional value. This will enhance attractiveness to fans." (A3)

Therefore, internet celebrities who provide high emotional value can not only enhance fan loyalty but also improve the effectiveness of eWOM communication. According to the analysis of research objectives 1 and 2, personality was identified as the core element of attractiveness. Personality includes character and attitudes, uniqueness, personal style, and affinity. Internet celebrities demonstrated friendly attitudes that effectively enhance consumers' trust and help fans feel valued through sincere interactions, thereby promoting the positive spread of eWOM. This finding also echoes the importance informants on moral character they believe that moral character and attitude are the core foundation of internet celebrities' credibility. Thus, internet celebrities need to focus on their moral standards to build positive public images if they want to establish long-term trust relationships.

Based on the analysis of objectives 1 and 2, uniqueness is an important factor in internet celebrities' personal brand building. Informants A1 and A3 unanimously believed:

"An internet celebrity's unique personality is a critical factor in credibility. An internet celebrity's image might not be perfect, but if they are cheerful and have a distinctive personality, such characteristics are often more popular." (A1)

"Unique personality, also called a unique personalized label, is a symbol easily identifiable when fans discuss in real life." (A3)

Uniqueness not only enhances internet celebrities' recognizability among fan groups

but also becomes a core driver of content distribution. Informants E1 mentioned that uniqueness, as an emotional connection bond, enables internet celebrities to create emotional resonance with consumers through their personalities, thereby consolidating their fan base. Informant E3 concluded:

"Internet celebrities' unique personality is the most important factor. Displaying unique personal style and charm makes consumers remember internet celebrities." (E3)

This shows that internet celebrities who want to stand out in the competitive social media environment need to shape distinctive uniqueness to enhance their influence. In this case, personal style plays an important role in shaping personality and promoting fan interaction. The findings of the analysis in objective 2 indicate that humor is another key personality trait of personal style. This view was supported by academic informants E1 and E3:

"The key is their unique style, such as those who are especially humorous and witty, or have their own artistic and refined style, while others are passionate and enthusiastic." (E1)

"Aspects like humorous language expression, passionate live streaming atmosphere, and highly interactive approaches are sources of internet celebrity appeal." (E3)

Therefore, internet celebrities need to shape unique styles based on their characteristics to attract different types of consumers. Moreover, according to the analysis of objective 2, advertisers choose internet celebrities who can demonstrate affinity through natural interactions. Affinity is considered an essential component of internet celebrities' personality, as it can shorten the psychological distance with fans and enhance the trust foundation of brand cooperation. Noteworthy, social responsibility has been an essential factor that cannot be ignored when studying the attractiveness of internet

celebrity (Kim and Kim, 2022). Social responsibility is a core role in shaping the public image of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities and in enhancing consumer trust. Social responsibility includes system of values, public welfare, after-sales guarantee, sense of social responsibility. System of values, as the primary aspect of social responsibility, permeate internet celebrities' content creation and public image, directly affecting consumer or fan trust. Informant A3 emphasizes:

"Internet storytelling focuses on personal values, relating to personal moral qualities and how to express internet events." (A3)

This means that the attractiveness of internet celebrities depends not only on their visual image and content format, but more fundamentally stems from their consistent and positive values. This view is supported by informants E1 and E3:

"Maintaining consistency in values, statements, and behaviors is key, which helps establish a stable and reliable personal brand." (E1)

"Internet celebrities who advocate healthy, environmentally friendly, and cultural heritage values are more likely to gain consumer recognition." (E3)

Thus, internet celebrities strengthen brand warmth and further consolidate fan loyalty through content dissemination that aligns with consumer values. Nevertheless, public welfare behavior reinforces internet celebrities' social image, further enhancing their attractiveness. Informants A1 and A4 agree:

"The sense of social responsibility is also an important factor in enhancing an internet celebrity's credibility. Whether it's responsibility to consumers during brand collaborations or active participation in public welfare activities, these actions will bring a more positive image and directly impact consumer trust." (A1)

"Participating in public welfare activities is not only about fulfilling social responsibility but also communicates a positive image and deepens fans' and consumers' trust in internet celebrities." (A4)

Informant A3 adds:

"Active participation in public welfare activities demonstrates personal responsibility as an internet practitioner. This is undoubtedly a win-win behavior." (A3)

This indicates that internet celebrities' active participation in public welfare activities can enhance their credibility while promoting brand communication. In addition, an after-sales guarantee is also considered a manifestation of responsibility for internet celebrities' attractiveness, particularly crucial in product promotion scenarios.

Informant E2 further emphasizes:

"Quality assurance and after-sales service are key to maintaining long-term trust. If problems occur in after-sales service or quality guarantee, consumers often attribute responsibility to the internet celebrity, thereby affecting their long-term reputation." (E2)

This shows that an after-sales guarantee not only involves direct consumer interests but is also an important guarantee for internet celebrities to maintain long-term credibility. Therefore, after-sales guarantee is not only a protection mechanism for consumer rights but also becomes an important component of internet celebrity attractiveness. Sense of social responsibility is an important manifestation of internet celebrities' overall social image, directly affecting their attractiveness. This view is supported by academicians (E2, E3):

"Internet celebrities should possess a certain sense of social responsibility. For example, they can use their influence to advocate meaningful social issues, such as environmental protection and public welfare." (E2)

"Social responsibility awareness is one of the factors influencing credibility. For instance, focusing on environmental protection and supporting public welfare." (E3)

These views indicate that internet celebrities can not only demonstrate their sense of responsibility but also enhance consumer identification and emotional connection with their content by advocating socially meaningful issues. Therefore, social responsibility

plays a key role in enhancing internet celebrities' attractiveness, both conveying a positive image and strengthening consumers' emotional identification and long-term stickiness.

The above findings on attractiveness indicate that it enhances audience acceptance of information and plays a positive role in brand identity and communication. Notably, unlike traditional appearance-based attractiveness, this study's gastronomic tourism social media internet celebrity model focuses on content attractiveness. Content attractiveness not only influences internet celebrities' follower base but also determines the sustainability of their influence. Although physical appeal is considered the primary factor of attractiveness, internet celebrities should demonstrate authentic personality and infectiousness rather than merely relying on appearance. In this case, personal charm establishment is equally crucial; internet celebrities can enhance celebrity charisma and increase follower loyalty by crafting specific personas, such as "public welfare agricultural supporter" or "single female lifestyle promoter." The resultant affinity facilitates the reduction of psychological distance between internet celebrities and their followers, thereby further augmenting perceived credibility.

Most importantly, user-generated videos are a significant source of attractiveness; creative content can enhance consumer stickiness, while the originality and thoughtfulness of short videos determine long-term follower retention. Although appearance has some impact on short-term attractiveness, research results show that appearance has limited influence on long-term credibility. With technological

empowerment, personalized expression and content quality are gradually replacing appearance as core attractiveness factors. Personality is another important element in the attractiveness of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities. Research results show that moral character and attitude is the cornerstone of internet celebrity personality. Consumers tend to trust internet celebrities who follow moral norms and demonstrate honest behavior, while internet celebrity credibility significantly decreases when they engage in false advertising or unethical behavior.

Meanwhile, uniqueness is a key factor for internet celebrities to stand out. Internet celebrities' personality characteristics, such as sense of humor, language style, and values, can enhance their recognition and increase follower stickiness. Therefore, internet celebrity needs to clearly define their personality tags and create personal brands through differentiation. However, personal style further affects internet celebrity credibility and follower interaction. Internet celebrities who are humorous, enthusiastic, or infectious are more likely to gain consumer favor and increase consumer participation. Therefore, internet celebrity needs to create styles suitable for their target consumer based on their characteristics to enhance content attractiveness.

This study also demonstrates that social responsibility is an important aspect of internet celebrity attractiveness, particularly in the gastronomic tourism, where it not only shapes internet celebrities' public image but also directly influences consumer trust and brand identification. When internet celebrities can demonstrate positive values, such as integrity, cultural identity, and positive social attitudes, they can not only

enhance consumer trust but also shape their long-term stable personal brand image. Especially in the short video platform communication environment, consumers pay more attention to whether internet celebrities meet socially expected moral standards. What is more, public welfare is an important way for internet celebrities to fulfill social responsibilities and enhance their social image. Participating in public welfare activities not only shapes a positive public image but also further deepens emotional connections between fans and internet celebrities. When gastronomic tourism social media internet celebrities actively participate in public welfare matters such as food safety, environmental protection, and local culture promotion, they can effectively enhance their influence and credibility.

The research results also show that after-sales support, as part of social responsibility, directly relates to consumer rights protection. Internet celebrities' sense of responsibility when recommending products, especially attention to product quality and after-sales service, is an important factor affecting their credibility. If recommended products have quality issues and lack after-sales support, consumers often reduce their trust in that internet celebrity. Thus, protecting consumer rights is not only a manifestation of internet celebrity responsibility but also concerns their long-term brand sustainability. Overall, internet celebrities' attractiveness stems not only from physical appeal but also depends on their content strategy, emotional expression, and brand-building approach. User-generated video, personality and social responsibility are key to shaping long-term attractiveness, while emotional value and affinity play important roles in enhancing fan interaction and trust. Therefore,

attractiveness serves as the second factor of the gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model.

In this research, expertise played a relatively minor role in constructing the gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model. According to the analytical findings of research objectives 1 and 2, in short videos, internet celebrities no longer require expert identity or professional certification, and their credibility relies more on the comprehensive demonstration of personal abilities. This view is supported by Djafarova and Trofimenko (2019), who found that audiences did not expect internet celebrities to possess formal qualifications or professional expertise. Rather, informants valued competence, defined as relevant experience and the ability to effectively convey information. Therefore, the concept of expertise can no longer explain the effectiveness of internet celebrities in short video transmission and should be replaced by the broader concept of ability.

This study suggests that in the constructed model, expertise should no longer be established as a separate dimension, but its connotations should be integrated into ability. In social media, communicators' ability is an important factor influencing their credibility and impact. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) emphasized in the Two-step Flow Theory that opinion leaders can influence the masses primarily through their ability performance in social networks, rather than merely traditional expertise. According to the integrated analytical findings of research objectives 1 and 2, internet celebrities' ability influences their credibility in the gastronomic tourism more than expertise.

Therefore, researchers divided internet celebrities' ability into four elements: proficiency, consumer stickiness, communication skills and visual storytelling.

Proficiency as an element in the ability refers to the internet celebrity's practical experience, technical abilities, and production skills demonstrated in their content creation. According to Tanha (2020), while the term expertise is often used in credibility models, most social media consumers prefer the concept of proficiency when evaluating internet celebrities. Practical experience is widely regarded as the core source of internet celebrities' ability, rather than academic background or authoritative qualifications. Informants A3 and A4 mentioned when sharing their experiences:

"My experience was accumulated through shooting food short videos, including filming techniques, visual presentation, and character dubbing." (A3)

"My experience comes from each travel and real-life stories, which also requires accumulating copywriting and filming skills." (A4)

This practice-based expertise received unanimous support from informant E3:

"Internet celebrities' expertise is primarily demonstrated through abilities and experience, especially in gastronomic tourism domains." (E3)

This demonstrates that proficiency has been replaced by experience-based ability in practice. Internet celebrities' credibility is built on their content creation abilities and real experiences, rather than whether they possess expert titles or academic credentials. Based on the analysis of research objective 1, advertisers unanimously believe that internet celebrities need not be experts in specific fields but only need to possess certain practical experience and knowledge. Knowledge transmission skills have more

communicative value than professional knowledge. What matters more for internet celebrities is whether they can convey information in ways consumers understand, rather than professional qualifications themselves. Informants A2 and E2 further supported this viewpoint:

"Although internet celebrities need not be experts, they must have sufficient knowledge about gastronomic tourism." (A2)

"In knowledge-transmission-focused domains like gastronomic tourism, internet celebrities' expertise is extremely important for credibility." (E2)

This demonstrates that internet celebrities' proficiency should be redefined as ability rather than mastery of deep professional knowledge. This further reinforces ability's dominant position in the model. Furthermore, expert identity may affect transmission effectiveness. Informant A3 and E1 particularly emphasized:

"Expertise in the creation process is just the icing on the cake. Internet celebrities need not be experts. Many domain experts appear disconnected in short videos, potentially diminishing consumer interest." (A3)

"Internet celebrities can explain product principles using simple language while combining industry experience and information to enhance credibility." (E1)

Moreover, the analyses of objectives 1 and 2 indicate that technical and production skills are specific manifestations of expertise. Particularly video editing skills and filming skills. Of these, Filming techniques are considered a concrete manifestation of expertise, directly affecting short video quality and communication effectiveness.

Informants A1 and A2 believe:

"Expertise is not necessarily reflected in academic background, but in mastering filming techniques and demonstrating a love for life." (A1)

"Filming techniques and video editing are essential skills for internet celebrities." (A2)

Therefore, technical and production skills are regarded as indispensable abilities for internet celebrities. These skills are not only directly reflected in content production standards but are particularly concentrated in their product demonstration capabilities. Beyond proficiency, Research objective 2 results emphasize that consumer stickiness is one of the important criteria for advertisers to evaluate internet celebrities, manifested in four aspects: storytelling creation, topic generation, fan stickiness, and interaction data. It represents the ability of internet celebrities, to attract and maintain audience attention, engagement, and loyalty. Further analysis indicates that planning and operational ability is the key pathway to enhancing consumer stickiness. Excellent planning and operational ability enable internet celebrities to accurately grasp platform recommendation mechanisms, trending patterns, and audience preferences, thereby improving content systematicity and attractiveness. This perspective received unanimous support from both academicians and internet celebrities. Informants E1, E2, and E3 emphasized:

"Data analysis abilities and cross-platform marketing abilities can help internet celebrities precisely position consumers and optimize strategies." (E1)

"Planning abilities can integrate professional knowledge into short-form video content, enhancing credibility." (E2)

"In the highly competitive short-form video platforms, internet celebrities with innovative abilities are more likely to attract consumers, whether in content form, filming techniques, or interaction methods." (E3)

Informants A1 and A2 also emphasized the role of planning and operational capability in enhancing stickiness:

"I consider creative directions based on trending recommendations from social media platforms. For instance, what trending patterns and topics are currently popular become sources of inspiration for my creation." (A1)

"During the short video creation process, I pay particular attention to interaction with each location and the people there. They appreciate my promotion of their cities and culinary culture." (A2)

Consumer stickiness is not only an important manifestation of the capability dimension but also a direct result of the effectiveness of planning and operational ability. Through strategic content planning and operation, internet celebrities continuously enhance interaction frequency, emotional resonance, and value identification with fans, thereby consolidating their competitive advantages in the market. Moreover, through analysis of research objectives 1 and 2, consumers, fans, and advertisers all emphasized the importance of communication skills in internet celebrities' credibility, specifically manifested in narrative expression, colloquial language, narrative style, personalized expression, and precise expression. Informants A1, A3, and A4 further pointed out:

"Whether it's language narration in front of the camera, or chatting, voiceover, or commentary, the quality of language expression directly affects the overall video quality and popularity." (A1)

"Expressing in Cantonese makes it easier for consumers in that region to understand and establish emotional connections." (A3)

"Language with a stronger sense of intimacy is more easily accepted, while also needing to pay attention to speaking rate, clarity, and attractiveness." (A4)

Additionally, informant E2 believed that language expression's infectiousness and style are important factors in building emotional connections:

"Vivid and imagery language can help consumers more intuitively feel the deliciousness of food and the unique travel experience." (E2)

Therefore, communication skills concern not only content communication effectiveness but also determine communication quality between internet celebrities and consumers. It's necessary for internet celebrities to have the ability to be expressive.

Simultaneously, in social media, visual storytelling has become one of the indispensable core abilities for internet celebrities, especially in short video-dominated gastronomic tourism. Based on the findings from the interviews with internet celebrities and academicians this study found that visual storytelling as a key ability for internet celebrities' successful transmission and trust establishment, particularly evident in short videos. Visual storytelling is primarily manifested in narrative structure, storytelling, and audiovisual presentation. Internet celebrities argue that knowledge constitutes the expertise of internet celebrities, although they do not consider systematic knowledge required for internet celebrities, the ability to perceive knowledge and organize information is necessary. Nevertheless, such knowledge predominantly manifests in copywriting creation. Therefore, copywriting creation is the prerequisite for internet celebrities to achieve visual storytelling. Informants A1, A3, and A4 all emphasized the importance of copywriting:

"Copywriting can transform dry information into something interesting, thereby attracting consumer attention." (A1)

"To avoid repetition, we need to continuously optimize our copy library." (A3)

"Copywriting is the essence of short-form videos; its innovation degree determines whether the video can attract consumers and achieve dissemination." (A4)

Informant E3 further pointed out:

"Novel and interesting copywriting can enhance video's communication power." (E3)

This shows that copywriting creation is both the core of short video content creation and an effective tool for internet celebrities to attract consumers and increase consumer stickiness. Simultaneously, narrative structure provides clear frameworks and layers

for short video content, representing one of the basic abilities' internet celebrities need to master in content production. Informant A4 pointed out:

"The narrative structure of short-form videos is crucial, including video intro, content hierarchy, editing structure, and voiceover. These elements can enhance fan interest." (A4)

Therefore, internet celebrities must possess good narrative logic construction abilities when creating content to enhance video watchability and transmission effects. Additionally, storytelling, as the core content of visual storytelling ability, not only determines video appeal but also directly affects internet celebrities' credibility.

Informants A1 emphasize:

"Storytelling can make content richer, not just simply introducing a place or food, but by narrating the experience process to inspire consumer resonance." (A1)

These viewpoints received support from E1:

"Weaving gastronomic tourism experiences into compelling stories deepens consumer emotional resonance. This sense of identification will ultimately convert into consumer trust in the internet celebrity and their recommended goods." (E1)

Informants E2 and E3 also consistently emphasize the importance of storytelling:

"Internet celebrities enhance emotional connections by sharing their personal experiences or explaining stories behind food, helping consumers better understand and feel the content." (E2)

"The storytelling factor. Internet celebrities increase content appeal and depth by telling stories behind food tourism." (E3)

Therefore, gastronomic tourism internet celebrities need to build engaging stories to enhance short video authenticity and interactivity, thereby improving content dissemination power and influence. Nevertheless, audiovisual presentation, as the expression form of visual storytelling, enhances short video content credibility and

appeal through the collaborative work of multiple elements including copy, visuals, music, and editing. Informants A1, A2, A3, and A4 mention based on their experiences:

"Copywriting, visual presentation, music, and voiceover in short-form videos directly impact credibility." (A1)

"Short video voiceover consists of music and my voice. For shooting content, I combine selfies, photographer shots, and tourist shots." (A2)

"Short videos can be full of rich visual expressiveness, enhancing fan interest." (A3)

"Visual presentation innovation is also particularly important. Elements in the image need to be diverse and creative." (A4)

Informants E1, E2, and E3 also consistently believe that high-quality visual production ability is key to enhancing content immersion and transmission effects. For example, informant E1 points out:

"Creative visual effects and editing techniques make content more attractive; the sophistication of visual presentation directly affects consumers' sensory experience." (E1)

This view is supported by E2, who believes:

"High-quality visual effects cannot be ignored. Food tourism content needs to convey sensory experiences through visuals; exquisite photos and videos not only attract consumer attention but also enhance content authenticity and appeal." (E2)

Informant E3 further adds:

"Visual presentation factors. Exquisite images, unique shooting angles, and editing styles can improve video quality and appeal." (E3)

Therefore, gastronomic tourism internet celebrities need to focus on frame composition, color matching, editing style, and sound effect application to enhance short video visual expressiveness and improve consumer viewing experience. Visual storytelling is no longer merely content aesthetic expression but a key skill that must

be incorporated into internet celebrities' ability systems. It encompasses narrative structure design ability, story construction ability, and audiovisual presentation ability, playing decisive roles in enhancing audience immersion, strengthening transmission effects, and constructing credibility.

Based on the above analysis, the findings indicate that expertise holds relatively low importance in constructing gastronomic tourism internet celebrity models. Internet celebrities do not need to possess expert credentials or academic backgrounds; Expertise needs to be redefined in the new model and may even be replaced by more broadly defined ability. Proficiency serves as an important foundation for building trust and enhancing fan loyalty. Consumer stickiness guarantees the long-term success of internet celebrities. Data analysis capabilities, cross-platform marketing abilities, and innovative planning skills enable internet celebrities to precisely target audiences and optimize content strategies. Communication skills similarly exert significant influence on internet celebrity credibility. Clear, vivid, and compelling language can enhance audience comprehension and identification, improving the effectiveness of information transmission. On this basis, copywriting serves as the prerequisite for visual storytelling abilities and plays a decisive role in the dissemination effectiveness of short video content. Novel and engaging copy can enhance content attractiveness and communicability.

Research results demonstrate that visual storytelling plays a crucial role in the content dissemination of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities. Narrative structure,

audiovisual presentation, and storytelling collectively construct the communicative power of short videos and directly influence consumer trust in internet celebrities. Overall, internet celebrities' abilities have a greater influence on their credibility than expertise. From proficiency, planning and operational abilities, communication skills and visual storytelling, these factors collectively shape internet celebrities' market competitiveness and affect their recognition among fans. Therefore, the ability of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities has partially or completely replaced expertise, becoming the third factor in constructing the model.

In the process of constructing the gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model, consumer needs are independently categorized as a core factor, whose importance lies in not only directly shaping the orientation of internet celebrities' content production but also indirectly influencing audiences' credibility judgments of their content, thereby influencing eWOM transmission effectiveness and the formation of purchase intentions. According to the analysis findings of research objective 1, whether internet celebrities genuinely respond to consumers' real needs is one of the key criteria for measuring their credibility. Consumer needs are primarily manifested in two elements: personal needs and product price. Consumers' personal needs are primarily reflected in expectations for content personalization, empathetic, and daily life. Internet celebrities who can connect their content with fans' real lives, interests, and emotional needs are more likely to gain trust and favor, thereby enhancing their credibility. Informant A1 emphasized:

"I think from the perspective of fans or consumers, creating content around their

needs and emotions to better meet their expectations." (A1)

This not only reflects the user-centered strategy in content creation but also validates their keen insight into consumer psychology. Informant A3 emphasized the role of resonance:

"I am an ordinary consumer just like my fans. If I think this food is delicious, most ordinary consumers will agree with my opinion." (A3)

This type of self-positioning as an ordinary consumer reduces distance and enhances fans' trust and identification, reflecting the current trend of content de-elliptization on social media platforms. Informant A4 similarly noted:

"Each fan or consumer has different interests and attractions." (A4)

Accordingly, these perspectives on consumer needs are also supported by academicians. Informants E1 and E3 particularly emphasized:

"Consumers increasingly rely on content published by internet celebrities to obtain gastronomic tourism advice. They respond to consumers' rising consumption needs by optimizing interaction methods and improving service quality to consolidate their fan base." (E1)

"Consumer needs and interests constantly change, and internet celebrities need to timely adjust their content and style to meet audience needs." (E3)

This further confirms the foundational position of personal needs in internet celebrities' content strategies while pointing out the challenges faced by internet celebrities—consumer needs are not fixed but highly fluid, requiring internet celebrities to continuously update content strategies, expression methods, and interaction approaches. Therefore, consumers' personal needs determine whether internet celebrities can establish authentic trust relationships, thereby enhancing their communication effectiveness and commercial value on platforms. Beyond personal

needs, consumers' sensitivity to product price and authenticity expectations also constitutes an important component of their needs. In the current highly commercialized social media platform context, price information conveyed by internet celebrities when recommending products or services often directly affects consumers' trust and purchase intentions. Informant A2, drawing from personal creative experience, discussed an incident of being questioned about promoting excessively low prices:

"Actually, the questioning of my work content was about a restaurant's pricing issue; I filmed the price display board and on-site purchase experience as a response."
(A2)

This experience indicates that price authenticity has become a key criterion for fans to evaluate internet celebrities' credibility. Once information does not match reality, it easily triggers skepticism, thereby affecting internet celebrities' public trust and image. Therefore, in gastronomic tourism, product price is not merely a transactional element but also a trust signal. When internet celebrities can present authentic, reasonable price information and substantiate it with experiential processes, they more easily inspire consumer trust and purchase intentions.

Overall, consumer needs are independently established as the fourth core dimension for constructing the gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model because they are not only key factors influencing internet celebrities' credibility, eWOM transmission, and consumer purchase intentions, but also crucial driving forces for reconstructing relationships between consumers and content, and between consumers and platforms in short video social media. Consumers expect internet celebrities to provide content

that aligns with their interests and emotional experiences, thereby generating resonance and establishing identification. Meanwhile, consumers are extremely sensitive to favorable prices and authenticity, viewing these as key indicators for assessing whether internet celebrities are honest and trustworthy. Whether satisfying consumers' emotional resonance and interest preferences through personal needs or emphasizing authenticity, cost-effectiveness, and transparency through product price, both constitute core judgment criteria for contemporary consumers in their acceptance process of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities.

Compatibility is confirmed as the most critical dimension in constructing the gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model. Compatibility not only determines internet celebrities' credibility in specific promotional activities but also directly affects the sustainability of their eWOM transmission and marketing collaborations. In the findings of research objective 2, advertisers emphasized the importance of compatibility in choosing internet celebrities. Compatibility can be further divided into four elements: product compatibility, fans compatibility, style compatibility, fee and collaboration. Product compatibility is the primary consideration for advertisers. As demonstrated in previous chapter analyses, when internet celebrities' content and domains highly align with products, positive transmission effects are more easily achieved. This viewpoint is confirmed by internet celebrities. Informant A2 pointed out:

"Most products or services I collaborate with advertisers are strongly related to my creative domain. However, if they don't compatibility, there might be difficulties in topic selection." (A2)

Therefore, product compatibility is not only a prerequisite for successful collaboration but also a factor affecting eWOM and consumer conversion behavior. Beyond product compatibility, the alignment between internet celebrities and their fans is also fundamental for establishing credibility. Internet celebrities often adjust their content direction based on their fans' characteristics to enhance fan interest stickiness and emotional connection. Informant A1 pointed out:

"Although many female creators in the beauty category are also very successful, I have more male fans, so I continue creating works in the gastronomic tourism." (A1)

This indicates that internet celebrities' content strategies are not only driven by personal interests but also strongly influenced by fan demographics, meaning creators actively choose content domains that better align with fans' gender, preferences, and behavioral patterns to strengthen fan identification and sustained attention. Fans emotional resonance cannot be ignored. This point is also fully reflected in brand collaborations. Evidence from informant A2's case:

"Why did the 'Meijian' plum wine brand choose this? Because it belongs to a brand with a predominantly female customer base. The brand wanted to use female power to highlight the brand image." (A2)

This shows that when choosing collaboration partners, brands do not only value traffic or communication skills more attention to the alignment between internet celebrities and target consumer groups in terms of gender, emotional tone, and lifestyle. Academicians further emphasized the role of fans compatibility in credibility.

Informant E3 emphasized:

"Compatibility is a very important factor. Internet celebrities with higher matching to consumer needs and fan interests are more likely to gain trust. For example, providing customized content for audiences of specific age groups and interests." (E3)

This demonstrates that the interest compatibility of internet celebrities' recommended content is one of consumers' core concerns; only when content reaches consumers' genuine interest points can effective eWOM transmission be achieved. These findings are supported by academicians. Informants E1 and E2 emphasized:

"In terms of compatibility, internet celebrities' deep understanding and unique insights into gastronomic tourism, highly matching consumer or fan interests, make their recommended content more aligned with consumer needs, enhancing consumer recognition of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities." (E1)

"Internet celebrities must be responsible for the quality of products or services they promote. If they continuously recommend poor-quality products or those that cannot meet fan expectations, fan trust will rapidly diminish." (E2)

Therefore, compatibility depends not only on whether products themselves match but also relies on high alignment with fan demographics, emotional resonance, precise delivery of interest content, and authentic responses to fans expectations. Additionally, when internet celebrities' personal styles align with fans' life experiences and value orientations, they more easily inspire emotional identification and long-term attention.

From creators' perspectives, personal style often represents natural extensions of creators' own personalities. Informant A1 mentioned:

"My travel short video shooting is closely related to my personality characteristics. I have strong social abilities, so I like shooting short videos outside and interacting with various groups of people." (A1)

This authenticity not only enhances content naturalness but also helps establish psychological connections with specific fans groups. Meanwhile, informant A4 emphasized that personal style should possess differentiation and recognizability to stand out in platforms with intense persona competition:

"On social media platforms, greater image contrast can achieve higher

attractiveness. Fans prefer internet celebrities' styles to have multiple types: intimate, bold, passionate. I think internet celebrities' style is very important. Internet celebrities should create memorable points for fans or consumers. The style characteristics reflected by established character settings can enhance compatibility with fans." (A4)

Academicians affirmed this viewpoint. Informant E1 pointed out:

"I believe that on social media platforms like TikTok, internet celebrities' credibility not only stems from their professional knowledge but is also influenced by the compatibility between consumers or fans and their personal style." (E1)

In the analysis of research objective 2, it was found that fee and collaboration also constitute an indispensable component of compatibility. Advertisers tend to choose internet celebrities with high cost-effectiveness and stable content for long-term collaboration to ensure marketing return on investment. In other words, internet celebrities with long-term content stability and reasonable fees are more likely to gain advertiser favor. If internet celebrities blindly cater to brands and accept orders without screening, their authenticity and credibility will be reduced. This viewpoint was also echoed by academicians. Informant E2 pointed out:

"Internet celebrities must be responsible for the quality of products or services they promote. If they continuously recommend poor-quality products or those that cannot meet fan expectations, fan trust will rapidly diminish." (E2)

Notably, brand selection and collaboration transparency are also important dimensions affecting consumer trust. From internet celebrities' perspectives, tension between commercialization and style unity also exists. Informant A1 admitted:

"I chose gastronomic tourism for content creation because it has more collaboration brands and merchants, enabling me to earn more living expenses, which is important." (A1)

However, some internet celebrities hold critical attitudes toward industry conditions.

Informant A3 pointed out:

"Actually, many gastronomic tourism internet celebrities gain profits through paid store visits. I believe that as long as interests exist in this process, such short video creation cannot be authentic." (A3)

Therefore, fee and collaboration are not only collaboration considerations under commercial logic but also key factors affecting consumer trust and brand communication effectiveness. Advertisers hope to achieve communication goals within budget, internet celebrities need to find balance between profitability and authenticity, and consumer trust often depends on internet celebrities' screening standards for collaboration partners and transparent expression of collaboration motivations.

Based on the above findings, compatibility constitutes the most critical and final dimension of the gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model. When products recommended by internet celebrities highly align with their content themes, creative styles, and professional domains, they can significantly enhance information naturalness and persuasiveness. Conversely, inappropriate collaborations may lead consumers to question internet celebrities' recommendation motivations, believing they promote solely for commercial interests, thereby weakening their credibility. Additionally, coordination and consistency among product presentation methods, price levels, and user experiences jointly determine consumer acceptance of recommended content. Consumers tend to trust creators who demonstrate authentic experiences and value alignment in their recommendations.

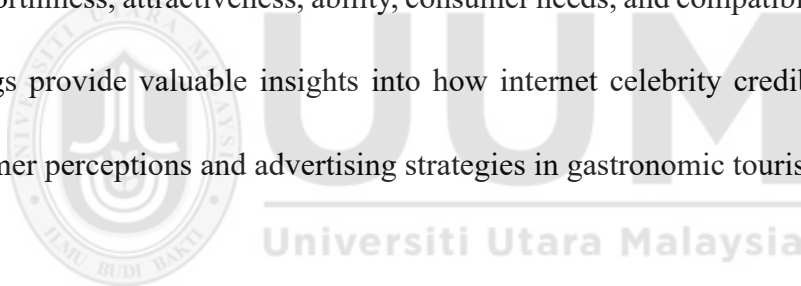
Meanwhile, fan compatibility determines whether content can precisely reach target

consumers. Internet celebrities need to customize content strategies based on their fans' interest preferences, gender composition, and emotional appeals to enhance consumer stickiness and identification. When internet celebrities' recommended content resonates with fans' lifestyles or emotional experiences, it more easily inspires emotional connections and forms sustained word-of-mouth transmission. Simultaneously, internet celebrities' personal style compatibility is also crucial. Only by establishing coordinated relationships among communication methods, expression styles, industry backgrounds, and target consumer groups can brand information credibility and communication effectiveness be enhanced.

Moreover, fee and collaboration reflect the actual collaboration foundation between brands and internet celebrities. High cost-effectiveness, content stability, and reasonable fee standards are important indicators for advertisers to evaluate collaboration relationship sustainability. If internet celebrities frequently change collaboration categories and have unstable content styles, it easily weakens brand trust and fan stickiness. Therefore, compatibility is not merely a static alignment relationship but a dynamic bilateral selection mechanism that is a key prerequisite for establishing long-term collaboration and effective eWOM transmission. In summary, as the final dimension of the model, compatibility not only serves to integrate and coordinate other factors but also directly affects internet celebrities' credibility, making it an indispensable consolidating element.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented and discussed the findings following the sequence of the research objectives. These factors include trustworthiness reflected in information quality and review quantity, attractiveness associated with personality, ability demonstrated through communication skills, and the crucial impact of consumer needs. In addition, the criteria advertisers highlighted when choosing internet celebrities were outlined, highlighting trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise, and compatibility as decisive considerations. Furthermore, the chapter proposed essential dimensions for constructing a model of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities, encompassing trustworthiness, attractiveness, ability, consumer needs, and compatibility. Overall, the findings provide valuable insights into how internet celebrity credibility influences consumer perceptions and advertising strategies in gastronomic tourism.



CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter focuses on summarizing the research objectives, namely the influence of the credibility of internet celebrities on eWOM towards fans and consumers' purchase intentions, advertisers' criteria for choosing internet celebrities, and suggesting a gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model. On this foundation, this chapter revisits the research questions and objectives, emphasizes the theoretical approaches and practical significance of this study, and identifies the study's limitations and directions for future research.

5.2 Research Objective 1: **Research Objective 1: To investigate the influence of the credibility of internet celebrities on eWOM towards fans and consumer purchase intentions**

Research objective 1 focuses on investigating the influence of internet celebrities' credibility on eWOM towards fans and consumer purchase intentions. This objective was addressed through thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with consumers and fans, as well as content analysis of user comments. The results show that key elements such as information quality, review quantity, and consumer needs exert the greatest influence on fans towards eWOM and consumer purchase intention, followed by communication skills and personality. Among these, information quality and review quantity within the trustworthiness dimension are confirmed as critical factors

influencing consumer trust and eWOM dissemination, significantly enhancing the persuasiveness of eWOM.

Simultaneously, personality within the attractiveness dimension and communication skills within the expertise dimension serve as auxiliary factors that effectively strengthen emotional connections and interaction levels between consumers and internet celebrities, thereby indirectly promoting purchase intention to a certain extent. Additionally, internet celebrities past recommendation records and user-generated videos are found to provide positive support for enhancing fans towards eWOM and consumer purchase intention. Concurrently, consumers' personal needs and price sensitivity are confirmed as important factors influencing their purchasing decisions, further highlighting the significant position of consumer needs in short video platforms. Notably, the research reveals that physical appeal and professional domain knowledge levels have relatively limited influence on short videos. This indicates that consumers on short video platforms are more concerned with content practicality, authenticity, and alignment with their personal needs, rather than internet celebrities' external appearance or authoritative status.

In conclusion, this research emphasizes the core role of trustworthy and authentic internet celebrities in enhancing consumers' information screening abilities and strengthening rational consumption decision-making. This finding holds significant practical implications for understanding eWOM dissemination in social media short videos and for brands' development of internet celebrity collaboration strategies.

5.3 Research Objective 2: To explore the criteria the advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities

In relation to research objective 2, this study explores the criteria advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities. This objective was fulfilled through in-depth interviews with advertisers. The findings indicate that advertisers' primary criteria include trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise and compatibility. Trustworthiness emphasizes the qualities of honesty and integrity and past performance of internet celebrities, namely whether they have consistently attracted and maintained the attention and interaction of their fans, rather than merely focusing on follower counts or one-time traffic. Regarding attractiveness, advertisers emphasize that physical appeal is not a determining factor; instead, they place greater emphasis on whether internet celebrities possess distinctive, unique personalities and sustainable content appeal. It is noteworthy that expert status is not a choice criterion for advertisers, who instead focus on internet celebrities' professional attitude, consumer stickiness, filming skills, communication skills, qualifications and experience at the comprehensive quality level. These abilities are considered the foundation for achieving effective brand communication and high-quality content output.

Furthermore, compatibility has become another core criterion for advertiser consideration, particularly emphasizing whether the products promoted by internet celebrities align highly with their fan base needs, brand image, and market positioning, thereby ensuring maximum communication effectiveness. Overall, advertisers tend to favor internet celebrities who can establish authentic emotional connections with

consumers, maintain stable content quality, and possess long-term collaboration potential, rather than relying solely on external attractiveness or superficial authoritative endorsement. These insights help advertisers refine their choice criteria by focusing on the sustained performance and fan engagement quality thereby improving the accuracy and return on investment of brand marketing.

5.4 Research Objective 3: To suggest a gastronomic tourism model of the internet celebrity

Regarding research objective 3, this study suggested a gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model, developed from the findings of the first two objectives and additional in-depth interviews with internet celebrities and academicians. The suggested model includes five dimensions: trustworthiness, attractiveness, ability, consumer needs, and compatibility. Among these, trustworthiness is prominently manifested through information quality and review quantity, which serve as important criteria for judging content trustworthiness. Attractiveness differs from the physical appeal emphasized in previous research; this study emphasizes content attractiveness and personality, namely whether internet celebrities possess uniqueness and affinity. User-generated videos and social responsibility enhance the celebrity's attractiveness by increasing consumer engagement, perceived authenticity, and credibility. Ability replaces expertise, specifically encompassing internet celebrities' proficiency, consumer stickiness, communication skills, and visual storytelling abilities, reflecting the comprehensive requirements of short video creation.

This research newly introduces two dimensions, consumer needs and compatibility, which constitute key innovations distinguishing this model from previous research. Consumer needs refer to fans' or consumers' personal needs when watching short videos and their sensitivity to product price, while compatibility refers to the consistency among multiple factors including product attributes, target fan groups, internet celebrity style, and fee collaboration with brand partners. This dimension emphasizes the synergistic adaptability among internet celebrities, content, and brands.

Overall, these five dimensions collectively construct the internet celebrity model for the gastronomic tourism short video domain, revealing how credibility functions under the influence of different factors in this field. If internet celebrities follow this model in their short video creation process, they can not only gain consumer trust more effectively but also become advertisers' preferred collaboration partners more easily, thereby enhancing their commercial value and market influence.

5.5 Implications of this Study

This study makes multiple contributions in theoretical, practical, industry, and methodological aspects. Theoretically, the research reveals how internet celebrity credibility influences eWOM and purchase intentions through information quality, review quantity, and consumer needs, enriching social media theory. Practically, it provides guidance for internet celebrities, consumers, advertisers, and social media platforms, helping optimize content strategies, choose criteria, and platform recommendation mechanisms. At the industry level, the research emphasizes the

importance of long-term credibility and interaction quality, offering new perspectives for brand marketing and digital advertising. Methodologically, it combines in-depth interviews with content analysis and employs NVivo for systematic analysis, providing a referenceable methodological framework for social media internet celebrity research. The following sections describe the specific contributions of this study in each of these aspects.

5.5.1 Implications for the Methodology

This study offers methodological contributions by integrating in-depth interviews with qualitative content analysis within the context of social media research, thereby enriching the methodological repertoire in the study of media management (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Schreier, 2012). Prior research in the field of internet celebrity and influencer marketing has predominantly adopted quantitative methods, such as surveys and experiments, to examine consumer behavior, purchase intention, and attitude formation (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020). While such approaches are valuable for testing theoretical relationships, they often suffer from limitations regarding ecological validity, as they rely on self-reported measures detached from the real digital environment and fail to capture the complex, interactive, and multimodal nature of content on social media platforms (Eisend, 2018). Moreover, previous studies have typically focused on the consumer perspective, neglecting the viewpoints of other key stakeholders such as content creators, advertisers, and industry experts, which restricts a comprehensive understanding of the internet celebrity (Duffy & Pooley, 2017).

This study emphasizes a qualitative, multi-source, and multi-perspective approach that enables a more comprehensive understanding of the communicative processes shaping internet celebrity credibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The methodological innovation lies in its inclusion of both self-reported subjective data (via stakeholder interviews) and publicly observable digital traces (through content and visual analysis of TikTok and RED), thereby operationalizing a cross-level analytical strategy that bridges perception and practice. This dual strategy operationalizes a cross-level analytical framework that bridges personal perceptions with observable digital behavior, addressing calls by Schreier (2012) for multi-dimensional qualitative research and by Jewitt (2012) for greater attention to visual and multimodal elements in digital media studies.

What is more, by constructing a context-specific credibility analysis framework for internet celebrities, the study not only tailors existing theoretical models to fit the unique affordances of short-video platforms but also provides a transferable methodological template that can be adapted to other social media platforms. Such methodological transferability is a crucial criterion for qualitative rigor, as highlighted by Lincoln and Guba (1985), who argued that transferability enhances the utility and impact of qualitative research beyond its immediate setting.

Importantly, this study's methodological approach emphasizes interdisciplinary integration—communication theory, marketing perspectives, and sociological insight—which sets a precedent for future research aiming to explore complex, multi-

stakeholder ecosystems within the digital economy. This interdisciplinary turn responds to calls by Denzin and Lincoln (2011) for qualitative researchers to engage with the challenges posed by dynamic, technology-mediated environments. The adaptability and scalability of this approach suggest that future research could apply this methodological configuration to other short video based social media platforms or internet celebrity-driven digital marketing environments, particularly those emphasizing user-generated visual content and interactive audience participation, aligning with recent discussions on methodological innovation in social media research (Lupton, 2020).

5.5.2 Implications for the Theory

This research extends the existing literature on the influence of social media internet celebrity credibility on eWOM and consumer purchase intentions by proposing a new gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model. Specifically, the theoretical contributions include several aspects: In the first instance, this study deepens the application of the SCM in social media environments. While existing research has primarily explored internet celebrity impact based on the SCM, there lack of systematic investigation into the composition and impact pathways of internet celebrity credibility in social media environments. Combining characteristics of the gastronomic tourism sector, this research suggests five key dimensions: trustworthiness, attractiveness, ability, consumer needs and compatibility, expanding the applicability of credibility theory in social media environments. This expansion addresses the limitations in existing literature regarding internet celebrity impact

research in social media contexts.

Next, in the formation of eWOM, internet celebrities serve not only as information carriers but directly affect fans' content trust and interaction behaviors. This study finds that internet celebrity credibility determines both fans' intention to participate in eWOM dissemination and profoundly impacts consumer purchase intentions. While existing research has primarily focused on written eWOM information dissemination between consumers, this study further expands the scope of eWOM, emphasizing the role of visual eWOM dissemination in enhancing content credibility and influencing consumer behavior. This research clarifies how credibility influences consumer purchase intention through factors such as information quality, review quantity, and consumer needs. By revealing the impact pathway of credibility on purchase intentions, this study further enriches the theoretical framework of eWOM research.

Ultimately, while advertisers' criteria for choosing internet celebrities have long received attention, previous research has largely focused on surface metrics such as fan size and interaction rates. This study finds that when screening internet celebrities, advertisers primarily consider personality, compatibility, past performance, and consumer stickiness, while physical appeal and expert status are not decisive criteria. These findings not only provide advertisers with a new evaluation framework but also offer new empirical support for credibility theory, expanding research dimensions of internet celebrity-advertiser relationships in social media environments.

5.5.3 Implications for the Gastronomic Tourism Internet Celebrity Model

This study suggested a gastronomic tourism internet celebrity model that not only theoretically enhances the understanding of the media management field but also has significant practice and industry application value. The model includes five dimensions: trustworthiness, attractiveness, ability, consumer needs and compatibility, which are instructive for multiple stakeholders. For consumers or fans, understanding the composition of internet celebrity credibility and its influence on eWOM helps improve information discrimination ability, avoid misleading content, and make more rational consumption decisions. Meanwhile, this study also indicates that consumer interaction and feedback play important roles in shaping internet celebrity credibility, thus encouraging consumers to actively participate in discussions and evaluations to jointly create a healthier social media environment.

For internet celebrities, this study provides systematic recommendations emphasizing the importance of five key dimensions in social media environments. Particularly in the gastronomic tourism sector, internet celebrities can effectively enhance fans' loyalty and increase their eWOM influence by continuously optimizing trustworthiness, attractiveness, ability, consumer needs and compatibility. However, brands and advertisers have long relied on fans count and short-term interaction data as primary metrics when selecting internet celebrities. Through empirical analysis, this study suggests core criteria for screening internet celebrities, namely trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise and compatibility. Advertisers can adjust their internet celebrity choice strategies, accordingly, focusing on long-term performance and

follower interaction quality to improve brand collaboration return on investment. Moreover, social media platforms play a crucial role in content distribution and recommendation mechanisms for eWOM dissemination. This study shows that high-quality user-generated content can effectively enhance internet celebrity credibility and subsequently affect fans' eWOM dissemination. Therefore, platforms can optimize algorithms to prioritize recommending content from internet celebrities with high information quality and strong credibility, thereby increasing consumer or fan trust and platform stickiness.

Today's gastronomic tourism industry heavily relies on social media marketing, with internet celebrities becoming important factors in brand communication and consumer purchase intention. Consumers increasingly rely on eWOM information in purchase intention processes, with internet celebrity credibility having a decisive impact on purchase intentions. This study reveals how credibility influences consumer trust and emphasizes the importance of factors such as information quality, review quantity, communication skills, personality and consumer needs. The industry can optimize internet celebrity management mechanisms, accordingly, reduce false advertising, and improve consumer trust in eWOM. Meanwhile, regulatory bodies can utilize these findings to develop stricter social media advertising standards to improve transparency and standardization of internet celebrity marketing.

In addition, this study provides theoretical support for industry standardization. As internet celebrity marketing becomes more prevalent, collaboration standards between

advertisers and internet celebrities continue to evolve. The study's conclusions can guide advertisers in developing social media marketing strategies, more precisely matching internet celebrities with target consumers to optimize communication effects. The suggested gastronomic tourism social media internet celebrity model provides the theoretical basis for establishing more reasonable internet celebrity evaluation standards in the industry.

5.6 Limitation of the Study

This study employed qualitative methods to thoroughly investigate the influence of internet celebrity credibility on eWOM and purchase intentions, as well as advertisers' considerations in internet celebrity choice criteria. However, this research has several limitations. First, the interview and content analysis samples were primarily concentrated in the gastronomic tourism sectors; therefore, the research findings may not be fully applicable to internet celebrities in other domains (such as fitness, technology, or education). Second, the data was sourced from TikTok and RED platforms, not encompassing the influence of other social media platforms (such as Kuaishou, WeChat Video, etc.), which may limit the applicability of research findings across different platforms. Finally, this study focused on internet celebrities who primarily use short-form videos as their content format, without conducting an in-depth analysis of internet celebrities who utilize other forms of expression (such as live streaming or image-text formats) and their influence.

5.7 Future Research

Based on the limitations of this study, future research could be enhanced in several aspects. Initially, considering the diversity of social media internet celebrities, the research scope should be expanded to include internet celebrities from other domains (such as fitness, education, or technology) to validate the cross-domain applicability of the proposed model. Subsequently, future studies should explore the regulatory role of different social media platforms (such as Kuaishou, WeChat Video, etc.) to comprehensively reveal the mechanism by which platform characteristics influence eWOM dissemination. For instance, researchers could compare how algorithm designs, content policies, and community cultures shape the credibility of internet celebrities' content. In addition, large-scale surveys could be employed to capture more generalizable patterns of consumer perceptions and behaviors, thereby enhancing the external validity of findings and enabling statistical testing of the proposed conceptual model.

Ultimately, future research could compare internet celebrities using different content formats (such as image-text format, short videos, and live streaming) to analyze in depth the relationship between content presentation forms and consumer purchase intentions and eWOM dissemination. Finally, it is recommended that future research further investigate differences in consumer perceptions of internet celebrity credibility across different cultural backgrounds, revealing the moderating role of cultural variables in eWOM dissemination and purchase intentions, thereby providing theoretical support for globalized internet celebrity marketing strategies.

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Appendix A
Interview Invitation Letter



Wang, Zilong

(Matric No: 905987)

School of Multimedia Technology and Communication

Universiti Utara Malaysia

06010 UUM Sintok

Kedah Darul Aman

MALAYSIA

Tel: 086-13676913268

Email: wang_zilong@ahsgs.uum.edu.my

Interviewee Name:

Address:

Date:

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Research Project Title:

GASTRONOMIC TOURISM: CREDIBILITY INFLUENCE OF INTERNET CELEBRITY VIA ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (eWOM)

I am taking a research project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Media Management at the School of Multimedia Technology and Communication under the supervision of Dr. Noor Aziah binti Abdullah and Dr. Aselawati Binti Che Ab Adziz.

I am conducting interviews for this research project, focused primarily on investigate the influence of the credibility of internet celebrities on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) towards fans and consumer purchase intentions, with an emphasis on exploring the criteria the advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities. It will also suggest a gastronomic tourism model of the internet celebrity that applies to social media.

Therefore, I would like to invite the fans and consumers who use TikTok and RED and internet celebrities to be part of this research. Relevant brand advertisers and academicians in the media field will also be invited. Participation in this research is on an entirely voluntary basis. The participant may withdraw from this research project without giving a reason. He/she can also have the option to withdraw any input that may identify him or her.

The interview consists of a set of questions that will take approximately 45 minutes online. The participant will be required to answer questions regarding his/her experience with TikTok and RED as a consumer engagement or internet celebrity. The respondent will also be asked for some demographic information.

The participant's permission will be asked to tape-record the interview session, to enable me to accurately document the information the participant conveys. If any time during the interview, the participant wishes to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, he/she is free to do so. All data collected in the interview is confidential.

After this research project, a summary of the results and associated reports will be made available should the participant request it. The final result of the interview will be reported in a dissertation to be submitted for Mr. Wang, Zilong's PhD degree, and as appropriate, in papers for presentation at conferences or publication in journals.

Should you require any clarification and/or additional information, please do not hesitate to inform me at wang_zilong@ahsgs.uum.edu.my or by calling/text me at 086-13676913268.

To agree to participate in this research project, kindly contact the researcher at the above-mentioned contact information. The date, time, and venue of the interview will be set according to the participant's preference. The consent form will be signed by the participant before the interview session.

I would like to thank you in advance for your consideration to participate in this research project.

Thank you,

Yours sincerely,
Wang, Zilong

Appendix B
Consent to Participate in a Research Project Form



Title of the research: GASTRONOMIC TOURISM: CREDIBILITY INFLUENCE OF INTERNET CELEBRITY VIA ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (eWOM)

Investigator

Name: Wang, Zilong

School: School of Multimedia Technology and Communication

Tel: 086-13676913268

Email: wang_zilong@ahsgs.uum.edu.my

Supervisor

Name: Dr. Noor Aziah binti Abdullah

School: School of Multimedia Technology and Communication

Tel: +604 928 5872

Email: nooraziah@uum.edu.my

Co-supervisor

Name: Dr. Aselawati Binti Che Ab Adziz

School: School of Multimedia Technology and Communication

Tel: +604 928 5859

Email: aselawati@uum.edu.my

Dear participant,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research project. This interview will take approximately 45 minutes online. You will be required to answer questions regarding the gastronomic tourism: credibility influence of Internet celebrity via electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

Purpose of the Research Project

This study will focus primarily on investigating the influence of the credibility of internet celebrities on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) towards fans and consumer purchase intentions, with an emphasis on exploring the criteria the advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities. It will also suggest a gastronomic tourism model of the internet celebrity that applies to social media.

Ethical Concerns

All data collected in this interview is confidential and anonymous.

Your permission to tape-record this interview is required. The recorded interview will assist me with my data analysis. Please note that you are free to pause at any time during the interview and you can terminate the interview at any time.

Benefits Associated with Participation

There are no direct benefits to participating in this research project, but your input will provide important information regarding the gastronomic tourism: credibility influence of Internet celebrity via electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

The final results of the interview will be reported in a dissertation to be submitted for Mr. Wang, Zilong's PhD degree, and as appropriate, in papers for presentation at conferences or publication in journals.

Voluntary Consent by Participant

By signing below, you indicate that:

- o This study has been explained to you.
- o You have read this document, or it has been read to you.
- o Your questions about this research project have been answered.
- o You are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it.
- o You voluntarily agree to participate in the research entitled: GASTRONOMIC TOURISM: CREDIBILITY INFLUENCE OF INTERNET CELEBRITY VIA ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (eWOM)

Participant's Name:

Participant's signature:

Date:

Time:

Appendix C
Interview Protocol



Wang, Zilong
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
Universiti Utara Malaysia
Tel: 086-13676913268
wang_zilong@ahsgs.uum.edu.my

—
—
**Title of the research: GASTRONOMIC TOURISM: CREDIBILITY
INFLUENCE OF INTERNET CELEBRITY VIA ELECTRONIC WORD OF
MOUTH (eWOM)**



Date : _____ Time: _____ am/pm

Participant's Name:

Occupation :

Education :

Introduction

Dear Participant,
Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research project. This interview will take approximately 45 minutes online. You will be required to answer questions regarding the gastronomic tourism: credibility influence of Internet celebrity via electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

Purpose of the Research Project

This research will focus primarily on investigating the influence of the credibility of internet celebrities on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) towards fans and consumer purchase intentions, with an emphasis on exploring the criteria the advertisers consider when choosing internet celebrities. It will also suggest a gastronomic tourism model of the internet celebrity that applies to social media.

Ethical Concerns

All data collected in this interview is confidential and anonymous.

Your permission to tape-record this interview is required. The recorded interview will assist me with my data analysis. Please note that you are free to pause at any time during the interview and you can terminate the interview at any time.

Do you have further questions regarding the aim or procedure of this interview?

Benefits Associated with Participant

There are no direct benefits to participating in this research project, but your input will provide important information regarding the gastronomic tourism: credibility influence of Internet celebrity via electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

The final results of the interview will be reported in a dissertation to be submitted for Mr. Wang, Zilong's PhD degree, and as appropriate, in papers for presentation at conferences or publication in journals.

Your cooperation and generosity in participating in this study are highly valued and appreciated. Thank you,

Wang, Zilong
905987
PhD

Appendix D

Data Collection Letter for Research



Pusat Pengajian
Teknologi Multimedia & Komunikasi
SCHOOL OF MULTIMEDIA TECHNOLOGY & COMMUNICATION

Universiti Utara Malaysia

School of Multimedia Technology and Communication (SMMTC)
UUM College of Arts and Sciences
Universiti Utara Malaysia
06010 UUM Sintok, Kedah Darul Aman, Malaysia

Phone: 604-928 5800/5801/5802/5803
Fax: 604-928-5804 Email: mmtc@uum.edu.my

DATA COLLECTION LETTER FOR RESEARCH

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam

DATA COLLECTION FOR PROJECT PAPER/THESIS

This study is to explore the influence of the credibility of Internet celebrities on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and purchase intentions. Your contribution to this interview will help us to understand the role of internet celebrities in consumer behavior. By doing this interview, it is hoped that this could bring new knowledge for the industry and for the academic field.

Your valuable knowledge and experience toward these current industrial practices have significantly contributed to the academic field of knowledge. Therefore, we are highly appreciated if you can contribute some of your valuable time to discuss the issue during the interview session at your earliest convenience. Your response will be kept strictly confidential.

Thank you for the participation and time contribution. Once again, your support is valuable to this study and the industry. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any inquiries.

Best regards,

Wang, Zilong (researcher)
Email: wang_zilong@ahsgs.uum.edu.my
Tel: 60-129813910

Dr. Noor Aziah binti Abdullah
Email: nooraziah@uum.edu.my

DR. NOOR AZIAH BINTI ABDULLAH
Senior Lecturer
School of Multimedia Technology and Communication (SMMTC)
UUM College of Arts and Sciences
Universiti Utara Malaysia

Appendix E

Interview Questions for Consumers

Main Questions:

1. Have you heard of eWOM? Do you know what it is about?
2. Regarding eWOM advertisements, what factors would attract you to search for the ad?
3. When reviewing advertisements that use internet celebrities, what factors or elements influence you?
4. Which characteristics of internet celebrities influence your purchasing decisions?
5. Can you give examples of gastronomic tourism advertisements that you like or prefer? Why do you feel this way?
6. So far, how many times have you been attracted by a recommendation or review from an internet celebrity that led you to purchase a product or service? What was the recommended content? How much time did you spend browsing the recommendation?
7. For you, which is more important: the internet celebrity or the content of the advertisement?
8. Regarding gastronomic tourism, have you noticed any recent related advertisements?
9. When you browse gastronomic tourism advertisements, which elements or dimensions do you look at first?
10. When browsing eWOM advertisements, especially gastronomic tourism ads, what are your expectations?
11. Which type of online advertisement do you prefer: internet celebrity ads, testimonial ads, or other types of ads?
12. What criteria of an internet celebrity do you think would encourage consumers to develop purchase intentions for products or services?
13. What factors of internet celebrities influence trust in them? What is the most important factor determining the credibility of an internet celebrity?
14. If there were two advertisements, one featuring an internet celebrity and one featuring an expert, which one would you trust more and decide to purchase from?
15. How do you think internet celebrities influence the four factors of eWOM ads: information quality, review quantity, user-generated videos, and following trends?

Appendix F

Interview Questions for Fans

Main Questions:

1. Have you heard of eWOM? Do you know what it is about?
2. Regarding eWOM advertisements, what factors would attract you to search for the ad?
3. When reviewing advertisements that use internet celebrities, what factors or elements influence you?
4. Which characteristics of internet celebrities influence your decision to follow them?
5. Can you give examples of gastronomic tourism advertisements that you like or prefer? Why do you feel this way?
6. How do you decide to become a fan of an internet celebrity? Is it because of content, values, or other factors? As a fan, how does the internet celebrity influence your consumption behavior?
7. For you, which is more important: the internet celebrity or the content of the advertisement?
8. Regarding gastronomic tourism, have you noticed any recent related advertisements?
9. When you browse gastronomic tourism advertisements, which elements or dimensions do you look at first?
10. When browsing eWOM advertisements, especially gastronomic tourism ads, what are your expectations?
11. Which type of online advertisement do you prefer: internet celebrity ads, testimonial ads, or other types of ads?
12. What criteria of an internet celebrity do you think would encourage fans to follow and develop purchase intentions for products or services?
13. How do you judge the authenticity and reliability of an internet celebrity's recommendations?
14. What factors of internet celebrities influence trust in them? What is the most important factor determining the credibility of an internet celebrity?
15. If there were two advertisements, one featuring an internet celebrity and one featuring an expert, which one would you trust more and decide to purchase from?
16. How do you think internet celebrities influence the four factors of eWOM ads: information quality, review quantity, user-generated videos, and following trends?

Appendix G

Interview Questions for Internet Celebrity

Main Questions:

1. Please introduce your background and how you became an internet celebrity.
2. Why did you choose gastronomic tourism as your content creation niche?
3. What expertise and experience do you have in the gastronomic tourism field?
4. How do you ensure that the content you share is professional and accurate?
5. How do your fans evaluate your expertise? Do you believe expertise is more important on short-video platforms than on other platforms?
6. How do you view the importance of maintaining authenticity and trustworthiness in content creation?
7. Have you ever encountered situations where fans questioned the authenticity of your content? If so, how did you respond?
8. What do you believe are the best ways to enhance your fans' perception of your trustworthiness?
9. How important do you think your personal charm and image are in attracting fans?
10. What factors do you think most enhance fans' interest and engagement with your content?
11. On platforms like TikTok or RED, what factors do you believe uniquely impact your credibility?
12. Have you noticed any differences in fans' expectations of credibility on different platforms (such as TikTok or RED)? If so, what are they?
13. How do fans' immediate feedback (like comments and likes) influence your content creation and credibility building?
14. Besides attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise, what other factors do you believe significantly influence your credibility? Please describe these factors in detail. For example, do you think factors like frequency of interaction or content update speed are important?
15. What factors do you think most influence a gastronomic tourism internet celebrity's credibility? How do these factors compare to existing credibility factors?

Appendix H

Interview Questions for Advertisers

Main Questions:

1. Please briefly introduce your company and your position and responsibilities.
2. In your past collaborations with internet celebrities, what types of products or services were primarily involved?
3. When selecting an internet celebrity for collaboration, what main factors do you typically consider?
4. What characteristics or qualities of internet celebrities most influence your choice?
5. How do you assess the trustworthiness of an internet celebrity when making your selection?
6. How do you assess the attractiveness of an internet celebrity? How important is this factor in your choice?
7. How significant is expertise in your selection process? How do you evaluate the expertise of an internet celebrity?
8. How does interactivity factor into your selection criteria? How do you evaluate an internet celebrity's interaction with their fans?
9. What behaviors or characteristics of internet celebrities do you believe most enhance their credibility?
10. When selecting internet celebrities in the gastronomic tourism sector, are there any specific criteria or requirements you follow?
11. Do you adjust your selection criteria based on different social media platforms?
12. How much influence do transparency and public disclosure of collaborations have on your selection of internet celebrities?
13. How do you view the past record of internet celebrities? Do their previous collaborations and endorsements influence your decision?
14. Based on your experience, what core factors should be included in the credibility of gastronomic tourism internet celebrities?
15. How do you think these factors impact eWOM and purchase intentions? Please share real-life examples illustrating how a highly credible internet celebrity can influence eWOM and consumer purchase intentions.
16. What emerging trends or new standards do you foresee being important in selecting internet celebrities in the future?

Appendix I

Interview Questions for Academicians

Main Questions:



1. Could you briefly introduce your research area and professional background?
2. Have you researched or followed social media internet celebrity, especially in the gastronomic tourism sector?
3. How do you define internet celebrity credibility on social media platforms?
4. How do you think social media platforms affect the formation of internet celebrity credibility?
5. Are you familiar with the three traditional factors in credibility theory?
6. How do you think internet celebrity's demonstrate authenticity?
7. What do you consider to be the main manifestations of internet celebrity attractiveness?
8. How significant is expertise in internet celebrity credibility? How do internet celebrities demonstrate their expertise?
9. Have you identified any new factors becoming increasingly important for internet celebrities on short-video social media platforms? Please describe these factors specifically.
10. In the gastronomic tourism sector, what specific characteristics do you think enhance an internet celebrity's credibility?
11. Besides attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise, what other credibility factors do you think food and tourism internet celebrates need to possess?
12. How do you view the role of other credibility factors in forming internet celebrity credibility?
13. How do you think the establishment of credibility differs between gastronomic tourism internet celebrities and those in other fields?
14. What major challenges do you think internet celebrities face in maintaining their credibility?
15. What suggestions do you have for future research on gastronomic tourism internet celebrity credibility? What directions or unresolved issues are worth further exploration?

Appendix J

Intercoder for Content Analysis (Example)

The sample consists of 60 comments selected for content analysis.

These were drawn from 20 short videos (10 each from TikTok and RED), with 3 comments sampled from each video.

No.	Video Features	Theme	Subthemes	Comments	Yes	No	Comment
Video 1 Tik Tok	 <p>The internet celebrity explores a Lanzhou hand-pulled noodles restaurant in Gansu, showcasing the noodle-making process and pairing tips.</p>	Consumer needs	Product Price	The noodles they recommended are only 8 RMB for the noodles alone, with extra charge for beef. Don't just say the price is low, as working people can't afford it.			
		Feasibility	Distance	This beef noodle restaurant looks good. I thought it would be far away. Unexpectedly it's near my home, great to try it nearby!			
		Trustworthiness	Genuine feeling	You're amazing, thank you for promoting my hometown, Lanzhou. I've followed you for a long time and always liked you! Hope you eat and play well. I suggest Gansu Tourism Bureau give you a certificate.			
Video 2 Tik Tok	 <p>In Chengdu, the internet celebrity and a fan visit three breakfast spots, blending local with gastronomic hometown pride.</p>	Attractiveness	Image and appearance	Your outfit is very fashionable.			
		Personality	Similarity	This short video showed your deep love for Chengdu, local Chengdu people totally resonated with you.			
		Information quality	Quality of the content	Wow, each gastronomic has detailed explanation, the internet celebrity is serious about content introduction.			

Appendix K

Interrater for Thematic Analyses (Example)

Research objectives 1: To investigate the influence of the credibility of internet celebrities on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) towards fans and consumer purchase intention.

Informant: Consumers (6), Fans (6).

N O .	INFO RMA NTS	THEME	SUBTHEME	STATEMENT	YES	NO	COMMENTS
1	B3 B5 C1 C4 B3 C5	Attractiveness	Celebrity charisma Persona(inner) Image and appearance	<p>High-influence internet celebrities or celebrity endorsements. The advertisement uses popular internet celebrities or celebrities to promote products.</p> <p>Personal charm of internet celebrities. When I like an internet celebrity, I will buy products they recommend. This celebrity effect causes me to make impulse purchases.</p> <p>I think its personal traits, expensive ability, and personal charisma of the person recommending the ad that attract me to search for it.</p> <p>I would search based on the internet celebrity's persona.</p> <p>Whether their appearance is my preferred type. Whether their voice has uniqueness.</p> <p>The image and appearance of the internet celebrity will attract me to purchase.</p>			