

# The Impact of KOCs on the Online Shopping Decisions of Hanoi University of Industry Students

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## ABSTRACT

This study is conducted in the context of the rapid development of e-commerce, particularly the increasing role of KOCs in influencing online shopping behavior. The purpose of the study is to identify and evaluate the factors affecting students' online purchasing decisions influenced by KOCs. The study surveyed 330 students at Hanoi University of Industry and used SPSS software for data analysis. The results show that factors such as credibility, expertise, number of followers, product experience, style, incentives, and feedback from followers have a strong and positive impact on students' online purchasing decisions. These findings contribute to the body of research on consumer behavior in the rapidly growing e-commerce landscape.

**Keywords:** Key Opinion Consumer, E-commerce, Consumer Decision-Making, Students.

## INTRODUCTION

In the period of 2023-2024, e-commerce in Vietnam continues to grow rapidly, with a significant shift from traditional shopping to online shopping. E-commerce not only creates a convenient platform for consumers but also opens up opportunities for businesses to access the global market. According to Viet Nam Association for Logistics Manpower Development (2024), the transaction value of e-commerce in 2024 reached over 12 billion USD, with the number of online shoppers continuously increasing.

E-commerce plays a particularly important role for students, a group of consumers who are quick to adopt technology and use online platforms to purchase goods and services (Minh et al., 2025; Nursyirwan & Ardanninggar, 2020). Students are not only seeking convenience but also care about factors such as reasonable prices, promotions, and seamless shopping experiences. Online shopping has become an essential part of students' consumer habits, directly influencing their purchasing decisions and intention (Lubis et al., 2022).

KOC (Key Opinion Consumer) refers to consumers who have a significant influence on the purchasing decisions of online communities, particularly on digital platforms (Zhu & Ratasuk, 2024). Unlike KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders), KOCs are not celebrities or industry experts, but rather ordinary consumers who hold strong influence due to the authenticity and trustworthiness of their product reviews (Hoang et al., 2023). KOCs often share personal experiences with products or services they have used, which helps other consumers feel more confident before making a purchase decision (Phamthi et al., 2024). The influence of KOCs is not only derived from the number of followers they have, but also from the level of engagement and trust the community places in their shared content. In the context of the rapidly growing e-commerce landscape, KOCs have become an important element in marketing strategies, helping brands reach and build trust with younger consumer groups, especially students.

Previous studies have evaluated factors influencing online purchasing decisions on e-commerce platforms, such as the convenience of the platform, reasonable pricing, product quality, customer service, promotional offers, and user feedback (Gunawan et al., 2019; Kidane & Sharma, 2016; Komalasari et al., 2021). These factors have been shown to have a strong impact on online shopping behavior. Some studies have also highlighted the significant role KOCs play in influencing purchasing decisions, thanks to the authenticity and relatability they offer (Lubis et al., 2022; Zhu & Ratasuk, 2024). However, while the role of KOCs has been recognized in some

studies, no research has thoroughly analyzed the specific characteristics of KOCs, such as their level of trustworthiness, expertise, and actual influence on students' purchasing behavior. Furthermore, prior research has not fully addressed the specific context of university settings, where students have distinct consumer behaviors and needs that influence their online shopping decisions. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing body of research on KOCs and consumer behavior, particularly among students in the context of modern e-commerce.

This study aims to fill this gap in the literature by surveying the influence of KOCs on the online purchasing decisions of students at Hanoi University of Industry. The research closely examines the characteristics of KOCs and how they affect students' shopping behavior, thereby providing deeper insights into the role of KOCs in e-commerce, particularly among young consumers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The reliability of KOC (Key Opinion Consumer) is an important factor influencing their ability to impact consumer purchase decisions. In e-commerce, when consumers search for product information, they tend to rely on trustworthy sources to minimize risks and ensure that their purchasing decisions are well-informed (Nguyen, 2023). Research of Hoang et al. (2023) has shown that the reliability of those sharing product experiences, especially KOCs, can increase consumer trust and encourage them to complete an online purchase. For students, a consumer group that often seeks information through online platforms, they tend to rely on authentic reviews from other consumers. When KOCs are perceived as reliable, students are more likely to accept and base their purchasing decisions on the reviews and recommendations shared by KOCs. Numerous studies in marketing and consumer behavior have highlighted that trust in the source of information is a key element in building long-term relationships between consumers and brands or products.

Moreover, research of Phan and Nguyen (2024) also indicates that trust is not only derived from positive reviews but also from the transparency and honesty in how KOCs share their experiences. KOCs can build reliability through factors such as providing detailed information, responding to followers' questions, and not concealing the shortcomings of the products. It is this sincerity and trustworthiness that makes students feel more confident when choosing products recommended by KOCs.

**H1:** The reliability of KOC has a positive impact on the online purchasing decisions of students.

Unlike famous influencers or industry experts, KOCs are ordinary consumers who possess deep knowledge and understanding of the products or areas they share. This expertise can enhance the value of the reviews and recommendations made by KOCs, thus increasing consumer trust in the products they endorse (Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2021). Furthermore, the expertise of KOCs is also related to their ability to provide detailed and specialized information about products, helping students understand their options more clearly. When KOCs share academically or industry-based information, they can create a stronger connection with consumers who are seeking accuracy and trustworthiness in their purchasing process (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018).

For students, a consumer group that frequently seeks product information through online platforms, the expertise of KOCs can have a significant influence. When a KOC has in-depth knowledge about a product or service, students are more likely to feel confident in making product choices based on KOCs' recommendations. Research of Özbölük and Akdoğan (2022) shown that consumers tend to trust experts or individuals with deep knowledge when making purchasing decisions. The expertise of KOCs not only helps them provide accurate information but also helps address consumers' questions, thereby creating peace of mind and encouraging them to make online purchases.

**H2:** The Expertise of KOC Has a Positive Impact on the Online Purchasing Decisions of Students.

In the e-commerce environment, consumers not only seek information from trustworthy sources but also pay attention to the popularity and recognition of those providing the information. The number of followers is an indicator of KOC's influence, and when KOCs have a large following, they are often perceived as having a greater impact on consumer behavior (Hoang et al., 2023). When a KOC has many followers, it suggests that

the product they recommend has been trusted and used by many, which can motivate and encourage students to choose the product (Nguyen, 2023). Moreover, the number of followers can reflect the success in building a community around the KOC (Colpan & Jones, 2016). KOCs with a large following are more likely to foster trust and deeper connections with consumers. Students, who are more easily influenced by trends and community reviews, feel more confident when the product they wish to purchase is endorsed by a KOC with a significant number of followers.

**H3: The Number of Followers of KOC Has a Positive Impact on the Online Purchasing Decisions of Students.**

When a KOC shares their firsthand experience with a product, it helps consumers, particularly students, gain a clearer understanding of the product's quality and effectiveness (Nguyen, 2023). KOCs' experiences provide not only information about the product's features but also factors such as perceived value, ease of use, or any issues the product might encounter. This information helps students evaluate the product holistically and make more informed purchasing decisions. When KOCs share detailed experiences about products they have tried, students are likely to feel more confident in their purchasing decision (Hoang et al., 2023). Furthermore, positive experiences shared by KOCs can create a sense of satisfaction and encourage students to complete a purchase, while negative experiences may make them cautious and seek alternatives. Studies in consumer behavior have shown that firsthand experiences from consumers significantly influence their purchasing decisions, and when these experiences are shared by trusted sources like KOCs, the impact becomes even more powerful. KOCs, with their real-world product experiences, can help reduce the uncertainty and risks associated with students' purchasing decisions.

**H4: The Product Experience of KOC Has a Positive Impact on the Online Purchasing Decisions of Students.**

The style of KOC (Key Opinion Consumer) can be understood as the way they communicate, express themselves, and share their product experiences with their follower community. This style not only affects how consumers perceive the KOC but also influences their ability to persuade them to make a purchase (Hoang et al., 2023). A KOC with a friendly, humorous, sincere, or even serious and professional style can leave a strong impression on the target consumer group, especially students, and encourage them to trust the products the KOC recommends.

Research in the field of marketing has shown that emotional factors and the relationship between KOCs and consumers have a significant impact on purchasing decisions (Tadajewski, 2022). When a KOC has an engaging communication style that creates an emotional connection, students are more likely to be persuaded and encouraged to take action and make purchases. Specifically, students, who tend to seek connection and alignment in online interactions, are more easily influenced by the style of the KOC.

**H5: The Style of KOC Has a Positive Impact on the Online Purchasing Decisions of Students.**

The offers provided by KOCs (Key Opinion Consumers) may include promotions, discount codes, free gifts, or special discount programs that KOCs share with their follower community (Hantula & Bryant, 2005). These offers have a significant impact on consumer purchasing decisions, especially for students, a consumer group with limited budgets who frequently look for opportunities to save on online purchases. When KOCs introduce attractive offers, students tend to see this as a good opportunity to save money while still acquiring the products they desire (Salsafira & Trianasari, 2022). Moreover, the offers provided by KOCs can also create a sense of scarcity and urgency, encouraging immediate purchase behavior. Limited-time offers or products available in limited quantities can make students feel the need to act quickly in order to avoid missing out on the opportunity. This scarcity also increases the perceived value of the product in the eyes of consumers, thereby directly influencing students' purchasing decisions.

**H6: The Offers Provided by KOC Have a Positive Impact on the Online Purchasing Decisions of Students.**

Feedback from followers plays an important role in influencing the online purchasing decisions of students. When a KOC (Key Opinion Consumer) shares their experience or review of a product, followers often respond through comments, ratings, or questions. These responses not only show interest but also act as a form of validation, providing additional information, and building trust for potential buyers (Bone et al., 2017). Feedback

from followers also helps establish authenticity and transparency, which are crucial in e-commerce. A KOC with numerous positive responses from followers reinforce trust and increase their ability to influence consumers (Voorhees et al., 2014). Studies in marketing have shown that validation from the community (such as positive feedback) can increase confidence and reduce uncertainty in the purchasing decisions of consumers.

**H7: Feedback from Followers Has a Positive Impact on the Online Purchasing Decisions of Students.**

Conceptual model is presented below (see Fig. 1)

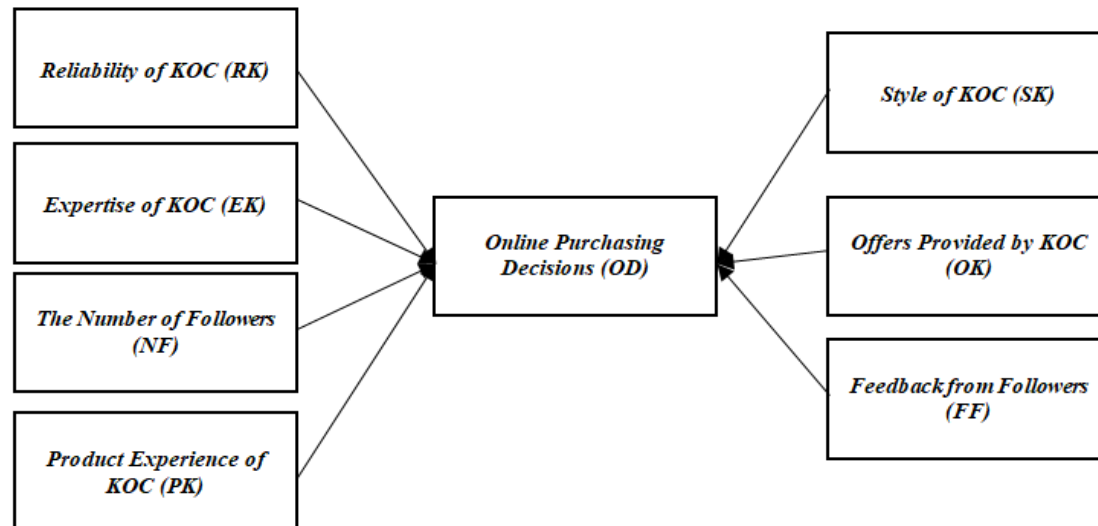


Figure 1. Conceptual model

## METHODOLOGY

### Data collection and sampling

This study employed a survey to collect primary data from university students at Hanoi University of Industry. The study was conducted from October 2024 to January 2025, resulting in 403 collected responses, of which 330 were deemed valid for analysis. This sampling method was chosen due to the accessibility of the participants, who were readily available and willing to participate in the survey.

The survey was administered online through a questionnaire distributed via email and social media platforms to ensure broad reach among the student population. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and Likert scale questions, which aimed to measure the perceptions and behaviors of students towards KOCs and online shopping decisions. The survey also focused on demographic information such as age, gender, and academic year to understand any potential differences in the responses based on these factors.

To ensure the validity of the data, the questionnaire was pre-tested with a small group of students prior to full-scale distribution. The feedback from the pre-test helped refine the questions to ensure clarity and accuracy. Following the collection, the data was reviewed to check for completeness and consistency before moving on to the next step of analysis. Table 1 presents the characteristics of sample.

Table 1. Characteristics of sample

Variables	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
N = 330			
Gender	Male	121	36.7

	Female	209	63.3
Year in school	First-year	42	12.7
	Second-year	165	50.0
	Third-year	88	26.7
	Fourth-year	35	10.6
Major	Foreign Languages - Tourism	40	12.1
	Mechanical Engineering - Automotive	21	6.4
	Electrical Engineering	15	4.5
	Electronics	23	7.0
	Information Technology	46	13.9
	Accounting - Auditing	54	16.4
	Business Administration	99	30.0
	Chemical Engineering	25	7.6
	Garment Technology and Fashion Design	7	2.1
E-commerce platform	Facebook	n/a	59.1
	Tiktok	n/a	88.7
	Instagram	n/a	29.6
	Youtube	n/a	42.5

Source: Authors

## Data analyst

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software. Firstly, Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess internal consistency, with a threshold of 0.7 to ensure scale reliability. Next, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted with  $KMO \geq 0.6$  and  $Sig. < 0.05$  to confirm sampling adequacy and factor validity. Items with factor loadings  $\geq 0.5$  were retained. Correlation analysis was then used to examine the strength and direction of relationships among variables. Multiple regression analysis followed to test the influence of independent variables on online purchase decisions. The model's effectiveness was evaluated using  $R^2$ , adjusted  $R^2$ , F-value ( $Sig. < 0.05$ ), Durbin-Watson ( $\approx 2$ ), and RMSEA  $< 0.08$ .

## RESULT

### Reliability and discriminant and convergent validity

Based on the table 2, the reliability and factor loadings for both independent and dependent variables were analyzed. The Cronbach's Alpha values for most factors range from 0.701 to 0.861, indicating a good level of internal consistency for the measurement items. Specifically, the highest Cronbach's Alpha values were observed for RK (0.858), OK (0.861), and FF (0.788), suggesting high reliability in these factors.

For the outer loadings, which indicate the correlation between each indicator and its associated construct, most values are above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.7, which may suggest that these items are less representative of their constructs.

Furthermore, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) values indicate the adequacy of the data for factor analysis. The dependent variable has a KMO value of 0.819, suggesting that the data is suitable for factor analysis, with a significant result (Sig = 0.000) and a variance of 70.043%. The independent variable has a KMO value of 0.686, which is still acceptable but lower than that of the dependent variable. The significance for the independent variable is also 0.000, with a variance of 69.324%, suggesting that the factors for both sets of variables are well-structured and fit for analysis.

Table 2. Reliability and discriminant and convergent validity

Factors	Cronbach's Alpha	Outer loadings	
		Independent variable	Dependent variable
RK1	0.858	0.852	
KR2		0.848	
RK3		0.832	
EK1	0.809	0.841	
EK2		0.803	
EK3		0.801	
NF1	0.702	0.778	
NF2		0.771	
NF3		0.505	
PK1	0.752	0.812	
PK2		0.719	
PK3		0.710	
SK1	0.824	0.791	
SK2		0.792	
SK3		0.795	
SP4		0.712	
OK1	0.861	0.748	
OK2		0.812	
OK3		0.796	
OK4		0.788	
OK5		0.607	
FF1	0.739	0.813	

FF2		0.788	
FF3		0.596	
OD1	0.761		0.743
OD2			0.778
OD3			0.686
Dependent variable	KMO = 0.819 Sig = 0.000 Df = 276 Variance = 70.043	<b>Independent variable</b>	KMO = 0.686 Sig = 0.000 Df = 3 Variance = 69.324

Source: Authors

### Hypotheses testing

The results of the hypothesis testing (See table 2) indicate that all proposed hypotheses are accepted, excepted the impact of SK on OD. Specifically, the relationship between RK (Trustworthiness) and OD (Online Purchase Decision) has a p-value of 0.000 and an estimate of 0.191, which is significant, leading to the acceptance of the hypothesis. Similarly, the relationship between EK (Expertise) and OD has a p-value of 0.000 and an estimate of 0.156, confirming the hypothesis. The relationship between NF (Number of Followers) and OD also shows a significant result, with a p-value of 0.000 and an estimate of 0.161, supporting the hypothesis. The PK (Product Knowledge) to OD relationship has a p-value of 0.006 and an estimate of 0.158, which is also significant and accepted. The relationship between SK (Style) and OD shows a negative estimate of -0.110, but with a p-value of 0.000, it is still accepted. Additionally, OK (Offers) has a positive estimate of 0.217 and a p-value of 0.000, confirming its impact on online purchase decisions. Lastly, FF (Feedback from Followers) shows a significant estimate of 0.176 with a p-value of 0.000, leading to the acceptance of the hypothesis.

Regarding the overall model fit, the  $R^2$  value is 0.645, indicating that 64.5% of the variation in the online purchase decision is explained by the model. The adjusted  $R^2$  is 0.675, suggesting that the model explains a substantial amount of variance when adjusted for the number of predictors. The F-value of 14.546 confirms the overall significance of the model. The Durbin-Watson value of 2.079 indicates no significant autocorrelation in the residuals, and the RMSEA value of 0.062 suggests a good model fit.

Table 3. Hypotheses testing

Hypotheses	P-values	Estimate	Decision
RK → OD	0.000	0.191	Accepted
EK → OD	0.000	0.156	Accepted
NF → OD	0.000	0.161	Accepted
PK → OD	0.006	0.158	Accepted
SK → OD	0.000	-0.110	Rejected
OK → OD	0.000	0.217	Accepted
FF → OD	0.000	0.176	Accepted

Model fit	$R^2 = 0.645$ Adjusted $R^2 = 0.675$ $F = 14.546$ Durbin-Watson = 2.079 RMSEA = 0.062
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Source: Authors

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

### Discussion

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the factors influencing the online purchase decisions of students at Hanoi University of Industry, especially in the context of Key Opinion Consumers (KOCs). The findings suggest that KOCs' trustworthiness, expertise, number of followers, product experience, style, offers, and feedback from followers all play significant roles in shaping the students' purchasing behavior. These results align with existing literature, which emphasizes the increasing importance of social influencers in e-commerce and consumer decision-making processes.

The positive impact of trustworthiness (RK) on purchase decisions highlights the critical role that credibility plays in online shopping. As students are often exposed to a plethora of product recommendations, they tend to rely on KOCs they perceive as trustworthy to guide their choices. This aligns with the principle that trust reduces perceived risk in online shopping, thereby encouraging purchase behavior. Similarly, the significant influence of expertise (EK) suggests that students value knowledgeable and well-informed KOCs when making decisions. This underscores the importance of KOCs providing accurate, reliable information about the products they promote, which is essential in a market where consumers are increasingly seeking expert opinions.

The number of followers (NF) was also found to significantly impact purchase decisions, further supporting the idea that social proof, or the influence of a large following, enhances the credibility and attractiveness of KOCs. This is consistent with social influence theory, which posits that individuals tend to follow the behavior of others, particularly when making decisions in uncertain or ambiguous situations.

Interestingly, the style of KOCs (SK) showed a negative relationship with online purchase decisions, although it was still significant. This could imply that while style is important to some degree, it is not as influential as other factors like trustworthiness or expertise. This suggests that students may prioritize practical and reliable information over personal style when making purchasing decisions, reflecting a more rational approach to online shopping among this demographic.

Offers (OK) emerged as a powerful factor influencing purchase decisions, indicating that students are highly motivated by discounts and promotions. This finding highlights the growing importance of promotional tactics in the digital marketplace, where KOCs can leverage special deals to entice their followers into making a purchase.

Feedback from followers (FF) was also found to positively impact purchase decisions, emphasizing the role of social validation. Positive feedback from other consumers provides reassurance and reinforces the credibility of KOCs, further driving purchasing behavior.

### Implication

The study also highlights the importance of expertise. KOCs who are seen as experts in a particular field are more likely to influence students' purchasing behavior. Marketers should look for influencers who offer knowledgeable insights into products, rather than just selecting KOCs based on popularity alone. This ensures

that students perceive the product recommendations as credible and valuable, leading to higher engagement and trust.

The significant impact of the number of followers suggests that students are influenced by the social proof that a large following provides. However, marketers should be cautious not to focus solely on follower count. The quality of interaction and relationship between the KOC and their followers is just as important. KOCs with genuine engagement and meaningful interactions are likely to have a more lasting impact on students' decisions.

The negative relationship between KOCs' style and purchasing decisions suggests that while personal style may play a role in brand building, students prioritize practical factors such as product reliability and expertise over aesthetic appeal. This finding can guide KOCs to focus on delivering value through their content rather than solely focusing on image or style.

The strong influence of offers and promotions on purchase decisions indicates that students are motivated by discounts and deals. For marketers, this presents an opportunity to incorporate promotional strategies, such as limited-time offers, special discounts, or giveaways, into their campaigns to incentivize purchases. Given the budget-conscious nature of the student demographic, such strategies could prove highly effective in driving sales.

Furthermore, feedback from followers emerged as a significant factor, emphasizing the role of social validation in online purchasing. Positive reviews and comments from followers can enhance a KOC's credibility, making students feel more confident in their purchasing decisions. Marketers should encourage positive interactions within the KOC's community and create opportunities for real users to share their experiences, as this social proof can serve as an effective tool in boosting conversions.

For students, the study suggests that while KOCs are an important source of product recommendations, they should remain critical consumers, evaluating KOCs based not only on their popularity but also on their trustworthiness and expertise. Understanding the impact of these factors on their purchasing decisions can help students make more informed and confident choices when shopping online. This awareness can also help students navigate the complexities of the digital marketplace, recognizing that influencers with a large following or appealing style may not always offer the best product recommendations.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has shown that Key Opinion Consumers (KOCs) play a significant role in influencing online purchasing decisions among students. The research indicates that factors such as trustworthiness, expertise, follower count, style, promotions, and feedback all have a positive impact on students' purchasing behavior. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how KOCs can affect consumer decisions in the context of e-commerce. The results offer valuable implications for marketers looking to enhance their strategies, as well as for students who can benefit from understanding the key factors influencing their purchasing decisions.

Future research could explore the influence of additional factors, such as product type, brand loyalty, and platform-specific dynamics, on students' purchasing decisions. Investigating the long-term impact of KOCs on brand loyalty and future purchasing behavior would also provide valuable insights. Additionally, examining cultural and demographic differences could reveal how various student groups respond to KOCs. Future studies may also focus on the ethical aspects of KOC marketing, such as transparency, and use experimental designs to establish clearer causal relationships between KOC characteristics and consumer behavior.

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