The influence of key opinion consumers in social e-commerce on consumers' purchase intention

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Abstract. This study focuses on social e-commerce, specifically the characteristics of social e-commerce Key Opinion Consumers (KOCs), and establishes a model based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory to explore the impact mechanism of KOC content marketing on consumers' purchase intentions. Through a questionnaire survey, 270 valid samples were collected. SPSS data analysis revealed that the authenticity, homogeneity, professionalism, visual cues of content, and interactivity of KOCs can effectively stimulate consumers' purchase intentions. The research outlines the influencing factors of KOC content marketing on consumers' purchase intentions from both the KOC subject and content perspectives, filling the gap in traditional influencer marketing that overlooks the uniqueness of KOC marketing. From a practical perspective, it is recommended that brands, when refining KOC operations, strengthen the real experience output of KOCs, the expression of homogeneity within communities, and the professional adaptation of content. At the same time, attention should be given to the visual effects and interaction frequency of KOC content to meet consumers' deep needs for authentic information and identity recognition.

Keywords: social e-commerce, KOC, Content marketing, purchase intention

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of social e-commerce, Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), who once played an important role in brand marketing due to their large fan base and strong traffic advantages, have seen a gradual weakening of their marketing effectiveness due to increased market competition, rising traffic costs, and a decline in consumer trust in advertisements. As an emerging marketing force, Key Opinion Consumers (KOCs) have begun to attract increasing attention from brands. Unlike KOLs, KOCs do not rely on a large fan base but instead influence consumer purchasing decisions by sharing personal consumption experiences and lifestyles, utilizing their social influence within smaller circles. KOCs typically maintain closer relationships with their audience, build trust through authentic and personalized content, and help consumers reduce information asymmetry, thus effectively driving brand communication. As social e-commerce continues to evolve, KOCs, as an important marketing force, serve as a more authentic and efficient communication bridge between brands and consumers. However, current brand media placements overlook the growing consumer demand for authentic content and fail to recognize the differentiated value of KOCs in influencing consumers. From this perspective, this study aims to explore the factors influencing consumers' purchase intentions through KOC content marketing on social e-commerce platforms, by analyzing the characteristics of KOCs and their content, to understand how KOCs influence consumer decision-making. The study aims to analyze how social e-commerce KOC content marketing can enhance consumers' purchase intentions and provide guidance for enterprises' KOC marketing practices in social e-commerce.

2. Theoretical foundation and research hypotheses

2.1. Social e-commerce KOCs and theoretical perspectives on consumers' purchase intentions

Social e-commerce, a new business model that combines social interaction and e-commerce [1], has attracted widespread attention in academia in recent years. Studies have shown that social e-commerce provides consumers with a more immersive shopping experience through the interactivity of social platforms and the convenience of e-commerce, effectively promoting brand communication [2]. In particular, platforms like Little Red Book and Douyin in China, through content creation and social

interaction, are becoming new frontiers for brand marketing. KOCs are consumers who interact with others by sharing information, raising brand awareness, and influencing consumer purchasing behavior. Compared to KOLs, KOCs' core advantage lies in their ability to build trust and emotional connections with consumers by sharing authentic consumption experiences and emotional content [3]. By relying on their influence within smaller circles, KOCs can effectively promote brand communication and consumer decision-making [4].

Although the excellent conversion rates of KOC content marketing have been recognized, there are still limitations in academic research on KOCs as an emerging concept, especially regarding the mechanisms through which KOC content influences consumer purchase intentions. Academia has yet to form a unified theoretical framework on this issue. Most studies simplify the comparison between the influence paths of KOCs and KOLs, without delving into the deeper effects of KOC content authenticity, emotional resonance, and other factors on consumer decision-making.

2.2. Research hypotheses

2.2.1. Authenticity

With the proliferation of commercial information in the internet era, consumers often purchase unsuitable products due to misplaced trust in marketing content, increasing the time and effort spent on shopping. KOC content based on authentic experience sharing allows fashion consumers to accurately understand the actual condition of products, such as clothing styles, fabrics, and wearing effects, which reduces consumers' concerns about "misleading" products. Liu's study on Generation Z consumers confirms that the more significant the authenticity of KOCs, the more it can stimulate the purchase intentions of rational consumers [5].

H1: The authenticity of social e-commerce KOCs positively influences the purchase intentions of fashion consumers.

2.2.2. Homogeneity

KOCs with similarities in physiological traits, aesthetic preferences, and consumption behavior norms can narrow the psychological distance with consumers. Liu's research based on the Little Red Book platform found that KOCs' similar characteristics to consumers, such as values and taste, positively affect purchase intentions [6]. For consumers, homogeneity creates a greater sense of identification and closeness, leading them to believe that KOC recommendations are based on personal experience rather than commercial interests. This homogeneity also means that KOCs better understand consumers' needs and pain points and can provide more accurate product suggestions to consumers with similar needs.

H2: The homogeneity of social e-commerce KOCs positively influences the purchase intentions of fashion consumers.

2.2.3. Professionalism

KOCs with strong professionalism, due to their focus on specific fields and long-term attention, possess unique aesthetic tastes or knowledge skills, deeply understand the consumer needs of their audience, and are able to provide valuable information to aid in decision-making, thus directly influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. Xiao's research on shoppers in WeChat groups found that the professionalism of opinion leaders influences consumers' purchase intentions [2].

H3: The professionalism of social e-commerce KOCs positively influences the purchase intentions of fashion consumers.

2.2.4. Interactivity

Li Zhe and others' research found that high interaction frequency in live-streaming sessions can create a sense of co-presence, respect, and social presence, making consumers feel relaxed and enhancing their purchase intentions [7]. In e-commerce contexts, where consumers cannot physically interact with products, frequent interaction with KOCs can share usage experiences and product evaluations more transparently. Furthermore, when consumers browse KOC content, high interaction and the following of other consumers can stimulate a herd mentality, accelerating the formation of purchase decisions.

H4: The interactivity of social e-commerce KOC content positively influences the purchase intentions of fashion consumers.

2.2.5. Visual Cues

Visual cues can provide consumers with intuitive impressions and emotional experiences. The various forms of KOC content on social e-commerce platforms can convey product information from different perspectives, authentically showcasing attributes such as product color, shape, and texture. Lin's study on key opinion leaders found that diverse ways of presenting information help consumers understand how well a product matches their own needs, positively influencing purchase intentions [8]. Davis and others' research shows that visual cues in online word-of-mouth can influence consumers' perceptions, ultimately affecting sales [9].

H5: The visual cues of social e-commerce KOC content positively influence the purchase intentions of fashion consumers.

3. Research design and data analysis

3.1. Data collection and sample characteristics

The survey for the KOC content marketing questionnaire was conducted from February 3, 2025, to March 12, 2025. The questionnaire was distributed via the online platform "Wenjuanxing". The first and second questions of the questionnaire served as screening questions to select fashion consumers who had experience using social e-commerce platforms and had previously been influenced by KOC-recommended content to form purchase intentions. To further control the quality of the questionnaire, screening questions were set in the middle of the survey to filter out responses with low accuracy. Additionally, questionnaires completed in less than 60 seconds were excluded to improve the accuracy of the responses. A total of 292 questionnaires were collected, of which 22 were discarded for being incomplete, incorrectly answered on the screening questions, or taking insufficient time to complete. This resulted in 270 valid responses, with a valid response rate of 92.5%.

The questionnaire design is shown in Appendix 1, and the reliability of the collected questionnaires is shown in Table 1. The Cronbach's α coefficient is 0.902, which is greater than 0.9, indicating high reliability of the research data. In addition, the KMO and Bartlett's test were conducted for validity verification. As shown in Table 2, the KMO value is 0.903, which is greater than 0.8, indicating that the research data is highly suitable for factor extraction.

Table 1. Cronbach's reliability analysis

Item Count	Sample Size	Cronbach's α Coefficient
27	270	0.902

Table 2. KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO Value		0.903
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approximate Chi-Square	2245.411
	df	351
	p-value	0.000

3.2. Descriptive statistical analysis of the sample

The research employed SPSS software for descriptive statistical analysis. The demographic characteristics and purchase statistics are presented in Table 3. The descriptive statistics of the sample cover five aspects: gender, age, occupation, education level, and monthly online shopping expenditure. In terms of gender, the proportion of females is significantly higher than that of males, accounting for 88.15% and 11.85%, respectively. The age distribution is mainly between 21-30 years (61.85%), followed by 31-40 years (35.56%), indicating that the sample consists primarily of young and middle-aged individuals. In terms of occupation, employees in enterprises and institutions account for the highest proportion (57.04%), followed by freelancers (31.85%). The highest education level in the sample is undergraduate (57.04%), followed by master's degree (37.78%), indicating a generally high level of education. In terms of monthly online shopping expenditure, 36.67% of the sample spends between 1001-3000 yuan, and 27.78% spends between 3001-5000 yuan, showing a medium to high level of online consumption. Overall, the sample consists mainly of young, highly educated females with strong online purchasing power.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the sample

Item	Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	32	11.85	11.85
	Female	238	88.15	100.00
Age	Under 18	1	0.37	0.37
	18-25	167	61.85	62.22
	26-30	96	35.56	97.78
	31-40	5	1.85	99.63
	Above 40	1	0.37	100.00

Table 3. Continued

	High School or Below	1	0.37	0.37
	Associate Degree	9	3.33	3.70
Education Level	Bachelor's Degree	154	57.04	60.74
	Master's Degree	102	37.78	98.52
	Doctorate Degree	4	1.48	100.00
	0-500 yuan	49	18.15	18.15
	500-1000 yuan	99	36.67	54.81
Monthly Online Shopping Expenditure	1000-2000 yuan	39	14.44	69.26
	2000-4000 yuan	75	27.78	97.04
	Above 4000 yuan	8	2.96	100.00
	Student	154	57.04	57.04
Occupation	Employee in Enterprises/Institutions	86	30.85	88.89
	Self-employed/Freelancer	30	11.11	100.00
	Less than 30 minutes	18	6.67	6.67
	0.5-1 hour	59	21.85	28.52
Daily Usage Time	1-3 hours	123	45.56	74.07
	Over 3 hours	77	28.52	102.59
Total		270	100	100

3.3. Descriptive statistical analysis of variables

This study uses SPSS software to perform a descriptive statistical analysis of all the dimensions in the research model, determining whether the data distribution conforms to normality. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of variables

Item	Sample Size	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median
Authenticity 1	270	1.000	5.000	3.896	0.643	4.000
Authenticity 2	270	1.000	5.000	3.844	0.812	4.000
Authenticity 3	270	1.000	5.000	3.207	0.999	3.000
Homogeneity 1	270	1.000	5.000	3.637	0.824	4.000
Homogeneity 2	270	1.000	5.000	3.663	0.925	4.000
Homogeneity 3	270	2.000	5.000	3.867	0.745	4.000
Homogeneity 4	270	1.000	5.000	3.841	0.805	4.000
Professionalism 1	270	1.000	5.000	3.807	0.776	4.000
Professionalism 2	270	1.000	5.000	4.100	0.786	4.000
Professionalism 3	270	1.000	5.000	4.004	0.797	4.000
Professionalism 4	270	1.000	5.000	4.081	0.777	4.000
Interactivity 1	270	1.000	5.000	3.663	0.757	4.000
Interactivity 2	270	1.000	5.000	3.996	0.829	4.000
Interactivity 3	270	1.000	5.000	3.770	0.813	4.000
Visual Cues 1	270	2.000	5.000	4.067	0.687	4.000
Visual Cues 2	270	2.000	5.000	4.100	0.747	4.000
Visual Cues 3	270	2.000	5.000	4.026	0.713	4.000
Purchase Intention 1	270	2.000	5.000	4.056	0.610	4.000

Table 4. Continued

| Purchase Intention 2 | 270 | 2.000 | 5.000 | 3.941 | 0.693 | 4.000 |
| Purchase Intention 3 | 270 | 1.000 | 5.000 | 3.604 | 0.926 | 4.000 |

From Table 4, it can be seen that the absolute values of the kurtosis for all dimensions are less than 10, and the absolute values of the skewness are less than 3. This indicates that while the sample data is not strictly normal, it is generally acceptable as being normally distributed, with all values falling within reasonable ranges, making it suitable for further analysis.

4. Research results

This study analyzes the direct impact of KOC characteristics on the purchase intention of fashion consumers using structural equation modeling. The results of the data analysis are presented in Table 5, and the findings are explained below.

The result for the impact of authenticity on purchase intention is $\beta=0.116$, $p<0.05$. The data shows that the authenticity of KOC content has a significant positive effect on purchase intention. This indicates that when consumers perceive the content shared by KOCs to stem from real experiences and is not manipulated by commercial interests, their purchase intention is greatly enhanced, thus validating Hypothesis H1. Authenticity, being the most influential factor among KOC characteristics affecting purchase intention, reflects the high value that fashion consumers place on authentic and objective information.

The result for the impact of homogeneity on purchase intention is $\beta=0.178$, $p<0.01$. The study shows that the similarity between KOCs and consumers in terms of physical traits, aesthetic preferences, and consumer behavior significantly positively impacts purchase intention, supporting Hypothesis H2. This similarity creates a sense of closeness, leading consumers to believe that products recommended by KOCs better meet their needs, thereby increasing their purchase inclination.

The result for the impact of professionalism on purchase intention is $\beta=0.452$, $p<0.001$. Data analysis shows that the professionalism of KOCs significantly positively impacts purchase intention, confirming Hypothesis H3. KOCs' professional knowledge and unique insights in specialized fields provide valuable decision-making references for consumers. When trusting and adopting KOC product recommendations, consumers also consider the professionalism, thus increasing the likelihood of purchase.

The result for the impact of interactivity on purchase intention is $\beta=0.242$, $p<0.05$. The study supports Hypothesis H4, indicating that the interactivity of KOC content significantly positively affects purchase intention. High-frequency interactions with KOCs enhance consumers' social presence, while also stimulating the herd mentality, encouraging consumers to form purchasing decisions.

The result for the impact of visual cues on purchase intention is $\beta=0.545$, $p<0.01$. Data analysis supports Hypothesis H5, indicating that visual cues in KOC content have a significant positive impact on purchase intention. High-quality visual presentation intuitively showcases product features, helping consumers evaluate how well a product meets their needs. This sensory stimulation triggers purchasing desire, which then translates into actual purchase behavior.

Table 5. Path coefficients and significance

Path	Unstandardized Path Coefficient	SE	CR	p	Standardized Path Coefficient	Hypothesis Testing
Authenticity → Purchase Intention	0.116	0.049	2.381	0.017	0.127	Accepted
Homogeneity → Purchase Intention	0.178	0.060	2.948	0.003	0.180	Accepted
Professionalism → Purchase Intention	0.452	0.055	8.211	0.000	0.452	Accepted
Interactivity → Purchase Intention	0.242	0.051	4.743	0.000	0.255	Accepted
Visual Cues → Purchase Intention	0.545	0.058	9.467	0.000	0.499	Accepted

5. Research conclusion

This study, based on the context of social e-commerce, reveals the influence mechanism of KOC (Key Opinion Consumer) content marketing on consumers' purchase intentions. The empirical results show that the authenticity, homogeneity, professionalism,

interactivity, and visual cues of KOC content marketing can promote the formation of consumers' purchase intentions. On a theoretical level, the research fills the gap in the field of influencer marketing in online social e-commerce by exploring the mechanism through which KOC affects consumer purchase intentions. On a practical level, the study suggests that brands should focus on differentiated marketing when refining KOC operations. They can improve marketing precision by constructing a multi-dimensional KOC screening system. It is essential to balance the authenticity of KOC content with commercial interests. KOC content should be based on real user experiences to maintain credibility and affinity, while also considering commercial goals. By employing reasonable commercial narratives, products can be integrated into consumers' life scenarios, actively encouraging KOCs to build immediate and sincere "real-user dialogues" with consumers.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Questionnaire design

Construct	Item Code	Item Content	Source
Authenticity	TR1	I believe the fashion product recommended by this KOC is based on personal experience.	
	TR2	I believe the content presented by this KOC is consistent with the actual condition of the fashion product.	
	TR3	I believe the content recommending the fashion product by this KOC is not influenced by commercial interests and is neither exaggerated nor misleading.	
Similarity	SI1	I believe this KOC's lifestyle is similar to mine.	
	SI2	I believe this KOC's body type is similar to mine.	
	SI3	I believe this KOC's fashion taste is similar to mine.	Moorman (1992); Meng F. (2012); Liu J. (2016); Gilly (1998); Tajfel (1986); Ohanina (1991); Liu F. J. (2020)
	SI4	I believe this KOC and I belong to the same fashion consumer group (e.g., Clean Fit style enthusiasts).	
Professionalism	PR1	I believe this KOC has a deep understanding of fashion trends and clothing knowledge.	
	PR2	I believe this KOC has good fashion appreciation and aesthetic ability.	
	PR3	I believe this KOC is skilled at selecting fashion products based on personal characteristics.	
	PR4	I believe this KOC has rich experience in purchasing/styling fashion products.	
Interactivity	IN1	I believe this KOC can build a good interactive relationship with me.	
	IN2	I believe this KOC's content stimulates my interest in interaction.	
	IN3	I believe this KOC creates a strong sense of community engagement.	
Purchase Intention	BI1	I am very likely to consider purchasing the fashion product recommended by this KOC.	
	BI2	I am willing to purchase the fashion product recommended by this KOC.	
	BI3	I would recommend the fashion product recommended by this KOC to others.	