

How online KOL endorsement on TikTok affects customer brand association and recall: evidence from Vietnam's F&B sector

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Abstract: The current study aims at exploring the interrelationships among KOL endorsement effectiveness, brand association, and brand recall. Moreover, the impacts of the three key KOL endorsement attributes (KOL commensurate with product, Brand Investment in KOL endorsement, KOL endorsement suspect to consumer culture.) on brand association and KOL endorsement effectiveness have also been examined. Partial least square-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) and Smart PLS 3.3.7 software have been adopted to conduct analysis and test hypotheses. Quantitative data was collected by using online structured questionnaire with 350 TikTok users who have experience in consuming F&B products advertised by online KOL. The findings suggested that KOL endorsement has a positive and significant impact on the brand association and recall. Then, brand associations also substantially impact brand recall of F&B brands. Brands are also suggested to invest in KOL endorsed marketing activities to increase brand associations, boost brand recall and buying intention. Besides, the brand must pay attention on selecting KOL who are appropriate for the consumer culture and the company's brand identity.

Keywords: Brand Association, Brand Recall, KOL endorsement effectiveness, KOL commensurate with product, Brand Investment in KOL endorsement, KOL endorsement suspect to consumer culture.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Food and Beverage (F&B) market in Vietnam is now increasingly competitive with the appearance of many local and global enterprises, hence, to sharpen competition weapons, local F & B enterprises must focus on building brand associations and recall in heart and mind of customer. KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) are whom have influences on a specific community such as experts in a particular field and often share their practical experiences on social networks (Turcotte et al., 2015; Carpenter & Sherbino, 2010). Through their knowledge or sharing, they are loved and trusted by many people. With the development of the Internet and social networks, online KOLs are in the media, such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube (Jersey, 2016). Recent years, the social network TikTok has been growing strongly in Vietnam, leading to the appearance of TikTokers.

Although online KOL do not have as many Followers as celebrities in showbiz but still have a significant impact on intention and habit of choosing F&B services and products. Consumers seem to see through reviews and experiential comments of these endorsed clips before deciding to buy or consumer any product. This model of using KOL on TikTok to promote for brands and products has created a new marketing direction for F&B companies in Vietnam. However, this model also has certain limitations stemming from the quality and reputation of the KOL or the risk that the KOL's judgment of product quality can affect brand associations and brand recall.

There has been much prior research on using celebrities in advertising (Karasiewicz & Kowalcuk, 2014) in which celebrities associate their image, reputation, and popularity to promote products and services then increasing awareness and buying intention (Awasthi & Choraria, 2015). Ndlela & Chuchu (2016) also confirmed that celebrity endorsements influence brand recall and help increase purchasing behavior. Sharma (2016) contributed to the literature by exploring the impacts of endorsed ads on customer's perceived value, association, and brand loyalty. However, there have been few studies of how endorsement influence brand recall and brand association.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Brand Association

Brand associations are often based on the affiliate network model (Farquhar & Herr, 1992), in which a person's memory is made up of links and nodes: links represent relationships (positive or negative, weak, or strong), and nodes represent concepts (e.g., brand association) and objects (e.g., brand). Similarly, Keller (1993) defines brand associations as information nodes associated with brand nodes in memory that contain the meaning and value of the brand to consumers. Brand associations comprise all brand-related thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, experiences, and beliefs). Moreover, it is anything linked in memory to a brand. Brand associations help create value for both the business and the customer; it helps build brand value by differentiating the brand and creating a positive emotion or attitude in people's minds.

Brand Recall

Brand recall is the consumer's ability to remember a brand when given the product category (Lu, Chang, & Chiang, 2014). Brand recall relates to consumers' aptitude to identify the brand from memory given the product category, the needs fulfilled by the level, and purchase or use according to the situation (Memon et al., 2016). Brand recall helps to communicate with the audience and helps customers to identify or differentiate from other products. It requires consumers to focus, and determine differentiates the brand from memory when given a relevant cause. According to Boisvert (2011), brand associations will help consumers find and process information. The association of a brand also plays a vital role in differentiating brands from one another. A brand with a stronger association is easier to recall in the consumer's mind when the need arises (Boisvert & Burton, 2011).

- H1: Brand association positively affects brand recall.

KOL Endorsement Effectiveness

Endorsement occurs when a celebrity (KOL) lends his/her name to and appears on behalf of a product or service on which he or she may not be an expert (Bekk & Spörrle, 2010). Many studies focus on whether celebrity endorsements (KOLs) can change consumer attitudes and behaviors (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016; Cho, 2010; Gefen, 2000). The buzz effect introduced by Zamudio (2016) refers to the level of public interest in endorsers. Marketing performance increases when endorsers and brands share a typical value or belief. KOL effects are the effects that KOLs can have on a brand in a positive way. In this regard, validator characteristics will be transferred to the brand image, helping consumers evaluate the brand (McCracken, 1989). Hudders et al., (2012) found that the extent of a brand's prominence positively affects the extent to which that brand is recalled, regardless of the extent to which that respondent is connected to the person endorsing the brand. Celebrity endorsements can increase advertisement recall rates (Ilicic & Webster, 2011). Sharma (2016) also demonstrated that celebrity endorsements significantly influence brand associations.

- H2a: KOL endorsement Effectiveness positively affects brand association.
- H2b: KOL endorsement Effectiveness positively affects brand recall.

KOL commensurate with the product

KOL commensurate with the product, also known as the "match-up hypothesis," refers to the harmonization of the match between the celebrity endorsement and the endorsed product (Till & Busler, 2000). Previous research has demonstrated that the effectiveness of endorsements is tied to the extent to which the endorser's image, personality, or expertise is relevant to the advertised product (Kamins, 1990; Kamins & Gupta, 1994). Friedman and Friedman (1979) also concluded that the more relevant the celebrity and the product perceived by the consumer, the higher the celebrity endorsement effectiveness. The relevance and compatibility of the KOL with the product are decisive factors for the effectiveness of KOL endorsement. In addition, when the KOL has a commensurate association with the product, customers will quickly associate the brand and its products with the KOL.

- H3a: KOL commensurate with the product positively affects brand association.
- H3b: KOL commensurate with the product positively affects KOL endorsement effectiveness.

Brand Investment on KOL endorsement

Brand investment is reflected in the resources the brand spends to build the brand, keep product promises, and demonstrate a long-term commitment to customers (Klein & Leffler, 1981). Brand investment in KOL endorsement is how businesses learn, select, plan, and invest resources for marketing activities through KOL. Brands with more significant brand investments have been proven to convey higher levels of credibility (Erdem & Swait, 1998). In addition, Brand investment also helps to improve brand loyalty, strengthen brand identity, and increase brand perceived value (Davis, 2002). When businesses invest heavily in a brand through KOL endorsement, consumers will have more opportunities to gather information about that brand. For example, if a business spends more money on advertising through a KOL, consumers can get more messages about the brand. Therefore, brand investment in KOL endorsement can facilitate consumer brand associations. The more brand investment in KOL endorsement, the higher the brand's trustworthiness; consumers also know the brand more. Hence, they tend to buy under the influence of the brand's endorsement of KOL, and the effectiveness of KOL endorsement will also increase.

- H4a: Brand Investment in KOL endorsement positively affects brand association.
- H4b: Brand Investment in KOL endorsement positively affects KOL endorsement Effectiveness.

KOL endorsement suspect to consumer culture

Consumer culture is a form of a material culture driven by market conditions, thus creating a special relationship between consumers and the goods or services they use or consume (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Cultural sensitivity is defined as the desire or propensity of consumers to purchase and use brands (Zhou et al., 2008). Chen et al. (2013) demonstrated that the level of sensitivity to consumer culture has a positive causal relationship with brand trust and awareness and affects brand associations. It is purported that the meanings embedded in a celebrity can be transferred onto brands and then the consumer (McCracken, 1989). If consumers are sensitive to consumer culture, they will pay more attention to information about brands promoted or introduced by KOLs with trendy images, personality, prestige, and high quality. Consumers will identify these images associated with the brand and buy those brands.

- H5a: KOL endorsement suspect to consumer culture positively affects brand association.
- H5b: KOL endorsement suspect to consumer culture positively affects KOL endorsement Effectiveness.

Proposed Conceptual Model

The proposed conceptual model below in figure1 consists of three predictors variables: (1) KOL commensurate with the product (KCP), (2) Brand Investment in KOL endorsement (BIK), and (3) KOL endorsement suspect to consumer culture (KSC); two mediator variables: (1) brand association (BA), and (2) KOL endorsement Effectiveness (KE), and the outcome variable Brand Recall (BR).

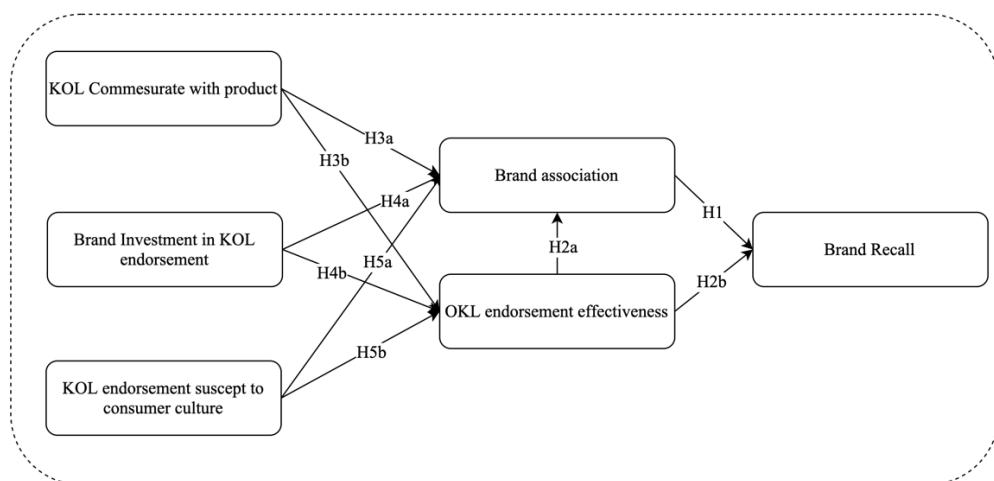


Fig 1. Proposed research model

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the quantitative research method by using structured questionnaires in which the measurement items were adopted and developed from previously published studies. The collected data were purified to eliminate the errors and missing, then analyzed by Smart PLS 3.3.7.

The study used the online survey form to collect primary data by sending a Google Form survey to the respondents who had experience with F&B products and services in Vietnam via social networks and emails. Thereby collecting enough primary data for the study. The results of the questionnaire survey collected answers from 350 respondents of different ages and demographic characteristics.

The questionnaire is divided into two main parts, starting with an introduction and instructions for answering; part one is about demographic questions, and part two is related to research concepts. Five five-point Likert scales were used in this study and were fixed by 1= strongly agree to 5= strongly disagree. The observed constructs were adopted from questionnaires of Ohanian (1990), Aljasir (2019), Awasthi & Choraria (2015), Amos et al. (2008), Choi and Rifon (2012), Chen et al. (2013), Sharma (2016), Kun (2022), Xiong (2021).

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The measurement model.

The measurement model was evaluated by examining the validity and reliability of multi-items by assessing the values of Cronbach alpha (CA), composite reliability (CR), extracted average variance (AVE), and outer loadings. Hair et al. (2017) stated that the outer loading values must be greater than or equal to 0.708 observed quality variables. The analysis results show that three items of BA1, BI4, and KE3 were deleted from measurement scales due to their outer loadings values being less than 0.70.

Table 1. Internal Consistency Reliability and Convergent Validity

Constructs	Factorloadings	CA	CR	AVE
Brand Association (BA)	0.779-0.861	0.841	0.893	0.676
Brand Investment in KOL endorsement (BI)	0.811-0.862	0.86	0.905	0.705
Brand Recall (BR)	0.752-0.816	0.833	0.883	0.601
KOL commensurate with product (C)	0.757-0.821	0.858	0.898	0.638
KOL Endorsement Effectiveness (KE)	0.729-0.859	0.836	0.89	0.671
KOL endorsement suspect to consumer culture (SC)	0.805-0.866	0.867	0.91	0.716

The Composite reality and Cronbach's alpha would be acceptable for internal consistency with a value between 0.60 and 0.70 and good reliability with a value between 0.70 and 0.90. Fornell & Larcker (1981) stated that validity and reality carry conviction if the extracted average variance for each latent variable exceeds 0.50. The results show that six constructs with 25 items satisfied reliability because the Cronbach's alpha (CA) values are greater than 0.7, and Composite reliability (CR) values are greater than 0.7. The AVE values are greater than 0.5. With the obtained data, it can be confirmed that the constructs are reliable and convergent.

Table 2. Discriminant validity

	BA	BI	BR	C	KE	SC
BA	0.822					
BI	0.55	0.839				
BR	0.784	0.45	0.8			
C	0.453	0.349	0.464	0.799		
KE	0.631	0.455	0.653	0.499	0.819	
SC	0.458	0.457	0.387	0.352	0.454	0.846

Fornell & Larcker (1981) proposed that the square root of each construct's AVE should have a better value than the correlations with other latent constructs. The analysis results show that the square root of all variables surpasses the

corresponding correlations in the relevant columns and rows. Thus, the whole constructs meet the discriminant validity requirement. The Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) were used to examine multicollinearity in this study. A VIF value greater than 5 indicates multicollinearity; Hair et al. (2014) stated that multicollinearity does not occur when the VIF value is less than 5. According to the analysis results, all the variables have VIF values much lower than 5, representing no critical collinearity issue.

The structural model.

Standard measurement criteria for structural models are considered to include the model fit (SRMR), the coefficient of determination (R2), the Effect size (F2), and the predictive relevance (Q2). It is necessary to consider the SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual) to measure the model fit. According to Hu et al. (1999), the SRMR index must be less than 0.08 or 0.1. The result shows that the SRMR of the model <0.100, the predictive relevance is established, indicating that the model fit is acceptable.

The coefficient of determination (R2 values) and the endogenous latent variables' path coefficient (values) determine the structural model's plausible explanation in PLS-SEM analysis. R2 values of 0.25, 0.5, and 0.75 suggest weak, medium, and robust endogenous structures, respectively (Hair et al., 2014). The R2 number also indicates how much of a dependent variable was accounted for by independent variables. According to the results, the factor Brand Recall has the value of R2 = 0.656. The proposed research model indicates that Brand Association and KOL Endorsement Effectiveness factors can explain 65.6% of the variation of this dependent variable. Regarding Brand Association and KOL Endorsement Effectiveness, the R2 value is 0.507 and 0.378, meaning that the independent variables explained 64.2% of the variation of BA and 37.8% of the variation of KE.

Table 3. R2, Q2, and SRMR

Constructs	R2	Q2	SRMR
BA	0.507	0.33	0.053
BR	0.656	0.407	
KE	0.378	0.249	

The predictive relevance accuracy of the PLS path model is evaluated through the Q2 value (Geisser, 1974). The value of Q2 must be more than 0 for a particular hypothesis to indicate predictive relevance. The Q2 is suggested to reflect small predictive relevance for a value of under 0.25, and correspondingly large predictive relevance for values of 0.5 and above 0.5. The predictive relevance test in this research gives the results that 3 dependent variables have medium predictive relevance with the values of Q2 being 0.33, 0.407, and 0.249 respectively.

Table 4. Hypotheses testing result.

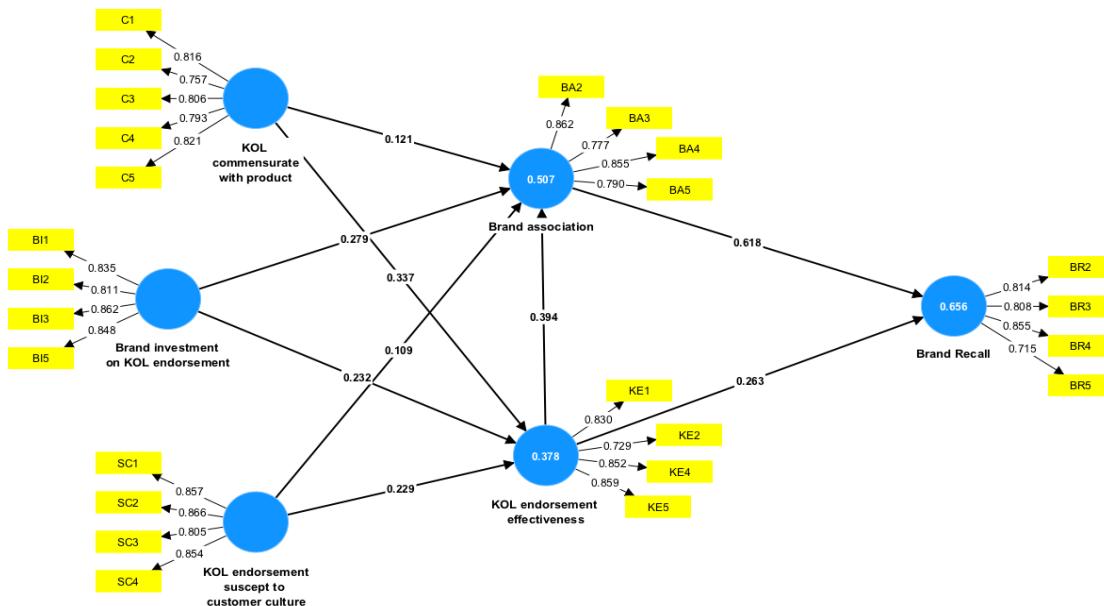
Hypotheses	Path	β	t	f2	p-value	Decision
H1	BA \rightarrow BR	0.618	11.742	0.667	0.000	Supported
H2a	KE \rightarrow BA	0.394	7.951	0.196	0.000	Supported
H2b	KE \rightarrow BR	0.263	4.428	0.121	0.000	Supported
H3a	C \rightarrow BA	0.121	2.801	0.021	0.005	Supported
H3b	C \rightarrow KE	0.337	7.463	0.152	0.000	Supported
H4a	BI \rightarrow BA	0.279	6.327	0.111	0.000	Supported
H4b	BI \rightarrow KE	0.232	4.258	0.065	0.000	Supported
H5a	SC \rightarrow BA	0.109	2.266	0.017	0.023	Supported
H5b	SC \rightarrow KE	0.229	4.592	0.063	0.000	Supported

This study ensures statistical significance using p-values and standard errors from a bootstrapping process with 5000 subsamples. Estimation results from 5000 observations show that the p values are all smaller than 0.05, which means the

original samples are significant with the sample means of Bootstrapping because they are in the 95% confidence interval. Therefore, it can be concluded that all relationships in the model have meanings.

The effect size test gives the results that out of 9 relationships in the proposed model, there is one relationship with extra small impacts, 4 with minor impacts, 1 with large-sized impacts, and two hypotheses that have medium-sized impacts. Specifically, the hypothesis stating 'Brand association has a large impact on brand recall as $f^2 = 0.667$ greater than 0.35. On the other hand, KOL endorsement suspect to consumer culture mostly has no impact on Brand association as $f^2 = 0.017$ lesser than 0.02. Other relationships show the medium to large impact as the values of f^2 range from 0.15 to 0.35.

The study also checked the path coefficients to understand the magnitude of change in the dependent variable as a function of each independent variable (Gronemus et al., 2010). Table 4 demonstrates that all p-values were less than 0.050 and β values were greater than 0.100, indicating that all independent variables significantly affect the dependent variable. Therefore, all hypotheses were supported.



V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Theoretically, this study has contributed to existing theories about branding and the relationship between branding and other university factors. While there are currently very few studies on the relationship between brand recall and KOL endorsement, this study has shown and clarified the interrelationship between brand recall, brand association, and KOL endorsement.

The findings indicate that brand association is positively influenced by four main factors: KOL Endorsement Effectiveness, KOL commensurate with the product, Brand Investment in KOL endorsement, and KOL endorsement suspect to consumer culture. KOL Endorsement Effectiveness has the most significant influence on the brand association, indicated by a path coefficient of 0.394. The results of this study support the argument raised by Chen et al. (2013) and Sharma (2016). Brand investment is necessary to have a credible brand signal and build a positive brand association. Advertisers have been spending large sums of money on KOL to promote their brands in anticipation of a positive consumer brand association with a particular brand, thus improving the firm's sales and brand equity. Research results also show that brand association and KOL Endorsement Effectiveness significantly influence brand recall. This supports previous studies by Ndlela and Chuchu (2016), and Memon et al. (2016) in which they concluded that KOL Endorsement and brand association directly and positively affect brand recall and increase purchase intention.

In terms of practical implication, the present study offers implications for marketing practitioners with regards to KOL endorsement in the F&B industry in Viet Nam. Building brand associations and brand recall plays a very important role and meaning in the development of marketing activities of the business. On the one hand, it helps businesses to build a good image in the hearts of customers, on the other hand, helps customers remember the brand thereby increasing the purchase decision. The study also pointed out that KOL's endorsement greatly affects associating and recalling customers about an F&B brand in Vietnam. KOL and KOL's endorsement effect not only helps the brand increase distribution, more

people know about the brand but also convinces customers to be more confident about the quality and effectiveness of the product and service, from which they want to buy, try to experience the products and services of the business.

Based on the research results, we also make some recommendations for brands. Businesses must also invest in advertising and communication to bring improved and new products closer to consumers. Communication and advertising must be maintained and invested in parallel with the development of products and brands. They can combine with KOL to create promotional content for their products and services in the form of articles, vlogs, and videos, ... on different social networking platforms, such as Review articles, Facebook check-in, or videos from Food Reviewer on Tiktok,... An effective KOL campaign requires several KOLS with followers large enough to cover the brand's target audience. KOLs are chosen to have few followers but must be suitable for the brand's products and services, credible, and their followers belong to the brand's target customer group. F&B brands must recognize the strong influence of consumer culture for consumers in Vietnam. Consumer preferences for F&B brands will be determined for many different reasons such as: consistent with the trend of consumers, the social group, the closeness to the modern lifestyle, calculation indicates social status, trend images or awareness of quality, and social reputation due to the influence of consumer culture. Therefore, brand managers need to understand the level of sensitivity to consumers' consumer culture and realize why they are very fond of those F&B brands. From here, businesses can split market segments and provide suitable brand strategies for consumers in different segments, combined with KOL suitable in this segment, thereby increasing the marketing effectiveness. When the brand cooperates with KOL, KOL will represent the image of the brand customers, so it has a significant influence on customers' associations with the brand, so the brand needs to be cautious in choosing KOL and building a KOL media campaign.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study examines the inter-relationship among three key KOL endorsement attributes (KOL commensurate with product, Brand Investment in KOL endorsement, KOL endorsement suspect to consumer culture), with KOL endorsement effectiveness, brand association, and brand recall. The quantitative method was used to collect survey data from 350 TikTok users who have experience with buying F&B's products and services on Tiktok. The results show these factors have a close and associated relationship. The KOL endorsement strongly influences brand association and brand recall. In addition, brand associations also substantially impact customers' recall of F&B brand's products and services. However, the research was limited to Vietnam customers and focused on the F&B industry, so it is only possible to cover some of the customers' concepts in general. This is also an opportunity for other future studies to test this research model in a different context. From the research results, we recommended that F&B brands invest in communication campaigns using KOL to increase brand associations, thereby increasing customers' recall of the brand. Besides, the brand also needs to pay attention to choosing KOL suitable for the brand's products and services and building a communication campaign with KOL by the consumer culture to achieve high efficiency.

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