

The Influence of KOL (Key Opinion Leader) Marketing Model on the Consumption Behavior of Generation Z

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Abstract: With the rapid development of Internet technology, KOL (Key Opinion Leader) marketing has emerged as a vital tool for brand promotion. Particularly for the Z-generation (born between 1995 and 2010), the influence of KOL marketing is particularly pronounced. This paper delves into the KOL marketing model, examining its impact on the consumer behavior of the Z-generation. Through interviews and qualitative research, it unveils how KOL marketing influences Z-generation's consumption decisions and brand attitudes in terms of precise targeting, diversified content formats, and heightened interactivity. The findings reveal that KOL marketing fosters emotional connections between brands and consumers, enhancing brand awareness and loyalty, thereby playing a pivotal role in shaping Z-generation's consumer decisions.

Keywords: KOL Marketing, Z-generation, Consumer Behavior, Brand Influence, Qualitative Research.

1. Introduction

In today's digital era, the speed and reach of information dissemination have reached unprecedented levels. Amidst rapid technological advancements and the proliferation of social media, brand promotion methods have undergone profound transformations. KOL (Key Opinion Leader) marketing, an emerging promotional strategy, harnesses the influence of opinion leaders across major social platforms. [1] By leveraging their recommendations and endorsements, KOL marketing effectively guides consumer purchase decisions and shapes brand perceptions. The rise of KOL marketing signifies the decline of traditional advertising models and the ascendancy of personalized, targeted marketing.

Profiling the Z-generation: The Z-generation, individuals born in the mid-1990s to early 2000s, constitute a substantial demographic segment. According to the National Bureau of Statistics' 2023 data, China's Z-generation population stands at approximately 260 million, accounting for 19% of the total population that year, or roughly "one in every five individuals." Dubbed "digital natives," they have grown up amidst a highly digitized environment, naturally inclined towards the Internet and digital technologies. [2] Data indicates that the monthly average internet usage time among Z-generation users is 174.9 hours, and CMIMS-China Media Insight & Marketing Solution research reveals that Z-generation's short video usage rate exceeds that of the overall population by 10%. Having evolved within the Internet and social media landscape, the Z-generation has shifted their information acquisition to mobile devices and visual content, transforming media communication styles towards digital formats. This generation, having been exposed to the Internet and social media from a young age, possesses formidable abilities in information processing and filtering. Compared to previous generations, Z-generation consumers prioritize brand authenticity and individuality, making them highly susceptible to the influence of opinion leaders in their midst.

KOL marketing capitalizes on this tendency by partnering with KOLs to convey brand messages in a more natural, personalized manner to target audiences, thereby

distinguishing itself in the fiercely competitive marketplace.

Despite KOL marketing's immense potential and influence, its actual effectiveness and underlying mechanisms remain underexplored. Specifically, how does KOL marketing manifest its effects within the Z-generation consumer group? How do consumer behaviors and psychologies respond to KOL marketing? These questions remain largely unanswered, necessitating further investigation.

2. Overview of KOL Marketing Model

KOL Marketing (Key Opinion Leader Marketing) is a modern marketing strategy that involves collaborating with opinion leaders to promote brands and products. This approach leverages the extensive influence of KOLs on social media platforms, harnessing their trust and credibility among followers to disseminate brand messages and drive sales. The personal charm and professionalism of KOLs serve as a reliable vehicle for brand communication, enabling brands to effectively reach their target consumers [3].

According to interview records, KOL marketing encompasses various formats, primarily including:

Image-Text Format: One of the most traditional methods in KOL marketing, the image-text format combines images and text to convey brand information. Long-form articles on WeChat Official Accounts are a typical example, suitable for in-depth brand storytelling and product introductions. Compared to short-form content, this format offers more details and background information, catering to content requiring extended reading and comprehension.

Short Videos: Short videos stand out prominently in KOL marketing, particularly on platforms like Douyin (TikTok), Kuaishou, and WeChat Video Accounts. Typically ranging from 15 to 60 seconds, short videos capture viewers' attention swiftly with their conciseness and entertainment value. [4] They propagate rapidly and foster strong interactivity, ideal for showcasing product usage effects and brand images while engaging audiences through amusing content.

Long Videos: Published primarily on platforms like Bilibili, long videos can extend from a few minutes to several dozen minutes. [5, 6] This format excels in detailed product reviews,

brand narratives, or in-depth market analyses. Long videos provide comprehensive information and rich visual experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of the brand among viewers.

Short Dramas: As an emerging marketing format in recent years, short dramas integrate scriptwriting with brand promotion, embedding products through narrative storytelling. Characterized by strong narrativity and entertainment, short dramas integrate brand messages into plotlines, reducing the directness of advertising and enhancing audience acceptance.

Each KOL marketing format exhibits unique characteristics and advantages across different social media platforms. For instance, long-form articles on WeChat Official Accounts are suitable for in-depth introductions of brands and products, while short-form content on Xiaohongshu (RED) excels in recommending new products ("seeding") and showcasing usage effects and user reviews. Douyin's short videos captivate audiences with their swift and vivid presentations, while Bilibili's long videos offer detailed product reviews and brand narratives. Short dramas create a novel communication model by blending brand information with entertaining content, known as the brand placement model.

When selecting a KOL marketing model, brands must consider their brand positioning, target market characteristics, product nature, and communication objectives. Different marketing formats cater to diverse audience segments, and brands should choose the most suitable KOL marketing model based on their actual needs to maximize brand exposure and influence.

3. Qualitative Method: Interview Analysis

To gain a profound understanding of the impact of KOL marketing on the consumer behavior of Generation Z, this paper adopts a qualitative research approach. Through interviews with industry experts, firsthand information on the practical application and effectiveness evaluation of KOL marketing has been obtained.

3.1. Criteria for Selecting KOLs

The interviews revealed that the core of KOL selection lies in their alignment with brand values. The consistency of brand and KOL tone serves as the primary criterion for selection. For instance, the luxury watch brand Breitling chose local KOLs who aligned with their brand tone during an event in Jinan, China, effectively enhancing their brand voice in the target market. Additionally, when identifying suitable KOLs for a brand, factors such as their audience demographics and traffic data (likes, comments, views, etc.) are crucial assessment metrics. Furthermore, evaluating KOLs' past performance in promoting similar high-end brands and their respective data feedback reflects their influence and popularity, aiding brands in making more precise choices.

3.2. Evaluation of KOL Marketing Effectiveness

The interviews also introduced methods for assessing the effectiveness of KOL marketing. Post-publication data analysis encompasses indicators like likes, comments, saves, and page views. These metrics are used to calculate CPR

(Cost Per Reach) and CPC (Cost Per Click), thereby evaluating the cost-effectiveness of KOL collaborations. For example, by comparing the ratio of likes to expenses, brands can gauge the actual impact of KOL marketing and decide whether to continue the partnership. Additionally, sales data from influencer-driven purchases serve as a vital basis for assessing ROI (Return On Investment), with backend data providing clear insights into the actual performance of each transaction.

3.3. Characteristics of Generation Z Consumers

The interviews delved into the unique traits of Generation Z consumers. Living in a highly digitalized and informatized environment, they possess stronger information acquisition and processing capabilities than previous generations. They prioritize personal interests and independent judgment, embodying the "grass-seeding" generation with a penchant for individual expression and a stronger sense of economic independence. Generation Z consumers value shopping experiences and seek a high sense of value. Their consumption is primarily driven by self-gratification, pursuing a spiritual connection with products. These connections foster social circles rooted in belongingness, aesthetics, and shared interests, such as food, city walks, coffee, pets, watches, beauty, and more. Within these communities, influential and authoritative KOLs with professional expertise, distinctive personas, and labels serve as vital bridges between brands and consumers. Compared to traditional marketing methods, KOL marketing can more precisely target this demographic since its content formats and messaging align with Generation Z's consumption habits and aesthetic preferences.

4. The Impact of KOL Marketing on the Consumer Behavior of Generation Z

The KOL (Key Opinion Leader) marketing model exerts a notable influence on the consumer behavior of Generation Z, primarily manifested in enhancing brand credibility, optimizing marketing effectiveness, and precisely guiding consumer actions.

KOLs' personal charm and influence significantly bolster brand credibility and appeal. Consumers in Generation Z reside in an era of information overload, confronted with a deluge of advertising messages. In this context, traditional advertising formats often fail to pique their interest. Conversely, KOLs, as opinion leaders on social media, possess robust personal influence and a substantial fan base, making their recommendations and evaluations a more credible source of brand information. Through their expertise and personal charisma in a particular field, KOLs can shape a positive brand image and strengthen brand credibility. For instance, when a renowned fashion blogger recommends a newly launched cosmetic product on their social platform, their personal style and professional evaluation foster greater trust among fans, thereby driving purchasing decisions.

KOL marketing integrates products into daily life through soft advertising, making brand promotion more aligned with Generation Z's acceptance habits. Consumers in this generation tend to have a higher aversion to traditional hard advertising, preferring natural and non-intrusive promotional methods. KOLs typically introduce products in a relaxed and

authentic tone, seamlessly embedding brand messages into their daily content, such as fashion tips, food recommendations, or lifestyle shares. This soft advertising format not only avoids consumer resentment but also effectively stimulates purchasing interest. For example, when a KOL mentions a new product while sharing their daily skincare routine, consumers are more receptive to this subtle advertising approach and develop an interest in the product.

Through precise data analysis and feedback mechanisms, brands can continually refine their KOL marketing strategies, enhancing marketing efficiency and outcomes. A notable advantage of KOL marketing lies in its ability to track and analyze campaign performance in real-time. By monitoring interaction data after KOL content publication, such as likes, comments, shares, and views, brands can assess the actual effectiveness of marketing activities. For instance, after partnering with a KOL, brands can analyze the total views, user engagement rates, and conversion rates of their content to evaluate the KOL's promotional effectiveness. Additionally, brands can calculate the cost per engagement (e.g., CPR) and cost per click (e.g., CPC) to optimize future KOL selection and collaboration strategies. Through continuous adjustment and optimization, brands can improve the precision and effectiveness of their marketing campaigns, better catering to the needs of Generation Z consumers.

In summary, the KOL marketing model not only enhances brand credibility but also improves marketing effectiveness through soft advertising that aligns with consumer acceptance habits in Generation Z. Precise data analysis and feedback mechanisms further refine marketing strategies, enabling brands to more effectively reach target consumers. These characteristics of KOL marketing have secured its prominent position in digital marketing strategies and profoundly influenced the consumer behavior of Generation Z.

5. Conclusion

According to Crawler's data, the KOL advertising market size is estimated to be approximately 90 billion yuan in 2023, with a growth rate of around 4.7%. From the perspective of industry investment, the top four sectors—beauty and personal care, 3C electronics, food and beverages, and automobiles—account for over 60% of the total investment. The KOL marketing model plays an increasingly crucial role in the consumer behavior of Generation Z. KOLs' personal influence and precise content dissemination not only elevate brand credibility but also optimize brand messaging, enabling brands to stand out in a highly competitive market. Through precise KOL selection and effectiveness evaluation, brands

can effectively reach target consumers, thereby enhancing brand influence and sales performance. The success of KOL marketing relies not only on the KOLs' influence but also on scientific data analysis and strategic adjustments to maximize marketing outcomes.

As the KOL marketing model continues to evolve, brands face ever-changing challenges and opportunities. In the future, brands must closely monitor changes among Generation Z consumers and market trends, promptly adjusting strategies to adapt to new marketing environments. For instance, with the rise of emerging content formats like short videos and short dramas, their advantages of flexible collaboration, including customized roles, storylines, brand concept integration, and voiceovers, present new opportunities for brands. Brands need to explore how to effectively incorporate brand messages into these new formats to maintain competitive advantages. Additionally, brands should prioritize data privacy and consumer rights protection to foster long-term trust. In summary, flexible strategy adjustments and continuous innovation will be crucial to achieving optimal marketing outcomes.

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