

Research on the Different Effects and Influences of KOL and KOC in the Marketing of Makeup Goods in China

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Abstract: With the development of social media, KOL (Key Opinion leader) is playing an increasingly important role in brand marketing. They have a large following and can have a significant impact on consumers' purchasing decisions through their influence and professional insights. KOC (Key Opinion Consumer) is an emerging marketing force that has a high degree of trust and influence among consumers due to its authenticity and accessibility. Some previous literature suggested that KOC was about to replace KOL. This article mainly studies the difference between the marketing strategy of KOL and KOC. The core idea of this paper is to research the different effects of KOC and KOL on makeup goods. Based on the conclusions of the research, this paper suggests that the beauty industry should make marketing strategies in the direction of co-existence of KOC and KOL.

1 INTRODUCTION

Key opinion leader and key opinion consumer marketing has become the primary way to promote products, especially in the makeup category. With the rapid development of social media platforms and e-commerce, the internet influencer economy was born and became a new trend. As a result, many brands, especially makeup brands use KOL and KOC marketing strategies to help them promote and sell products (Nidoli, 2024). KOL marketing refers to key opinion leader marketing, which is a marketing strategy in which a brand company collaborates with internet influencers, celebrities, or industry professionals to promote a product. These influencers can use social media platforms as role models to share their experiences and effects on makeup, reduce the time it takes for audiences to understand product information, and purchase uncertainty (Shi, 2024). KOC marketing is also a product promotion strategy, which is a strategy for brands to promote their goods by using a large number of brand followers, who are ordinary consumers. However, KOL marketing is controversial because most people believe that celebrities or internet influencers who explain the effects of products are unreal and that they may be

controlled by the brand company or are contractually bound to tell about the benefits of the goods or even a false experience of using it (Zhu & Ratasuk, 2024). Therefore, KOC marketing has become a more popular way to be promoted by the public. KOC marketing emphasizes real usage scenarios and authentic use experiences, promoting stronger trust between people (ibid., 2024). Although KOC marketing has a larger audience, KOL marketing can improve the promotion and sales of brand products because KOL marketing will involve celebrities or internet influencers, and their voice and representation are stronger than ordinary people. Both of these marketing methods generate significant revenue for brand companies, while also influencing consumers' desire to buy (Nguyen, 2024). These two marketing methods have always coexisted on social media platforms and have not disappeared at present. However, most people don't understand why these two marketing strategies can coexist all the time on social media platforms, in addition, many people don't know the difference between these two marketing strategies and the communication effect they generate. Research these questions will help people better understand KOL and KOC marketing. Therefore, this article will first take Florasis and Perfect Diary as examples to study the effectiveness and impact of

KOL and KOC marketing on brand communication. After that, this paper will make a comparative analysis of the two marketing strategies in terms of communication methods and communication content to study their specific differences. Finally, this paper will explore the reasons for moving from KOL marketing to KOC marketing, and explore the reasons why these two marketing strategies can coexist on today's Chinese social media platforms.

2 THE ANALYSIS OF THE KOL MARKETING STRATEGY OF FLORASIS

2.1 The Usefulness and Impact of Kol on the Products

Florasis is a Chinese makeup brand, also known as Huaxizi. It incorporates elements of traditional Chinese aesthetics into makeup. Over the years, Huaxizi has been using KOL marketing strategies to promote its products, such as its in-depth cooperation with Internet celebrity Jiaqi Li. For example, internet influencer Jiaqi Li sells and promotes Hua Xizi's makeup sets, which feature traditional Chinese silver carvings (Nidoli, 2024). Because of his promotion, the makeup set has received more than 90 million views on Weibo, while his product promotion video has also received 20 million views (ibid., 2024). As the most influential promoter of the Huaxizi brand, Jiaqi Li also participates in the design and development of brand products, which is a right that ordinary brand spokespersons do not have (Lu, 2023). Such cooperation will not only promote product promotion but while increase the communication between Hua Xizi and Jiaqi Li so that he can fully understand the effect and information of makeup (ibid., 2023). So that he can explain the usefulness, usage, and effect of makeup to consumers clearly when promoting.

2.2 Deep Cooperation Between KOL and Florasis

In addition to the role of product promotion for the brand Huaxizi, Jiaqi Li can also promote China's characteristic traditional culture. For example, Hua Xizi produced a commercial star-ring influencer Jiaqi Li and supermodel Juan Du, which was used not only to promote makeup but also traditional Chinese Dai culture, the most obvious Dai element in the ad was the Dai peacock totem, which was viewed more than

200,000 times on Weibo (Nidoli, 2024). This shows that the public agrees with this promotion method because it uses novel methods to spread the national culture and let more people know about the Dai culture. Moreover, the brand also promoted new products with Dai characteristics, killing two birds with one stone. Huaxizi combines traditional culture with internet influencer Jiaqi Li through his traffic to increase brand awareness while showcasing the beauty of Chinese tradition (Lu, 2023). The brand's approach to working with KOL is more popular with the masses because it conveys cultural uniqueness and the national pride of mass consumers (ibid., 2023).

2.3 Innovative Marketing Between Florasis and KOL

Florasis aims to spread the unique concept of integrating traditional culture and products more widely. Florasis and Jiaqi Li co-produced the documentary 'Intangible of Non-generic Cultural Heritage', which mainly showcases Florasis's concept of promoting intangible cultural heritage for mass consumers, which Jiaqi Li is the main actor in the documentary (ibid., 2023). Florasis leverages Jiaqi Li's online reach to let more consumers know about the Florasis brand and their makeup products. When mass consumers learn that Florasis is also a company that promotes traditional intangible culture, they will actively participate in brand activities or buy products, because it uses the psychological factors of national pride or identity in the hearts of Chinese people to stimulate people's desire to buy. Florasis has transformed Jiaqi Li from a simple product salesman into a long-term brand partner, and Li Jiaqi's fans have also become Florasis fans when buying makeup products (ibid., 2023).

3 THE ANALYSIS OF KOC MARKETING STRATEGY OF PERFECT DIARY

3.1 Recruitment of KOC

Perfect Diary has built up a private Traffic pool of over 15,000 influencers and consumers who are the ambassadors of the brand. Perfect Diary understands the power of social media, especially on TikTok, where the brand has successfully expanded its influence through its official account and cooperation with a large number of KOC. Perfect Diary works with KOCs around the world, covering a variety of

content forms such as recommendations, reviews, and makeup tutorials to ensure that brands can reach more potential users.

Brands need to understand the target audience. Research the age, gender, location, and other key characteristics of the ideal customer, as well as the topics, hobbies, or product categories that interest them. Their personal stories and product anecdotes can bring the product closer to the heart. For example, Perfect Diary's KOC can share how specific makeup products have helped them achieve their beauty goals and boost their confidence.

3.2 Community Marketing

Perfect Diary operates through the WeChat public number matrix and community, using the essence of social media to 'spread'. On the social media platform, deep links are used between users and users. And then achieve rapid spread after product launch through such links to deepen brand barriers. And realize the re-purchase of users. This may involve the cultivation and utilization of KOC.

3.3 Virtual KOC Role

Perfect Diary created a virtual KOC character, 'Xiaowanzi', to establish one-to-one contact with consumers through WeChat, provide personalized customer service, and guide consumers to join Wechat groups to share information about new products, sales, and promotions. Perfect Diary encourages consumers to add virtual KOC accounts to receive cash rewards so that they can convert public traffic to private traffic. Once consumers join the private domain traffic pool, Perfect Diary begins to retain these customers through social platforms and send promotional information. Perfect Diary effectively uses KOC marketing mechanisms to drive brand impact and sales conversions while enhancing consumer engagement and loyalty.

4 THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN KOC AND KOL

4.1 Analysis of Marketing Communication Method

4.1.1 Visual Marketing

In 2019 the makeup market size in China expanded larger and led the industry, the market share reached

38% (Wu, 2022). The core of KOL marketing lies in leveraging the authority and expertise of these key opinion leaders to influence consumers in specific industries. KOL is seen as a more trusted source of branded content than traditional influencers. When choosing KOL, the brand needs to judge whether its fan base is highly concordant with the target market. The planning of cooperation content should fully integrate the personality characteristics and brand style of KOL, and make the advertising content both real and appealing through custom-tailored creation. KOL works with brands, especially in the FMCG sector. Companies usually use live streaming to let KOL communicate with their fans in real time, showing the product and solving questions. This interaction can improve trust and loyalty between the brand and customers. Perfect Diary has a large number of users with its live stream. This will make consumers impulse purchase and exceed their original spending expectations. Trends in visual marketing include choosing vertical and delivery matrices. Choose vertical is a measure that lets fans' quantity transfer to quality, and vertical KOL marketing value rises. Vertical KOLs are increasingly favored by brands because of their deeper professionalism and more refined fan quality.

Compared with KOL, KOC's influence is relatively concentrated, mainly in a specific social circle or interest group, their content is more real, close to the people, and can penetrate deeply into the minds of potential consumers. They create authentic, visual content like product reviews and posts that align with their personal lives, appealing to followers who trust their opinions. KOCs post on Redbook and DouYin with visually engaging product vlogs, tips, or creative stories. They often shoot videos to show the unique packaging and surprise elements of the product. Also, KOC has frequent and in-depth interactions with fans in the group. These activities are increasing the sense of engagement and interaction of the brand. Besides, KOC will be invited to outline stores for real experiences. Then they will share their experiences and feelings on social platforms, emphasizing the perspective of ordinary consumers.

4.1.2 Opinion Marketing

By utilizing the professionalism, influence, and interactivity of KOL, KOL opinion marketing can bring accurate target positioning, improve trust, expand communication scope, and enhance interactivity, thus intensifying brand awareness and product sales. Through effective strategies and

optimization, KOL marketing can produce significant communication effects.

More and more consumers believe that they are more likely to follow the recommendations of friends and family than celebrities instead of KOL. KOC's recommendations can play a more powerful role than Kols in influencing consumer decisions because their social sharing seems more natural, resulting in higher engagement and conversion rates. KOC leans toward original, authentic content, their content style is natural and not artificial, and non-commercial recommendations are more convincing. Since KOC's content is less commercialized, their recommendations are generally not influenced by the same high compensation as Kols, which makes their sharing more sincere.

Although the number of KOC fans is less, their engagement is much higher influencers. KOC's fan base tends to be more accurate, with many people who are KOC's friends, family, or close relationships. This small group but frequent interaction gives KOC more real influence in brand promotion.

Compared with celebrity endorsement and Internet celebrity promotion, KOC's promotion cost is relatively low. Brands' investment in KOC generates more cost-effective exposure and conversions, which can help brands reduce their average cost of customer acquisition. Suitable for low-cost, easy-to-distribute products: KOC is well suited to promote products that are low-cost and easy to transport. Brands can partner with KOC by distributing free products at a relatively low cost. The relatively low cost of KOC marketing can help brands reduce market entry costs and increase market penetration. With the influence and word-of-mouth effect of KOC, brands can quickly expand overseas markets and achieve rapid growth.

KOC's recommendations and sharing often have a strong personal and emotional element. Continuous investment in KOC marketing can create a deep emotional connection between the brand and consumers so that consumers have a sense of belonging and identity with the brand. As KOC's social media presence grows, so does the brand's visibility and influence. KOC's fan relationship is more like trust between friends, so brands can not only increase sales in the short term but also enhance user loyalty through KOC's recommendations.

4.2 Comparison of KOL and KOC Results

According to the above, here are some differences between KOL and KOC, mainly reflected in

influence and followers, profit, Credibility, and range of influence.

4.2.1 Influence and Followers

KOLs usually have a large number of fans, ranging from tens of thousands to millions, and their influence is widespread, able to cover a wide range of audiences. KOL often has expertise and authority in specific fields, such as fashion, technology, food, etc. The number of KOC's followers is relatively less, perhaps only hundreds to thousands, but their influence is more focused and precise, often active within specific social circles or interest groups. KOC is closer to the average consumer, and the content shared is mostly personal experiences and real feedback.

4.2.2 Profit

For-profit, through cooperation with brands, advertising placement, and sales commissions, KOL often creates content to maintain a professional image and fan engagement. Although it is possible for KOC to get some revenue from recommending products, it is more for sharing and recommending, rather than the main means of profit. KOC's sharing focuses more on reality and personal experience, building a trusting relationship with fans.

4.2.3 Credibility

Credibility comes from KOL's expertise and influence in a particular field. Their opinions and suggestions are considered authoritative because they have accumulated a certain reputation and experience in a specific field. However, KOC's credibility comes from its real experience and recommendations. Because KOCs are similar to the average consumer, their views resonate more with other consumers and are considered a more authentic and trusted source of recommendations.

4.2.4 Range of Influence

KOL's reach is broader, they have a large number of fans and followers on social media platforms, and can directly influence more consumer groups. The scope of influence is small for KOC, mainly concentrated in their social circles and communities. Their recommendations and opinions mainly influence their friends, family, and social media followers.

KOL and KOC play different roles in brand marketing. KOL emphasizes professionalism and

authority, which is suitable for brand cooperative promotion. KOC emphasizes authenticity and emotional resonance, which is suitable for brand word-of-mouth communication. Brands need to choose KOC or KOL to cooperate reasonably according to their own needs and the characteristics of the target audience to achieve the best marketing results. At the same time, KOL and KOC can also complement and enhance each other to promote the development and influence of the brand on social media.

5 KOL COEXISTS WITH KOC MARKETING

5.1 From KOL to KOC

In China, most Key opinion leaders are internet influencers or celebrities, they have a large number of fans, which makes KOL more commercially valuable for brand companies because it can bring more traffic to the brand, as long as there is traffic, the product has a great chance of being exposed and sold. KOL marketing is the go-to strategy for fashion brands because the advice and explanations of key opinion leaders are easily welcomed by fans (Yang, 2020). When fans see an internet influencer or celebrity they like, they will buy the product they have used. However, if the KOL says the wrong thing or does something wrong in the process of explaining or promoting a product, it can also negatively impact the brand and even reduce its followers. For example, this is the case with Jiaqi Li, KOL of makeup brand Florasis. Douyin is China's version of TikTok, public opinion spreads quickly, and doing something wrong can easily cause KOL and the brand to suffer a lot of bad influences. It can be seen that KOL is a double-edged sword. In addition, the content created by KOL on social media platforms is becoming more and more repetitive and less innovative, which makes the masses bored and uninteresting. Therefore, many ordinary people began to promote products and produce exciting and interesting content, and KOC marketing gradually emerged. KOC is more trusted by mass consumers because they primarily rely on video content, interactions, and re-views to promote products (Yang, 2020). In addition, KOC can become friends with mass consumers and even go out and communicate privately. Many makeup brands have also seen the effectiveness of KOC and have started working with KOC to promote their goods. For example, Perfect Diary leverages key opinion

consumers to promote its products across multiple social media platforms, key opinion consumers produce and disseminate content from the perspective of mass consumers based on their product experience (Hu, 2023). Nowadays, KOLs with more fans on social media platforms do not mean that they can sell a lot and be liked by mass consumers, KOCs with exciting and interesting content are more popular with the general public, at the same time, their product promotion content is more likely to be recommended by social media platforms (Yang, 2020). As a result, KOL marketing has become less popular with the masses than KOC marketing.

5.2 Marketing of Chinese Internet Celebrities

Today, Chinese makeup brands are increasingly relying on digital social media to operate, and brands are not only looking to increase sales of their products, but they also want to form a close communication relationship with the mass consumer while protecting the interests of consumers. Because of this, internet influencers have become more economical, KOL and KOC also need to be used by many fashion brands as a new marketing strategy, as they can turn viewers into buyers (Nidoli, 2024). KOL and KOC are both buyers and sellers. Therefore, a good web influencer must have the ability to provide quick feedback and excellent customer service to ensure smooth and close communication with consumers to get them to purchase products based on their product presentation (Yang, 2020). In addition, content diversification is also an area where online influencers need to improve, as the promotion and sales of products on self-media platforms depend on the content created by these online influencers. For example, online influencers can add buying suggestions, matching suggestions, tips and tricks, and price discounts to their creative content (Yang, 2020). Therefore, the product prices and activities promoted by KOL and KOC on self-media platforms need to be more cost-effective and cheaper than physical stores. For example, their products can be sold at a lower price than the original brand store, many times they can use a sample to sell multiple products at a lower price, which is also a reflection of excellent customer service, consumers can use the trial to try the product effect first, if it is not suitable for consumers, they can also return the goods to ensure the rights and interests of consumers. In addition, these people are different from ordinary people, they need to have a beautiful or handsome appearance and have a good positive attitude towards

the product to be favored by the public, the first impression of online influencers is crucial (Yang, 2020). Moreover, with the rapid development of online shopping and the influencer economy, celebrities or influencers who endorse various brands on social media platforms are now the main reference objects for the public, especially young people (Meng, 2023). Online influencers also have the dual role of persuader and facilitator, their behavior influences the audience's attitude towards the product, and they need to introduce the product in an exaggerated tone and exaggerated action in the live streaming (Sun & Tian, 2024). After that, consumers know that the KOLs are sponsored by the brand, and the KOL must clearly state the effectiveness and usefulness of the cosmetics, if the consumers buy the cosmetics but the product does not work as perfectly as they say, the consumers will question the authenticity of the brand's products, in addition, they will bring negative reviews about the brand and the influencer (Nidoli, 2024). This requires influencers or celebrities to have a detailed understanding of the production process, production materials, makeup effects, and usefulness of cosmetics so that they can have more information for mass consumers to refer to when selling and promoting products and strengthen the public's desire and purchase possibilities (Meng, 2023). To protect the interests of consumers, brands need to use both KOL and KOC marketing strategies because the two complement each other. Subsequently, makeup brands need to consider whether their skin type and appearance match the beauty concerns that makeup products can solve when choosing KOL and KOC, who meet the requirements will be more likely to attract the attention of consumers of the same skin type when making product descriptions (Nidoli, 2024).

6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, through research, it is found that KOL marketing can greatly increase the exposure and followers of products, and even facilitate brand companies to spread the company's philosophy and values to the public. KOC marketing is a marketing strategy close to the public, KOC can have deeper and closer communication with consumers so that consumers can clearly understand the usefulness and usage of the product is in line with themselves, and at the same time, it is convenient for the brand to carry out secondary communication. However, KOL marketing is not as popular as KOL marketing because if the product effect that consumers back is

not as good as the KOL explains, they will have a certain risk of public opinion and even affect the sales of the brand when promoting and introducing the product. In addition, KOL is not as close to the people as KOC because KOL signs contracts with brand companies and they have to tell the good side of the product, the product introduction is not necessarily true. Subsequently, the product promotion content released by KOLs on media platforms is not novel and the content is relatively similar, which makes it difficult to attract consumers' purchase or attention. Therefore, KOL must have a full understanding of the product before they can publicize and explain, such as the production and processing process of the product, the raw materials of the product, and the harm of the product to the human body. At the same time, the type of content they publish on social media platforms cannot be single and the content style is innovative, more product information must be added to it to attract consumers. Subsequently, since most consumers are young people, the tone and actions of KOL during live streaming need to be a little exaggerated to affect them. Although KOC marketing is more authentic and popular than KOL, it is difficult to bring more revenue and exposure to brand companies, which is a business value that brand companies need very much. Consumers' pre-purchase behavior is not only influenced by the product introduction of influencers or celebrities but also by social factors, such as the word-of-mouth and purchase recommendations of most people in society, KOC refers to these people. Therefore, KOL and KOC coexist in the context of the boom of the internet influencer economy, both are indispensable.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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