Communication Innovation in Brand Marketing Within the Influencer Economy

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Abstract. The global influencer economy is expanding rapidly, with the Chinese market exceeding 1.5 trillion yuan. However, its development is hindered by two key issues: content homogeneity and fraudulent traffic. Existing research has largely focused on influencer monetization and trust mechanisms, with insufficient attention paid to communication innovation and cross-cultural communication. This study, using a multi-case comparative and literature review approach, supported by secondary and literature data, constructs a three-dimensional "technology-content-people" framework to analyze communication innovation mechanisms: technology empowers conversions through precise push notifications using AI algorithms, collaborative content creation fosters user engagement, and technology also facilitates cross-cultural adaptation. The study found that communication innovation faces crises of trust, homogeneity, cross-cultural barriers, and sustainability issues. Based on this, recommendations include establishing original content libraries for platforms and innovation funds for brands to address homogeneity, establishing traceability systems to address trust crises, forming localized teams to overcome cultural barriers, and fostering community development to promote sustainable development. However, this research is limited by insufficient exploration of secondary fan dissemination and AI algorithm bias. Future research calls for deepening the application of AI in content co-creation and cross-cultural adaptation, improving "AI+human" oversight, and supplementing relevant research to promote high-quality brand marketing development.

Keywords: Brand marketing, internet celebrity economy, communication innovation, AI algorithms

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of social media platforms and profound shifts in user behavior, the influencer economy has become a core driver of global digital marketing. By 2025, the influencer economy within the social media industry is showing a trend toward verticalization and specialization, with content creators focusing on in-depth content creation within specific niches, such as beauty, fashion, food, and technology. Furthermore, the deep integration of livestreaming e-commerce and content e-commerce will become a key development direction for the influencer economy business model in 2025, bringing new opportunities and challenges to brand marketing.

The global influencer economy continues to expand, growing from $15.2 billion in 2022 to $22.2 billion in 2025, a compound annual growth rate exceeding 12%. The Chinese market is particularly vibrant, with livestream e-commerce transactions alone expected to exceed 1.5 trillion RMB in 2023. Against this backdrop, brand marketing and communication models are undergoing profound transformation, shifting from traditional one-way communication to interactive, co-creative models with influencers and their fans.

However, as market competition intensifies, brands face multiple challenges in using influencer marketing: first, a crisis of trust, with fraudulent traffic and exaggerated promotions undermining brand credibility; second, severe content homogeneity, which distracts users; third, cross-cultural communication barriers, making it difficult for brands to effectively communicate in the global market; and fourth, sustainability challenges, with the influencer economy's limited impact on the real economy. These issues highlight the necessity and urgency of innovation in brand marketing communications.

The research objective of this study is:construct a three-dimensional framework: Propose a "technology - content - people" theoretical framework, integrate the three dimensions of technology empowerment, content co-creation and interpersonal interaction, and provide systematic theoretical guidance for brand marketing and communication innovation in the Internet celebrity economy.For the first time, this study integrates TAM, UGC, quasi-social interaction, and Hofstede's theory to construct a 'Technology-Content-People' three-dimensional framework, filling the gap in existing research which focuses on single dimensions while neglecting systematic integration.

• Expand cross-cultural research: Based on Hofstede's cultural dimension theory, analyze the differences in brand communication strategies in different cultural backgrounds and enrich the application of cross-cultural marketing theory in the digital age.

• Deepen the application of UGC theory: Combined with the theory of user-generated content (UGC), explore the role of fan co-creation in brand communication and expand the existing theoretical boundaries.

The practical significance of this study lies in:

• Guiding brand practices: Providing brands with systematic communication innovation strategies to help them cope with challenges such as trust crisis and content homogeneity, and improve marketing effectiveness.

• Optimize platform operations: Provide governance recommendations for social media platforms to promote the healthy development of the influencer economy ecosystem.

• Assist global marketing: Provide specific strategies for brand cross-cultural communication and enhance its competitiveness in the global market.

2. Literature review

2.1. Technology Acceptance Model and the internet celebrity economy

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), proposed by Davis in 1989, explains user acceptance of information technology. Its core variables are perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. In the context of the influencer economy, the TAM provides logical support for brand technology applications: through technologies like AI algorithms and cross-cultural adaptation tools, brands can optimize users' perceived usefulness and ease of use of marketing content, thereby increasing user engagement [1].

Industry practices in 2025 show that AI technology has become a fundamental tool for influencer marketing: brands use AI to analyze the overlap of influencer fan profiles, predict the conversion potential of marketing campaigns (such as calculating the ROI of livestreaming sales through historical data), and even assist in content optimization, using AI to generate multilingual subtitles for cross-market adaptation. This trend confirms the applicability of TAM—technology has become the core driving force for improving brand communication efficiency by reducing user decision-making costs and operational barriers. The "perceived usefulness" in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) can be verified by iResearch (2025) data: in 2025, AI personalized recommendations will increase the click-through rate of content on top platforms by 40% and the conversion rate by 28%; VR/AR will reduce the cost of virtual livestreaming rooms from 5 million yuan per room in 2023 to 1.2 million yuan per room, lowering the brand's technical threshold and improving "perceived ease of use." In addition, the use rate of AIGC in MCNs has reached 75%, which can assist influencers in generating multilingual content and increase users' willingness to accept marketing content, confirming the applicability of TAM [2].

2.2. User-generated content theory and fan co-creation

The theory of user-generated content (UGC) was defined by Kaplan and Haenlein in 2010 as "content created and publicly shared by consumers through social platforms." Its core value lies in authenticity and participation. In the influencer economy, the UGC theory is extended to "fan co-creation" - by guiding fans to participate in content creation, brands transform one-way communication into two-way value co-creation, thereby enhancing brand trust and user stickiness. User-generated content (UGC) can be subdivided into forms according to social media categories: in content communities such as YouTube and Flickr, it is product reviews and scene photos taken by fans; on social networking sites such as Facebook, it is topic discussions and friend recommendations; on wiki-like platforms, it can also be extended to brand knowledge bases compiled by fans. This not only fits the core of UGC's "authenticity and participation", but also provides a reference for brands to find differentiated co-creation directions [3].

Industry data from 2025 shows that brands adopting user-generated content (UGC) strategies have an average user repurchase rate 28% higher than brands using traditional marketing (Instagram for Business, 2024). Hofstede's cultural dimension theory further explains regional differences in UGC: fans in collectivist cultures are more likely to participate in group challenges, such as brand-initiated "family use scenario sharing" campaigns; fans in individualist cultures prefer UGC that encourages personalized expression. This difference provides a theoretical basis for brands' cross-cultural content strategies [4].

2.3. Parasocial interaction theory and fan relationships

The theory of parasocial interaction, proposed by Horton and Wohl in 1956, describes the "one-way emotional connection" that audiences form with media figures. Fans, through viewing influencer content, come to view them as "familiar strangers," fostering trust and identification. In the influencer economy, this interaction is key to transforming fan loyalty into brand loyalty: when influencers establish stable parasocial relationships with their fans, their brand recommendations are more likely to be accepted, even mitigating resistance to "commercial promotions"[5].

A 2025 TikTok Creator Study revealed that influencers who establish deep parasocial relationships with their fans, regularly share their daily lives on the platform, and respond to fan comments, experience a 42% higher click-through rate for their promoted content than purely commercial influencers. Cultural factors further influence parasocial interaction patterns: in high-power-distance cultures, fans are more inclined toward "follower-style interaction," emulating the influencer's usage habits; in low-power-distance cultures, fans prefer "equal-level interaction," discussing product improvement suggestions with the influencer.

2.4. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory and intercultural communication

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory divides cultural differences into six dimensions, of which "individualism/collectivism" and "power distance" are the most closely related to influencer marketing:

- Individualism/Collectivism: Individualistic cultures prioritize self-expression, so brand communication should emphasize how the product enhances individual values. Collectivist cultures prioritize group identity, so communication should emphasize the social attributes of the product.
- Power distance: In high-power-distance cultures, fans trust authoritative influencers more. In low-power-distance cultures, recommendations from accessible influencers are more persuasive.
- The 2024 Lazada Southeast Asia e-commerce report validated this theory: Chinese home appliance brand Midea selected engineer influencers in Thailand to explain product technology, and housewives in Malaysia to share their experiences. Ultimately, sales in these two regions increased by 52% and 48%, respectively, significantly higher than the control group using the same influencer strategy.

2.5. "Technology - content - people" three-dimensional framework construction

Based on the above theories, this study constructs a three-dimensional framework of "technology-content-people" as an analytical tool for brand communication innovation in the influencer economy:

- Technical dimension: Based on TAM, we focus on how AI algorithms, cross-cultural adaptation technologies, etc. can improve the accuracy and efficiency of communication. The core is to "lower the user acceptance threshold."
- Content dimension: With UGC theory as the core, this study explores how fan co-creation and cross-cultural content innovation can enhance the authenticity and differentiation of communication. The core is to "stimulate user participation willingness."
- Human dimension: Based on the theory of quasi-social interaction, this paper analyzes how the emotional connection between influencers and their fans is transformed into brand value. The core is "establishing a trusting relationship with users."

Hofstede's cultural dimension theory runs through the three dimensions, forming a cross-cultural communication logic of "technology adapts to culture - content fits culture - people respond to culture", ensuring the applicability of the framework in the global market.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Case study method

First, we cover cases from multiple sectors, including beauty, food, and culture, to avoid industry bias. Second, selected cases must demonstrate significant innovation in their dissemination to ensure their representativeness. Third, the effectiveness of these innovations must be verified through public data such as platform reports and brand financial statements to ensure data availability. Case analysis utilizes a "three-dimensional deconstruction approach": for each case, key information is extracted from three dimensions: technology application, content strategy (such as user-generated content), and user interaction patterns, ensuring a systematic and in-depth analysis.

3.2. Literature research methods

This study used academic databases such as CNKI, Web of Science, and JSTOR to search for papers published between 2019 and 2024, as well as authoritative industry reports (e.g., Statista and iResearch). A total of 82 documents were screened, including 32 international journal articles and 25 industry reports, providing solid theoretical support for this research.

3.3. Data sources

Industry reports (iResearch Consulting, Statista global influencer economy data), platform public data (TikTok anchor background data), government regulatory documents.

4. Case studies

4.1. Empowerment of artificial intelligence technology

Artificial intelligence algorithms analyze user profiles (such as age and spending habits) to deliver personalized influencer content. For example, in 2023, the Chinese beauty brand Chando partnered with Douyin's AI push system to precisely reach young people aged 18-25 who are interested in "natural skincare." Data shows that compared to traditional mass push notifications, the click-through rate of influencer content increased by 42%, and the conversion rate reached 18.5%.

Influencers, through their expertise in specific fields, engaging content, and genuine personalities, have established deep, quasi-social relationships with their fans. When brands collaborate with influencers, they aren't simply "borrowing" their traffic; rather, they aim to cleverly transfer fans' active attention and passive trust to themselves.

The relationship between information sources and audiences has become "familiar and intimate." Influencers and their fans develop an emotional connection based on shared interests, values, and ongoing interaction. This highly sticky relationship makes information transmission far more efficient and high-quality than traditional advertising. Brands are shifting from self-promotion to recommendations from "trusted friends." Data from Douyin E-commerce (2024) confirms the effectiveness of AI technology: AI-powered personalized recommendations boost livestream e-commerce conversion rates. Beauty users aged 18-25 increased their engagement on "natural skincare" content from 45 seconds to 132 seconds, with a 42% increase in click-through rate (echoing the Chando case study). Home users aged 35-40 saw a 28% higher order conversion rate when viewing "smart home demonstrations" compared to traditional push notifications. Furthermore, AI-powered "intelligent customer service + livestream Q&A" reduced response times from 15 minutes to 30 seconds, increasing after-sales satisfaction by 32%, demonstrating the technology's effectiveness in optimizing perceived usefulness and ease of uses[6].

4.2. UGC content co-creation

Compared to traditional consumers, fan consumers are more loyal, ritualistic, and willing to share, often engaging in social consumption. Compared to traditional consumer psychology, fan consumption exhibits more compulsive and addictive characteristics. Jumper Brother, a scallion pancake vendor in Fushun, Liaoning Province, gained online popularity due to his 10-second efficient pancake-cutting technique,his memorable "six yuan" hawking, and his precise, basketball-like bagging technique. Customers uploaded videos of him online, leading to his rapid rise in popularity, gaining 2.29 million followers in two months. "Shouting six yuan" became a social code among his fans, a process that shifted from passive inspiration to active co-creation. Users spontaneously filmed imitating Jumper Brother's bagging technique, sparking a nationwide trend of "imitating Jumper Brother," further expanding his fan base. Local restaurant brands partnered with him to launch the "#jumpershotchallenge," a user-generated content campaign where fans could earn coupons by uploading their imitation videos and tagging the brands. Within a week, brands uploaded 102,000 videos, generating 2.1 billion views. This shift in popularity from casual users to fans has further strengthened his fanbase. In the internet celebrity economy, most fan groups are young people. These community-based fan groups have participated in the entire process of design, production and consumption of internet celebrity products.

4.3. Intelligent push innovation reach

Within a network of intelligent push algorithms, based on user preferences, the platform's algorithms will push influencers and products of greatest interest to the user's homepage. This "passive" approach to information reception significantly increases product and information reach, ensuring users receive the most relevant information at the right time, thereby reducing the time spent searching for information. Innovation in cross-cultural communication requires adapting content to local cultural contexts. Khaby Lame's 2023 China itinerary is a successful example: the Italian influencer learned Cantonese (though not fluently, with authentic slang) and, during a livestream, combined traditional intangible cultural heritage with technology through interactive activities with a lion dance robot. He also invited a Chinese intangible cultural heritage inheritor to demonstrate embroidery, transforming this heritage into something relatable for young international users. The livestream peaked at 80 million views overseas, and the related hashtag garnered 5.2 billion views on Douyin. The brand generated $3.2 million in overseas sales from the Chinese-style products promoted during the livestream.

5. Research results

5.1. Crisis of trust in communication innovation

A major reason for the rise of the influencer economy is that anyone with livestreaming equipment and a stand can sell products. The extremely low technical barrier to entry has led to a wide range of professional competence and professional qualifications within this industry, making it difficult to guarantee the quality of content and providing a positive shopping experience for users. According to the State Administration for Market Regulation's 2024 "Special Regulation of Online Livestreaming," a third-party platform operates a "100,000 views = 800 yuan" service. After new livestreamers purchase this service, their actual engagement rate is less than 0.5%, seriously misleading brands about the effectiveness of their innovative messaging. These platforms inflate livestream viewership from a few hundred to tens of thousands, in order to extract higher fees from businesses. Consequently, businesses are forced to compromise product quality and use cheaper materials, indirectly harming consumer rights. The increasing number of influencers facing complaints over product quality issues has raised questions about the sustainability of the influencer economy. ByteDance's (2025) "True Traffic Certificate" system uses a distributed ledger to record the entire chain of influencer traffic data (viewing sources, interactions, and conversions). Once uploaded to the chain, it cannot be tampered with. It has a 98.2% detection rate for fake live broadcast views and can distinguish between real users (who stay for an average of over 120 seconds) and those who use fake views (less than 8 seconds). After using it, a beauty brand found that of the 100,000 views claimed by a partner influencer, only 32,000 were real, accounting for over 68% of the fake views, highlighting the seriousness of traffic fraud[7].

5.2. Homogeneity of communication innovation

Small and medium-sized influencers, constrained by funding, are unable to create innovative content, leading them to copy business models or plagiarize content from larger influencers in the same niche. According to a 2024 report from the State Administration for Market Regulation, 30% of small and medium-sized influencers engage in "content plagiarism" (e.g., copying livestream scripts and product presentations from leading influencers). This leads to a convergence of innovation within the same niche. Data from a specific beauty vertical show that "same product reviews" accounted for 65% of content in 2023, and the click-through rate for this type of content decreased by 18% year-on-year, severely hindering the effectiveness of innovative content. This can lead to too many similar influences within the same niche. While the niche is shared, content innovation should pursue diversity and personalization.

5.3. Insufficient cross-cultural adaptation

Currently, most influencer marketing models rely solely on the influencer's traffic to sell goods, without delving into core aspects like product development and design. This has limited impact on the real economy. The influencer economy can only provide sales channels for existing products, rather than driving real businesses or optimizing their structures. The influencer economy should serve as an engine, not a distraction from the real economy. In 2024, a Chinese food brand promoted mooncakes through overseas influencers, ignoring local cultural taboos (such as egg yolks, which are a common ingredient in some countries). The EU, US, Canada, and other countries explicitly prohibit the import of mooncakes containing egg yolks, while mainstream Chinese mooncakes (such as Cantonese style) generally use salted egg yolks as their core filling. If the brand had not adjusted the recipe and directly promoted traditional products containing egg yolks, it would have directly violated local regulations. Reunion is a core value of Chinese culture, but this theme lacks emotional resonance in overseas markets where the majority of people are non-Chinese. The content continued to rely on the domestic theme of reunion, resulting in low acceptance among overseas users. The communication innovation (influencer tasting combined with holiday marketing) ultimately failed, demonstrating the critical role of cultural adaptation in cross-cultural communication innovation.

5.4. Growth bottlenecks and sustainability challenges

Currently, most influencer marketing models rely solely on the influencer's traffic to sell goods, without delving into core aspects like product development and design. This has limited impact on the real economy. The influencer economy can only provide sales channels for existing products, rather than driving real businesses or optimizing their structures. The influencer economy should serve as an engine, not a distraction from the real economy[8].

6. Discussion

6.1. Breaking homogeneity

Platforms need to establish an "influencer content original library" and prioritize traffic for original and innovative content. For example, Douyin has launched an "Original Protection Program," which has increased exposure for original content by 25%. Brands can establish an "Innovation Communication Fund" to reward influencers who propose differentiated communication solutions, such as integrating traditional culture with products. This will encourage small and medium-sized influencers to explore innovative niche areas. By establishing an effective user-generated content (UGC) incentive and integration mechanism, brands should proactively design accessible activities and offer attractive incentives to encourage users to create and share brand-related content. High-quality UGC should also be integrated into official marketing channels to make users feel valued and inspire in more proactive creation.

6.2. Solving the trust crisis

Build a "communication innovation effect traceability system" and introduce third-party data monitoring agencies (such as iResearch Consulting and Analysys) to conduct real-time traceability of the "full-link data" (real viewing volume, interactive conversion rate, product repurchase rate) of Internet celebrities' communication innovation. Brands pay promotion fees based on traceability data. After a maternal and child brand piloted this model in 2024, the input-output ratio of communication innovation increased by 30%, effectively avoiding the risk of false traffic[9].

6.3. Breaking through cross-cultural barriers

Before collaborating with overseas influencers, brands should establish a "localized communication innovation team" consisting of a "cultural consultant + influencer + brand" team to conduct cultural research on the target market (such as religious taboos and aesthetic preferences) and customize localized innovative content. When a certain home appliance brand entered the Southeast Asian market in 2024, it achieved a 50% year-on-year increase in product sales through innovative content such as "influencers using home appliances to make local delicacies," validating the value of localized innovation. When establishing a "localized communication innovation team," brands can include product R&D and supply chain experts from upstream of the value chain. In response to the cultural taboos and regulatory requirements of the target market, the R&D end should be coordinated to optimize the product (such as adjusting ingredients and packaging). Local influencers will then design content based on product adaptation points. Finally, transaction conversions will be completed through e-commerce platforms, ensuring deep synergy between influencer marketing and upstream links of the global value chain, thereby increasing the success rate of cross-cultural communication[10].

6.4. Cultivating brand community

Go beyond one-off campaigns and proactively build online communities around brands. In these communities, influencers are no longer the sole decision-makers but rather play the role of guides and service providers. This allows users to actively communicate, share, and support each other, fostering strong community cohesion. By passively observing and listening to community conversations, brands can gain authentic consumer insights and proactively respond when appropriate, transforming users from passive buyers into active brand evangelists.

7. Conclusion

This research focuses on brand marketing and communication innovation within the influencer economy. Building on global industry expansion and addressing real-world issues such as content homogeneity and fraudulent traffic, this study employs a multi-case comparative approach and literature review to construct a three-dimensional analytical framework: "technology-content-people"—from the perspective of communication innovation. AI technology, as a core enabling tool, uses algorithms to analyze user profiles for precise content delivery. This intelligent push improves information reach, filling a gap in existing research that has focused insufficient attention on the underlying logic of "technology-driven communication innovation."

From the perspective of technology-enabled approaches, its core value in communication innovation is clear: algorithms break the limitations of traditional one-way communication. By leveraging big data technology to analyze user behavior data in real time, they dynamically adjust influencer content push strategies, reducing user search costs. Furthermore, algorithms assist in cross-cultural content matching, providing technical support for the global dissemination of brand marketing content. However, while AI improves communication efficiency, it cannot resolve core issues such as fraudulent traffic and content homogeneity. Therefore, this study proposes a full-chain traceability solution combining "AI + third-party data monitoring," as well as an AI-driven mechanism for identifying original content and increasing traffic, offering innovative approaches for brand marketing.For cross-cultural communication, propose a localized team (cultural consultants, influencers, brand) strategy to address the shortcomings of existing research that focuses on traffic rather than cultural adaptation.

It should be noted that this paper has certain research limitations. First, the discussion of "fan secondary dissemination" is relatively weak, lacking an in-depth analysis of how AI can identify fan dissemination motivations and optimize the distribution path of secondary dissemination content to maximize the effectiveness of communication innovation. Second, it does not address the potential impact of algorithmic bias caused by AI technology on communication innovation. These two omissions may lead to an incomplete understanding of the complete chain of technology-driven communication innovation.

Looking ahead, the internet celebrity economy needs to further unleash the value of AI technology: it is necessary to deepen the application of AI in content co-creation and cross-cultural adaptation, and to build an "AI+manual" dual supervision system through technical means to avoid algorithmic risks; at the same time, subsequent research can supplement the relevant issues of AI empowering "fan secondary dissemination", improve the technology-driven communication innovation research system, and promote brand marketing to develop in a high-quality and healthy direction.

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