

A Study on the Impact of Lei Jun's Personal IP Marketing Strategy on Xiaomi Group

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Abstract. In the era of digital social media, founders' personal IPs have become a core KOL marketing tool for consumer electronics brands. This study takes the personal IP operation of Lei Jun, founder of Xiaomi, as its research subject, grounded in KOL (Key Opinion Leader) marketing theory, and employs case analysis and comparative research methods. The findings indicate that Lei Jun's personal IP has brought Xiaomi low-cost traffic exposure and efficient consumer trust conversion; however, it also presents practical challenges such as high dependence on a single founder and the risk that a fixed, approachable image may constrain brand premiumization. To address these issues, this paper proposes optimization strategies including building a multi-layered internal IP matrix, iteratively evolving the IP persona, and anchoring the brand in a premium market position. This research enriches the empirical framework of founder-led KOL marketing and offers practical insights for balancing the short-term traffic advantages of founder IPs with long-term brand sustainability in the consumer electronics industry.

Keywords: KOL marketing, personal IP, brand communication, founder marketing, consumer electronics brand

1. Introduction

In the era of deep penetration by short videos, founder-driven personal IP operations have become a key low-cost strategy for consumer electronics brands to break into new markets. Existing research has explored the influence and commercial value of KOLs and founder-led branding, but systematic comparisons of founder-centered communication strategies in the consumer electronics industry remain limited. Xiaomi provides a particularly useful case because of the substantial public attention surrounding Lei Jun, the extensive engagement generated across social media platforms, and the close integration between his personal image and the Xiaomi brand. Xiaomi is currently facing dual challenges: brand premiumization and automotive transformation. This makes Xiaomi a useful case for examining both the benefits and limitations of a founder-centered IP strategy.

In contrast, Huawei places greater emphasis on a diversified communication network involving corporate accounts, executives, and technology experts rather than relying primarily on a single founder figure [1].

The concept of opinion leadership can be traced back to Lazarsfeld's *The People's Choice*, which emphasized the role of influential individuals in interpersonal communication. They possess

influence and can consistently convey information, opinions, and recommendations, thereby subtly shaping public behavior. In the context of digital marketing, opinion leaders have increasingly played an important role in KOL marketing.

Therefore, this paper employs case study and comparative analysis methods, selecting Xiaomi as the primary subject and Huawei as the comparison case. Drawing on KOL theory, it conducts horizontal comparisons to critically evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, and applicable scenarios of these two models, aiming to help consumer electronics brands achieve a more balanced approach between leveraging founder IP advantages and building long-term brand equity.

2. Lei Jun's personal IP marketing strategy based on KOL theory

2.1. A highly distinctive multi-dimensional IP persona

Lei Jun's personal IP features three distinct layers of persona, each attracting different audience segments through dimensions of professional credibility, emotional closeness, and value alignment.

As the founder and chairman of Xiaomi, Lei Jun has developed a distinctive image as a technology-oriented entrepreneur. According to KOL theory, an opinion leader's influence stems primarily from exceptional knowledge or experience in a specific domain. Lei Jun's public image reflects this characteristic: His long-term involvement in smartphones, smart home devices, and Xiaomi's automotive business, together with his frequent participation in product launches and discussions of technology and products, has contributed to his image as a technically knowledgeable entrepreneur. It can strengthen his expert credibility and may help consumers perceive his opinions as useful sources of information when evaluating technology products.

Second, Lei Jun has cultivated an image of an approachable entrepreneur. Li pointed out that trust in KOLs is more based on their abilities and charisma, while trust in Key Opinion Consumers (KOCs, i.e., ordinary users with peer influence) is more based on their kindness and honesty [2]. Xiaomi Group has narrowed the psychological distance with consumers through videos and social media content showing Lei Jun's daily life and interactions with consumers.

The third type is an inspiring entrepreneurial role model. Lei Jun has shaped an entrepreneur image with value appeal through his entrepreneurial experiences and personal struggle narratives. KOL influence can also extend beyond information sharing to emotional and value-based connections with audiences. Lei Jun has long emphasized his entrepreneurial experiences, persistence in innovation, and the development of Chinese technology companies, which has elevated his personal image beyond that of a mere corporate manager. Such value recognition can further expand the brand's influence and lead some consumers to shift from product identification to a deep recognition of the enterprise's philosophy and brand culture.

To further observe the dissemination influence of Lei Jun's personal IP, this article selects relevant topic data from three major social media platforms: Douyin, Xiaohongshu, and Weibo. As shown in Table 1, the data indicates that topics related to "Lei Jun" with tags have significant differences in dissemination traffic across the platforms. The data show that the three platforms play different roles in the dissemination of Lei Jun-related content, together contributing to broader brand exposure.

Table 1. Data on the spread of Lei Jun's tag topics

	Douyin	REDnote	Weibo
number of participants	1.764 million	13.786 million	0.855 million

Table 1. (continued)

Total online viewership (reading quantity)	97.69 billion times	3.55 billion	10.48 billion
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Note: Data source from Douyin, REDnote, Microblog

2.2. Cross-platform operation and traffic accumulation

In the digital media environment, the influence of a founder's IP depends not only on the audience of an individual platform but also on how different platforms work together to expand audience reach. Lei Jun maintains a presence on major social platforms such as Weibo, Douyin, Xiaohongshu, and Bilibili. He has accumulated a substantial following across these platforms, creating a broad audience base for his personal IP and Xiaomi-related content. He continuously delivers exposure and attention to the Xiaomi brand.

Lei Jun produces four types of content on various social platforms: new product launches, industry technology analysis, entrepreneurial insights, and daily sharing. New product launches and technology analysis strengthen his professional image as a tech entrepreneur, while entrepreneurial stories and daily sharing enhance user interaction and emotional connection. Different types of content meet the diverse needs of consumers for product information, enterprise dynamics, and personalized communication, enabling Lei Jun's personal IP to cover different groups such as technology enthusiasts, brand consumers, and the general public. He also regularly shares updates about key businesses, particularly Xiaomi's automotive business, which can generate discussion and increase the visibility of related business developments across social media. Table 2 shows that Lei Jun has a larger following than fellow entrepreneur Yu Chengdong across the selected major social platforms. This suggests that Lei Jun has achieved substantial audience reach and visibility across multiple social media platforms.

Table 2. Horizontal Fan comparison data (unit: 10,000)

	Douyin Fans	Weibo Fans	Xiaohongshu Fans
Lei Jun	4230.3	2731	476.1
Yu Chengdong	2469.1	886.8	9.3

Note: Data source from Douyin, Weibo, Xiaohongshu (Data as of July 2026)

2.3. Product integration and commercial conversion of founder IP

The value of a founder's IP is reflected not only in communication and audience engagement but also in its potential to influence purchasing decisions, achieving the transformation from attention resources to commercial value. Lei Jun's personal IP has maintained a high degree of association with the Xiaomi product system for a long time, enabling his personal influence to be conveyed to the enterprise brand and specific products through product launches, livestreaming events, and product promotions. For example, during a 2020 livestreaming event, the cumulative number of viewers reportedly reached 50.53 million, while total sales reached RMB 210 million across several product categories, including Xiaomi smartphones and home-living products [3]. This example suggests that founder IP can help translate audience attention and engagement into purchasing behavior [3]. When consumers have already established recognition of the founder's professional ability and personal reputation, this trust relationship may further extend to the enterprise products

and brand image. Therefore, Lei Jun's IP not only undertakes the function of brand dissemination, but also becomes an important commercial tool connecting the enterprise and consumers. Lei Jun also shares information about product development, testing results, new products, and industry trends through public speeches and social media. This kind of way reduces consumers' uncertainty about Xiaomi's expansion into the automotive industry, particularly by providing more information about the company's technological capabilities and product development [4].

3. Comparative analysis of KOL communication models: Xiaomi and Huawei

3.1. Xiaomi's single founder KOL model

3.1.1. Positive value

In the early stage of Xiaomi's foray into the automotive industry, the market was relatively small, and consumers had certain uncertainties regarding its technological accumulation, product reliability, and R&D capabilities. Lei Jun regularly shared information about product development, testing, and R&D progress, which may have helped alleviate consumers' concerns. This process demonstrated the role of the founder KOL in information dissemination and trust establishment in complex consumer decision-making.

Compared with traditional brands that mainly rely on advertising for communication, Lei Jun's KOL influence allowed Xiaomi to reach audiences beyond its traditional consumer base at relatively low marketing costs. Lei Jun's KOL influence allows Xiaomi to reach audiences beyond its traditional consumer base at relatively low marketing costs. A stable community of followers also enabled Xiaomi to maintain ongoing engagement with consumers [5].

3.1.2. Inherent weaknesses

Reputational risks can spread from the founder to the company. The single-founder KOL model can quickly establish consumer trust, but it also increases the degree of association between the enterprise and the individual image. When the founder's personal image becomes controversial, negative perceptions may spill over to the company's reputation and potentially affect consumer attitudes and purchasing behavior.

Lei Jun's long-standing image as an approachable and pragmatic entrepreneur has strengthened Xiaomi's consumer affinity, but it may also create challenges for the brand's premiumization. When Xiaomi further promotes high-end products, the original founder persona may increase the difficulty for consumers to re-understand the brand positioning, which may make it more difficult to establish a strong position in the premium market.

High reliance on the personal influence of the founder can easily lead to the concentration of enterprise communication resources on a single core figure. Compared with Lei Jun, other Xiaomi executives and R&D leaders appear to have relatively limited public visibility and independent influence.

3.2. Huawei's hierarchical and diversified KOL matrix

3.2.1. Operation mode design

Unlike Xiaomi's highly dependent communication mode on the founder's personal influence, Huawei has long formed a communication system centered on the enterprise brand and involving

multiple entities. In recent years, Huawei has placed greater emphasis on the corporate brand and multiple communication actors, and has deliberately downplayed the public visibility of its founder. In specific communication practices, Huawei has developed a multi-layer KOL matrix involving company executives, technical professionals, and external opinion leaders. Yu Chengdong and other product-line executives play an important role in explaining products and technologies at press conferences and other public events. In addition, Huawei also expands the coverage of the mass consumer group through brand cooperation and endorsement activities, long-term cooperation with digital bloggers and industry experts, cooperation with third-party KOLs for evaluations to enhance credibility, and inviting celebrity endorsements, thereby covering various consumer groups and forming a communication matrix combining professional and mass communication.

3.2.2. Positive value

A diversified KOL structure reduces the brand's dependence on any single individual and therefore helps limit the impact of individual reputational crises on the overall brand. If a particular executive or external blogger faces negative public opinion, the spillover effect on the overall brand may be relatively limited. Compared to the highly bound model of the founder, the diversified KOL system reduces the association between the enterprise brand and a single individual label. The enterprise can continuously shape its image through technical expertise, product value, and brand concepts. This is conducive to the long-term shaping of a high-end technology brand. Through the participation of internal managers, professional opinion leaders, and external partners, Huawei can reach diverse user groups while maintaining a relatively stable communication system.

3.2.3. Fixed weaknesses

However, this model also involves relatively high and sustained communication costs. Maintaining a network of external bloggers, celebrity endorsements, and other marketing activities requires greater resource investment than relying heavily on a founder's personal IP. This means that the enterprise not only needs to incur ongoing media and marketing costs but also needs to coordinate and manage multiple communication entities. Corporate executives often communicate in a relatively professional and technical manner. While this can strengthen perceptions of expertise, it may create less emotional resonance with younger or less technically oriented consumers. In addition, the hierarchical KOL structure means that communication attention is distributed across multiple actors, making it more difficult to generate a concentrated surge of attention around specific events. During product launches or crisis communication, the absence of a single highly influential figure may limit the brand's ability to generate rapid and concentrated public attention.

3.3. Summary of the applicable boundaries of the two modes

Upon comprehensive comparison, the fundamental differences between the single founder IP model of Xiaomi and the hierarchical and diversified KOL matrix model of Huawei reflect different strategic needs and stages of business development. The single founder IP model of Xiaomi is more suitable for technology brands that need to quickly establish market recognition, enhance consumer trust, or support expansion into new business areas, thereby building an initial customer base. However, when the enterprise develops to the stage of high-end and diversified business, the expansion of scale and the expansion of business areas will continuously amplify the risks of a single IP [5].

Despite these advantages, the hierarchical and diversified KOL matrix model requires sustained investment, strong resource coordination capabilities, and may be less effective in generating emotional resonance and concentrated public attention. It remains more suitable for mature leading technology enterprises and those that pursue long-term value building, as it can support the long-term construction of high-end brands and resist public opinion impacts.

4. Optimization strategies for xiaomi Lei Jun's IP marketing system

4.1. Develop a diversified internal IP matrix and strengthen the founder's brand image

In response to the concentration of communication around a single founder, Xiaomi can further develop a multi-level internal opinion leader system. First, the company can cultivate a second tier of internal opinion leaders and increase the public visibility of product managers and other senior professionals. Professionals from different fields can take responsibility for communicating information in their respective areas of expertise, thereby reducing the company's reliance on the influence of a single founder.

Second, as the brand moves toward premiumization, Xiaomi needs to further enrich the value dimensions of Lei Jun's personal IP. The company can strengthen content related to high-end manufacturing, technological innovation, and long-term product development, while balancing Lei Jun's approachable image with a stronger association with premium technology and quality. This may help reduce the constraints that an established founder persona could place on the promotion of high-end products.

4.2. Diversify the content ecosystem and strengthen public opinion risk management

In terms of content operation, Xiaomi should further diversify the content associated with Lei Jun's IP and reduce excessive reliance on new product launches and promotional activities. The company can increase long-term brand content related to cutting-edge R&D, intelligent manufacturing, global industrial development, and green and low-carbon initiatives. This can reduce the purely promotional nature of the content and strengthen the long-term value of the founder's IP. At the same time, Xiaomi should establish a public opinion risk management mechanism tailored to the founder's IP, monitor the performance of social media content and changes in public feedback, and improve its response procedures for controversial events. By identifying potential public opinion risks in advance and optimizing communication methods, Xiaomi can reduce the potential negative impact of changes in the founder's personal image on the corporate brand [6].

5. Conclusion

This study is based on KOL theory and uses case study and comparative analysis methods, with Lei Jun's personal IP marketing as the main research focus. It compares Xiaomi's founder-centered IP model with Huawei's hierarchical and diversified KOL matrix. The study examines Lei Jun's IP marketing strategy from three aspects: personal image building, cross-platform operation, and deep integration with products. The case analysis suggests that this model can increase brand exposure and facilitate commercial conversion, while helping new businesses such as smartphones and Xiaomi automobiles build consumer trust and develop a stable follower community. However, the single-founder IP model also has several limitations, including concentrated reputational risks,

potential tensions between an approachable founder image and the brand's premiumization, and a relatively underdeveloped internal communication hierarchy beyond the founder.

Compared with Huawei's diversified KOL system, the latter has certain advantages in dispersing the reputational risks associated with dependence on a single individual and supporting long-term premium brand building. However, it also requires sustained marketing resources and may have limitations in terms of emotional connection with mass consumers and the ability to generate concentrated public attention. Based on these findings, this study proposes several optimization strategies, including developing a multi-level internal IP matrix, strengthening the premium positioning of Lei Jun's personal brand image, diversifying long-term brand content, and improving public opinion risk management.

However, the analysis focuses on only two companies, Xiaomi and Huawei, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Most of the traffic and sales data are derived from publicly available social media sources rather than complete internal company data. In addition, the study does not distinguish differences in how consumers of different ages and consumption levels perceive founder IP. Future research could expand the sample of cases and incorporate consumer surveys to provide more empirical evidence.

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