

Analysis of Online Marketing in the Age of We-media

- An Example of KOL Marketing in Xiaohongshu

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Abstract: This paper takes the key opinion leader (KOL) marketing on Xiaohongshu as an example to analyze the network marketing environment in the self-media era. The paper studied the win-win strategy of double arrows, including the selection of KOL, capital trading, and communication and feedback. Then, the impact of online marketing on online public opinion was discussed, including the positive and negative evaluation of the product by the brand audience, the possibility of KOL being subjected to online violence, and a more holistic view of the network. In addition, it analyzes the problems existing in online marketing, such as KOL hindering the development and expansion of the market, the intimidation of falsehood, and the scolding of netizens. In response to these problems, suggestions were put forward to improve the network marketing environment, including the improvement of we-media quality and professionalism, platform system management, and government bills. The significance of this research is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities of network marketing in the self-media era, and to provide insights into effective strategies and solutions for building a healthy and sustainable network marketing environment.

Keywords: we-media, KOL marketing, network public opinion

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of the Internet and the popularization of the mobile Internet, the era of we-media has arrived. The self-media platform has now become an important means of brand communication and marketing. In this context, online marketing has received extensive attention and research. Especially in recent years, KOL marketing, represented by Xiaohongshu, has become a unique and effective marketing method, which has attracted widespread attention from academia and industry. In the era of we-media, people's information sources and communication methods have undergone great changes, making KOL marketing an emerging industry. Platforms such as Xiaohongshu not only bring new marketing opportunities to brand merchants, but also provide a place for netizens to share and obtain information.

Moreover, the research of self-media marketing has become a hot topic in academia. On the one hand, the research on the online marketing environment in the we-media era not only helps to understand the essence and laws of online marketing, but also has important significance for the

development of marketing theory. On the other hand, the research of KOL marketing can provide useful guidance for brand merchants to help them improve their marketing effect.

Under this background, this study analyzes the network marketing environment in the we-media era, which is conducive to deepening the understanding of the current situation of network marketing and its development trend, and provides a theoretical basis for the practice of network marketing. Taking Xiaohongshu-style KOL marketing as an example, it reveals the problems existing in online marketing, provides constructive suggestions for the improvement of the online marketing environment, and helps to promote the healthy development of the industry. It hopes that this study can provide reference for the majority of netizens, brand merchants and government departments to improve the effect and level of online marketing.

2. Cooperation and Challenges Between KOLs and Brands

2.1. Concept of KOL and Its Operating Model

An Opinion Leader is a critical person who can change, modify, and transform others' views by their knowledge and proficiency. In marketing, experts or authorities who promote various brands are called "Key Opinion Leaders." They usually have more accurate product information, are accepted or trusted by relevant groups, and have a significant influence on the group's purchasing behavior. In the current web scenario, social networking is an integral part of human life. These sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram, etc. provide the opportunity to interact with another unknown world of known things and human being. Currently, these Websites are the primary source of information transmission and dissimulation [1]. Moreover, social networking sites often provide a platform for the companies for the diffusion of the new product and merchandise [2]. The success rate of this diffusion is dependent upon identifying the critical users effectively in the social network, such type of person known as an opinion leader. Opinion leader has more incredible significance for the diffusion of the new product. Opinion leader also affects the consumer behavior and decision making by their knowledge and experience about a particular product [3].

Beauty bloggers on platforms like Xiaohongshu are typical examples of KOLs. They have a certain knowledge reserve of beauty products and marketing methods, making product promotion their main or side business. They post multiple videos and posts on their accounts, and after accumulating popularity, they sign contracts with beauty companies, turning personal accounts into corporate ones. Then, after receiving promotional fees from the brand, they will carry out product evaluations and recommendations, urging the audience to purchase products.

2.2. Considering Factors for Choosing KOLs

When brands choose KOLs, they not only consider the number of fans but also pay attention to KOLs' shooting techniques, copywriting skills, and the professionalism of video content. Brands usually choose KOLs with good shooting techniques, as they can produce high-quality visual effects that attract more viewers. Additionally, brands consider KOLs' copywriting abilities, as excellent copywriting can help convey product information and brand values better.

Regarding video content, brands usually choose KOLs focused on a specific field, such as beauty. These KOLs maintain a consistent format for each video, with content related to beauty, helping brands convey more consistent information and make promotions appear more professional. In contrast, bloggers who accumulate fans by sharing daily vlogs may also receive brand product gifts and promotional invitations, but few become contracted bloggers. This is because their video content is not focused, and product promotions are interspersed with daily life, making promotions appear unprofessional and causing viewers interested in product reviews to lose patience, thus failing to promote products effectively.

Therefore, for KOLs, focusing on a specific field, such as beauty, can help them establish closer cooperation with brands. If KOLs want to become successful promoters, they need precise brand positioning, focus on a specific field, and develop close connections with brands.

2.3. Benefits and Drawbacks of Cooperation Between Brands and KOLs

The cooperation between brands and bloggers has its benefits and drawbacks. The advantages include positive product promotion, increased brand exposure and reputation, and increased brand awareness and sales. Meanwhile, bloggers' promotions provide consumers with more product information and user experience, helping them better understand products and make wiser purchase decisions.

However, at the same time, there are also some drawbacks to the cooperation between brands and bloggers. First, bloggers might carry out brainless promotion because of the rewards given by the brand, introducing products with a sense of experience and use that are not so good, or even products with no quality guarantee at all, to lure consumers into buying. Second, to gain a competitive advantage, some brands will ask bloggers to evaluate the products of the two brands in a video, deliberately exaggerating the good of their products and demeaning other products. Doing so will damage the reputation of different brands and destroy the whole industry's fair competition environment, eventually leading to a decrease in consumer trust.

After the video is sent out, the Xiaohongshu platform will notify the blogger's fans to watch it as soon as possible, and the fans will also forward it to their circle of friends, and the click rate will rise. If the blogger does not spread the two kinds of false information mentioned before in the video, but truly evaluates the product and makes pertinent evaluations according to his points, most of the audience feedback is positive, but it is not ruled out that there is excessive feedback for personal reasons. If there is indeed a "capital transaction" phenomenon in the blogger's video, even if consumers can't find it at the first time, the experience of the physical object will not lie. They will gradually find that the blogger's cheating behavior will be questioned in the comment area, and more victims with the same experience will come forward and speak out together. Entering the post-truth era, China's public opinion field has presented the general problem of "prediction in the front, facts in the back; emotions in the front, objectivity in the back; discourse in the front, the truth in the back; attitude in the front, cognition in the back". Obviously, when emotions, prejudices, and attitudes go first, rumors can grow savagely and get farther and farther away from the truth [4].

3. The Influence of Online Public Opinion

In the era of we-media, the speed of information dissemination has been greatly improved, especially with the help of social platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and TikTok. The effect of brand promotion and communication has been greatly optimized. Using the social attributes of the platform and the influence of KOL, Xiaohongshu KOL marketing can quickly spread brand information and form online public opinion hot spots. The transformation from traditional media to the we-media era also significantly impacts people's network environment. Traditional media has a transformational, deductive, legal, and structural negative impact on online public opinion [5].

The we-media era makes the interaction between users closer. While obtaining information, consumers can also participate more directly in the formation of online public opinion. With the influence of KOL, consumers are more willing to participate in brand promotion activities, such as comments, retweets, likes, and other interactive behaviors, which can help improve brand awareness and favorability.

However, in the era of self-media, online public opinion is easily affected by various factors, such as KOL's speech and platform policy. KOL, that is, bloggers promote products for profit. After receiving negative reviews, they usually receive online condemnation. And when this kind of

condemnation aggregates passers-by to comment on a bad word, nature becomes cyber violence. The negative impact of cyber violence on people is enormous, ranging from depression to depression and even suicide. There are many cases of online violence in today's society that people do not want to experience and see. Nevertheless, the falsity and anonymity of the Internet determine that people can't prevent such things from happening. People can only be cautious in their words and deeds to protect themselves and others. For KOLs, the best way to avoid online violence is to be responsible for what they say and the products they promote. Only by telling the truth can you consolidate and increase fans, get praise on the Internet, and also gain a good mood. This volatility requires enterprises always to pay attention to the dynamics of public opinion when conducting online marketing to adjust strategies in time to ensure the stability of the brand image.

4. Problems in Online Marketing

4.1. KOL Hinders Market Development and Expansion

The paradigm determines the purpose, and information technology is used according to the purpose determined by the paradigm. Under the influence and construction of the new media communication paradigm, the advertising communication platform has been integrated and transferred from the traditional media platform to the new media platform. The creation and diffusion process of advertising content is changing, and the relationship with the communication audience has also undergone qualitative changes [6]. KOL's advertising paradigms include: intervening in the daily life of the public, the audience being the life of all media, generalized communication and diffusion [7]. For the majority of consumers, the audience gains the subjective power of media participation, which is not the same as the individual audience gains the subjective ability of independent thinking and in-depth thinking. However, under the new capital force's influence, the active audience participants form a new consumer cluster, and they spend more time, energy and money. They integrate into manufacturing, spending more time, energy and money. Integrate into the manufacturing and dissemination of new media content [6].

With the continuous development of the KOL market, some KOLs may participate too much in commercial promotion for commercial interests, resulting in a decline in the quality of their content. Moreover, there will be some dishonest behaviors, including posting false advertisements, buying fake fans and traffic, using hidden advertisements for product promotion, and mercenaries publishing inaccurate comments. These behaviors easily mislead consumers, lead to distrust of online marketing, reduce the integrity of online marketing, and thus affect the market's healthy development. In addition, in the we-media market, the competition between KOLs is becoming more and more fierce. In order to pursue traffic and attention, some KOLs may adopt vicious competitive means, such as smearing competitors and publishing false information. These behaviors not only destroy the benign competitive environment of the industry but also may mislead consumers and affect the market's healthy development. In this process, some KOLs accept too many commercial promotion projects in pursuit of interests. This leads to the proliferation of promotional content. Furthermore, consumers may have aesthetic fatigue and resistance in the face of a large amount of advertising information, which will affect the effect of online marketing.

As a result of these reasons, some KOLs begin to fall into homogenization and lack uniqueness and differentiation in content creation. This makes it difficult for consumers to distinguish between high-quality KOL and low-quality KOL when facing similar content, thus affecting the effect of online marketing. In addition, some laws and regulations may be involved in the KOL marketing process, such as false propaganda and infringement. These problems will not only bring legal risks to enterprises but also may cause damage to the brand image and affect the development and expansion of the market. At the same time, over-reliance on KOL marketing may lead to too much

concentration of brand communication in the market and a lack of diversified marketing strategies. If there is an unexpected situation or public opinion disturbance in KOL, it may have a more significant negative impact on the brand and affect the development and expansion of the market.

4.2. Triggering a War of Scolding Netizens

In the process of KOL marketing, some controversial topics or opinions may lead to heated discussions and scolding among netizens. This phenomenon leads to distortion or distortion of the original marketing information, which makes it difficult for consumers to obtain real product information, thus affecting the effect of online marketing. Due to the high sensitivity of online public opinion, netizens' scolding war may quickly become a public relations crisis. This will not only damage the reputation and image of the brand but also affect consumers' perception of the brand and willingness to buy, thus reducing the effect of online marketing. In addition, the image and reputation of KOL may be seriously damaged. This will lead to the loss of KOL fans and reduce its influence in the market.

In the face of netizens' scolding, consumers may have negative emotions, such as anger and disappointment. These negative emotions may affect consumers' perception of the brand and willingness to buy, thus reducing the effectiveness of online marketing. Furthermore, the scolding of netizens often leads to the deterioration of the network environment and the destruction of public social order. Therefore, when conducting online marketing, people need to pay attention to the choice of controversial topics and opinions and properly handle the feedback and discussion of netizens to avoid adverse effects.

5. Remediation of the Internet Marketing Environment

5.1. Self-media Quality and Professional Improvement

In the "content is king" era, high-quality content should be professional, original, interactive and interesting. However, due to the low entry of the threshold, the content produced by many KOLs with different professional levels is uneven, and the homogeneity is serious. Most current "planting grass" short videos focus on the product to "plant grass" for users, such as product unboxing videos, trial experience, and evaluation. The form is too straightforward, the method is similar, the copywriting is similar, and there is a lack of novelty, so optimizing "planting grass" content is particularly critical [8]. Under the background of the rapid development of the Internet, we-media platforms have long become an essential channel for the public to obtain information. Therefore, in the face of emergencies, we-media is the first place to occur, and we-media comments and dissemination of events will also influence the development direction of public opinion. Therefore, it is urgent to establish a self-media "keeper" system, raise the entry threshold, and establish a training mechanism for practitioners [6]. When conducting online marketing, KOL should pay attention to improving the quality of content and provide consumers with valuable, interesting, and in-depth information. This can not only improve the attention and satisfaction of consumers but also avoid the vicious competition of low-quality content. In addition, KOLs should also establish a sense of self-discipline, consciously abide by laws and regulations and industry norms, and avoid publishing false information, spoofs, plagiarism and other harmful behaviors. This helps to improve its professional image and reputation and also helps to improve the entire network marketing environment.

5.2. Platform Management

Platforms and enterprises should establish a strict content review system to review the content published by KOL to ensure that it complies with laws, regulations, and ethics. At the same time, the

relevant department should also severely crack down on insufficient information involving false advertisements and infringements and maintain the fairness and integrity of online marketing. By selecting high-quality KOL, it is helpful to improve the quality of platform content and improve the effectiveness of online marketing.

The platform monitors KOL data in real-time to prevent cheating such as brushing and painting. At the same time, the platform should improve data transparency so that consumers can clearly understand the real data of KOL and reduce the possibility of false marketing. The platform should also set up complaint and reporting channels so that consumers can give timely feedback when they find lousy information, such as false advertisements and infringements. After receiving the complaint, the platform should deal with it quickly and investigate the KOL involved to ensure the fairness and integrity of the online marketing environment.

5.3. The Government Issued a Bill

Government departments should strengthen the we-media industry's supervision to promote the healthy development of online marketing. For online advertising, the government should issue laws and regulations to stipulate release standards, content requirements, and advertisers' responsibilities, to curb the spread of false advertisements and other wrong information. In addition, the government should also strengthen the protection of intellectual property rights and crack down on infringements to protect the rights and interests of creators and consumers and improve the integrity of online marketing.

The government should also introduce management measures to clarify the code of conduct and the regulatory responsibility of the platform in the we-media industry so as to guide the healthy development of the we-media industry and improve the online marketing environment. The government should also formulate relevant policies to encourage the construction of network integrity and improve the integrity of we-media platforms and KOL to improve consumers' trust in online marketing and the effectiveness of online marketing.

In order to ensure the orderly operation of the online marketing market and maintain the rights and interests of consumers, the government should set up a regulatory agency responsible for online marketing and regularly review the self-media platform and KOL to ensure that they comply with laws, regulations, and industry norms. The government should also strengthen cooperation with other countries and regions to deal with cross-border network marketing problems jointly, crack down on cross-border network fraud and other illegal acts, promote the healthy development of the global network marketing market, and improve the overall level of the network marketing environment.

In addition, the government should also pay attention to online public opinion and social-emotional security, establish an early warning platform for public opinion, and quickly identify and deal with filthy online language harmful to the social atmosphere to avoid the risk of shaking social-emotional security. However, it is not enough for the government to guide and spread public opinion from the technical level. It also needs to provide timely psychological communication and social and emotional assistance to the general public to prevent the public from being in destructive psychological emotions such as panic, anxiety, and depression for a long time, and further intensify the development of public opinion in the direction of deterioration [9]. Under the influence of new media communication technology, the audience's behaviour, cognitive habits and consumption characteristics are subtly changing, and further changing the content creation and communication mode of advertising [10].

6. Conclusions

In the era of we-media, online marketing has become an important means of promotion for brands and enterprises, among which KOL marketing, represented by Xiaohongshu, plays an important role.

Online marketing has significant advantages in promoting the dissemination of brands and products and improving consumer awareness, but it also faces problems such as the impact of online public opinion, KOL hindering market development and expansion, intimidating falseness, and netizens' scolding. In order to improve the online marketing environment, we need to start from many aspects. This includes improving the quality and professionalism of self-media, strengthening the management of the platform system, and the government's introduction of relevant bills to strengthen supervision.

By analyzing the advantages and challenges of Xiaohongshu KOL marketing, this study helps brands and enterprises to use the we-media platform for marketing promotion better and improve the effectiveness of online marketing. In addition, this study puts forward measures to rectify the problems existing in the we-media market, including improving the quality and professionalism of we-media, strengthening the management of the platform system, and the government issuing relevant bills, which will help standardize the we-media market and create a positive, healthy and orderly online marketing environment. By rectifying the online marketing environment and reducing the dissemination of bad information, such as false advertisements and infringements, it will help protect consumers' rights and interests and improve their trust in online marketing. This study analyzes the development trend of online marketing in the we-media era, provides new ideas and directions for the industry, and helps to promote the innovation and progress of the online marketing industry. This study provides a useful reference for government departments in the supervision of online marketing and helps the government to introduce more reasonable and effective policies and strengthen the supervision of the online marketing market. In a word, this study takes Xiaohongshu KOL marketing as an example, which aims to provide useful guidance and suggestions for online marketing practice, promote the healthy development of the self-media market, realize the improvement of the online marketing environment, and have a positive impact on the online marketing practice of brands and enterprises.

In the future, KOL will be more professional, with professional knowledge and skills, to provide higher-quality content and more effective promotion. This will help improve the trust of consumers and the effectiveness of online marketing. The platform will continue to improve the supervision mechanism, use big data, artificial intelligence and other technical means to strengthen the review and management of content, crack down on false information, infringement and other adverse phenomena, and improve the credibility and transparency of the platform. In the future, online marketing will pay more attention to cross-border cooperation and integration. KOL and brands in various industries will jointly carry out innovative marketing activities to realize the sharing of resources and the complementarity of advantages. As consumers' demand for personalization continues to grow, community marketing will become a new trend in online marketing. KOL and the brand will pay more attention to building a stable fan base and improving consumer stickiness and loyalty through community interaction. The government will continue to introduce relevant policies and regulations to strengthen the online marketing market's supervision and ensure the market's healthy and orderly development. At the same time, transnational regulatory cooperation will also be gradually strengthened to deal with global network marketing problems jointly. With the continuous enhancement of users' awareness of privacy protection, online marketing will pay more attention to user privacy protection. The platform and KOL need to collect and use user data within the scope of compliance to ensure the security of user information. In the future, online marketing will pay more attention to sustainable development and social responsibility. KOL and brands need to pay attention to environmental protection, public welfare and other aspects in the promotion process, actively assume social responsibility, and transmit positive energy. Therefore, future network marketing will be more professional, standardized, innovative, and responsible, and realize the network marketing

environment's continuous improvement and healthy development. The corresponding research can also be further developed from the above perspectives.

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