The Role of Influencer Marketing for Chinese Brands

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ABSTRACT

Due to the rapid growth of social media, influencer marketing has become an essential channel for Chinese brands. This paper defines influencers and influencer marketing and introduces the SWOT analytical framework. Using Xiaomi and Geely as case studies, the paper analyzes their influencer marketing practices and internal and external industrial conditions via SWOT. The study shows that influencer marketing allows domestic enterprises to precisely target and engage users and globalize their brand. However, it also involves risks, such as unreliable influencer credibility. The study concludes that Chinese brands must leverage their industrial strengths, seize global market opportunities, mitigate operational weaknesses, and avoid marketing risks to achieve steady brand development.

Keywords: *Influencer marketing, Social media marketing, Chinese brands, SWOT analysis, Xiaomi, Geely Group, Brand internationalization.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, online opinion leader cooperation has occupied an important position in the whole marketing system. Relying on big data screening technology, brands can accurately reach target customer groups. Meanwhile, recommendation content released by online opinion leaders can raise the public trust level of brand promotion activities. Through diversified interactive forms, brands can significantly lift user participation, which also complements the booming social media operation ecosystem.

For domestic Chinese brands, KOL cooperation brings multiple layers of promotional value. Working with overseas online creators can accelerate the pace of brand going global; cooperating with young internet celebrities can help brands adjust their market positioning and win over young consumer groups. It is vital to integrate brand core culture into short videos and live streaming content, and combine online creators' personal characteristics to realize the integration of traditional culture and modern creative marketing. By digging out unique product selling points, forming differentiated brand impressions, triggering spontaneous word-of-mouth communication among users, and realizing full-platform content diffusion, KOL marketing can provide strong momentum for brand market breakthrough and performance growth. [1]

2. BASIC DEFINITION

This chapter systematically explores the fundamental concepts of influencers and influencer marketing, including their definitions, connotations, classification standards, generation reasons and mainstream cooperation forms.

2.1 Influencer

This subsection focuses on explaining the definition, essential connotation and classification standards of online KOLs from communication logic and fan scale dimensions.

2.1.1 Definition

Online KOLs refer to internet personalities who own stable follower groups on one or more social media platforms. The content they post can reach a large number of audiences, and their personal viewpoints and product evaluation content can easily change followers' inherent cognition and

consumption choices. No matter whether they share practical information or publish subjective experience comments about goods, their speech and behavior will form guiding effects on their fan groups.

2.1.2 Meaning

Essentially, online KOLs are internet users with considerable fan volume on social platforms. Their published content can cover massive audiences and form strong guiding power over followers' consumption decisions.

Correspondingly, KOL marketing is a branch of social media promotion. Brands cooperate with various online creators to launch paid collaborative content, so as to transmit brand information to creators' fan groups. The popularization of social media such as short video platforms and blogs has expanded the scope of traditional celebrity endorsement marketing, and also redefined the definition of "public figures" in the digital age.

2.1.3 Types and Categories

From the perspective of communication logic, online KOLs can be split into two major types:

The first type is relationship-driven communicators. Such creators are good at socializing and maintain close connections with different circles of internet users. Thanks to their extensive social network, their product recommendation content can spread rapidly across different groups. They are natural online content disseminators, willing to forward and share interesting information to all kinds of fan groups. Many enterprises will invite them to conduct real product testing and release practical experience content. Relevant data proves that creators full of passion, creativity and communication talent can speed up the spread of new fashion trends in a short time.

The second type is professional opinion leaders. Such creators focus on vertical field information output and have accumulated deep professional knowledge in their own segmented track. Their professional sharing can win audience trust and provide targeted reference suggestions for consumers, so they are recognized as authoritative experts within the industry. Although their fan base is not as large as all-round internet celebrities, their content has strong professional depth and persuasion, especially in niche market segments. Such creators attach great importance to personal reputation management to maintain long-term credibility among fans.

From the perspective of follower scale, the industry has formed a more detailed classification standard:

Nano KOLs: The number of fans is only several hundred, but they have high intimacy with followers, high comment and interaction volume, and high content credibility, suitable for small-scale localized product promotion.

Micro KOLs: Fan volume ranges from ten thousand to one hundred thousand, most of them are vertical field professionals with stable local user groups, which is very suitable for regional small and medium-sized enterprises to carry out targeted marketing.

Mega KOLs: Mainly mainstream celebrities and top internet stars with millions of fans, whose content can cover a wide range of audiences, but the interaction rate between content and fans is relatively low, and the sense of community connection is weak.[2]

2.2 Influencer Marketing

This subsection provides a comprehensive definition of influencer marketing, along with a detailed analysis of its core marketing advantages. It also examines the industry background driving its rise and the diverse brand cooperation modes.

2.2.1 Definition

KOL marketing means brands reach cooperation agreements with social media content creators, and jointly launch promotional content to realize product and brand exposure. In performance-oriented marketing modes, brand and creator cooperation often generates user original experience content, which will be reused in subsequent brand advertising design.

2.2.2 Meaning

Enterprises can obtain multiple promotion advantages through cooperating with online creators:

First, expand brand exposure scope. Relying on the fan base of KOLs, brands can deliver product information to more potential consumers and raise overall brand visibility.

Second, improve consumer trust and order conversion rate. Audiences tend to regard professional evaluation content released by vertical KOLs as real personal experience, which will stimulate their willingness to buy goods and effectively lift conversion indicators.

Third, realize soft implantation of advertising information. Brands can integrate product introduction into creators' daily shooting content, forming personalized communication mode. Compared with rigid traditional advertisements, this soft promotion way brings less rejection to audiences and improves content acceptance.

Fourth, build two-way interaction channels between brands and consumers. Followers can comment, ask questions and exchange product experience under KOLs' posts, which helps brands strengthen user stickiness and collect real market feedback from consumers.

Fifth, realize precise marketing for segmented crowds. Brands can select creators from fashion, fitness, food, digital and other vertical tracks according to different product positioning, so as to deliver targeted promotion information to matching consumer groups. [3]

2.2.3 Causes

Online advertising industry insiders point out that modern internet users have formed "advertising shielding psychology", and many users will install advertisement interception tools. Traditional banner pop-up advertisements are hard to effectively reach target audiences, and most advertising information is ignored by users. To break through this promotion bottleneck, brands turn to online KOLs as communication carriers. On the one hand, KOLs themselves are willing to receive and spread brand information; on the other hand, their content can break through users' resistance to commercial advertisements. Multiple practical surveys show that modern consumers are more willing to accept product recommendations from online creators, mainly because audiences think KOLs' content is more real and down-to-earth, thus forming stable trust relationships.

2.2.4 Types

Enterprises can select diversified cooperation modes according to brand demands, giving full play to different advantages of online creators. The mainstream cooperation forms include paid single post release, professional product evaluation, unboxing experience videos, fan welfare lottery, platform-themed competitions, commission-based affiliate promotion, joint content creation, long-term brand ambassador cooperation, offline activity sponsorship and platform hot topic challenges.

3. SWOT ANALYSIS

This chapter introduces the basic concept, operation steps and four types of combined strategic logic of SWOT analysis, laying a theoretical foundation for subsequent case enterprise research.

3.1 Definition

SWOT analysis is a practical tool for enterprise planning and scheme sorting, which can be used to evaluate new business directions, project feasibility and compile enterprise development plans. The four letters S, W, O, T respectively stand for internal strengths, internal weaknesses, external market opportunities and external potential threats. This analysis method can help enterprises sort out internal and external influencing factors, optimize operation efficiency, and predict the development trend of new business layout.

3.2 How It Works

The whole analysis process follows fixed logical steps:

First, clarify the core research objectives, lock the target customer groups and confirm the analysis purpose;

Second, build a four-dimensional SWOT matrix, sort out and evaluate all internal advantages, existing deficiencies, market development opportunities and potential industry risks;

Third, fill the matrix with specific enterprise and industry information;

Fourth, conduct cross-matrix combined analysis, and form four sets of targeted development strategies including SO, ST, WO and WT;

Finally, sort out priority development directions and formulate specific implementation plans according to the analysis results.

3.3 Strategies

The strengths and opportunities arising from the SO strategy are of crucial importance in this

context. In this context, it is essential to capitalise on individual strengths in order to achieve higher profits or a larger market share. The plan is to build on these strengths.

As part of the ST strategy, an analysis of strengths and risks is carried out. This strategy identifies measures that can be used to leverage strengths in order to counter potential risks or threats. This offers the opportunity to safeguard the business.

Weaknesses and Opportunities (WO Strategy): The focus of this strategy is on exploiting opportunities to compensate for weaknesses. Provided the market allows it, it is advisable to use the current situation to transform any weaknesses into strengths.

Weaknesses and Risks (WT Strategy): In the event of an impending risk assessment and the presence of vulnerabilities in this area, the development of an avoidance strategy is recommended. It is advisable to avoid areas of risk or to offset them using one's own strengths. Weaknesses should be addressed and dealt with in a targeted manner. [4]

4. COMPANY EXAMPLE

This chapter examines the influencer marketing strategies and long-term development plans of two prominent Chinese brand enterprises, Xiaomi and Geely Group. A SWOT analysis is employed to assess their marketing strategies and future outlook.

4.1 Xiaomi

This subsection introduces Xiaomi's overall KOL marketing layout and uses SWOT model to analyze its internal and external conditions, and puts forward phased development plans.

4.1.1 Background

Xiaomi has achieved outstanding market results through long-term KOL operation. Its founder Lei Jun is a core personal opinion leader of the brand. As a senior digital industry expert with personal charm, he releases annual new product speeches and keeps real-time interaction on social platforms, shaping an image of approachable, sincere and humorous entrepreneur. He often shares entrepreneurial hardships online, responds to users' online messages, and launches interesting interactive activities such as customizing peripheral products based on hot memes according to fan demands, which greatly improves public goodwill and shortens the distance between consumers and the brand.

Besides Lei Jun, senior management including Lu Weibing and Xu Fei also maintain active social media accounts. They share daily work content and interact with netizens with popular internet memes, forming a complete brand official communication matrix and gaining wide public recognition. Meanwhile, Xiaomi signs long-term cooperation with celebrities from multiple fields such as Wang Yuan, Liu Haoran and Su Bingtian. The brand matches celebrity characteristics with product positioning to carry out joint promotion, comprehensively upgrading the overall brand influence.

4.1.2 Analysis of Xiaomi Using SWOT Analysis

Internal Strengths: Xiaomi owns a complete diversified product ecosystem covering mobile phones, smart home appliances and new energy vehicles, with strong independent research and development capability; its SU7 electric vehicle has outstanding comprehensive performance; all products maintain high cost performance, and the brand high-end transformation has achieved remarkable results; it holds stable global market share and forms perfect supply chain collaborative advantages.

Internal Weaknesses: The production capacity of new energy vehicles cannot fully meet market demand; offline after-sales service outlets are insufficient in partial regions; the inherent "cost-effective" brand label restricts the profit space of high-end products.

External Opportunities: The global new energy vehicle industry is in a rapid rising cycle; the integration of 5G and artificial intelligence brings huge growth space to the AIoT industry; the global consumer market provides sufficient space for brand overseas expansion.

External Threats: The digital and automobile industries face fierce homogeneous competition; geopolitical changes bring unstable factors to the global supply chain; consumer demand and aesthetic preferences keep changing rapidly.

Combined SWOT Strategic Planning:

Short-term layout: Focus on high-tech research and development, increase investment in semiconductor, image sensor and other core

components, expand the market coverage of SU7 electric vehicles, and deepen the construction of Globalization 2.0, realize localized production in emerging and developed countries, and break through high-end market segments such as folding screens and intelligent connected devices.

Medium-term layout: Further integrate the "human-vehicle-home" intelligent ecosystem, unify equipment connection standards and launch scene-based product packages; carry out investment and acquisition of core ecological chain enterprises to strengthen independent control over the supply chain.

Long-term layout: Diversify AI internet service businesses such as intelligent assistant subscription and vehicle-mounted advertising to raise overall gross profit margin; build multi-region overseas production bases to enhance supply chain anti-risk ability.

In general, Xiaomi is completing the transformation from a cost-effective digital brand to a global ecological technology enterprise driven by technology, forming a three-core profit layout of hardware, new energy vehicles and internet services. The enterprise will dynamically adjust resource allocation according to technological iteration speed and regional market risks. [5]

4.2 Geely Group

This subsection sorts out Geely's product layout, sales channels and KOL marketing mode, and completes SWOT analysis to clarify its overall industrial development strategy.

4.2.1 Background

Founded in 1997, Geely Auto has grown into a leading domestic automobile manufacturer and gained a stable foothold in the global automobile market after years of development. The brand has always adopted forward-looking marketing ideas and created many industry promotion trends.

On the product side, Geely adheres to differentiated innovative layout. It keeps updating fuel vehicle products while focusing on the research and development of new energy vehicles, launching multiple pure electric models such as Emgrand EV and Geometry A. Besides, Geely completes the acquisition and long-term cooperation with Volvo and other international automobile brands, introducing advanced foreign technology and management experience to drive product upgrading. Its Lynk & Co brand relies on unique design style, high-end configuration and Volvo's technical support to successfully open up the mid-to-high-end automobile market.

On the sales channel side, Geely builds an integrated online and offline sales system. Offline, it owns dense 4S store networks to provide convenient vehicle viewing and purchase channels for consumers; online, it operates official e-commerce platforms and settles in mainstream shopping platforms to realize seamless connection between online browsing and offline physical stores.

In terms of KOL marketing, Geely actively cooperates with professional automobile media people and vertical automotive bloggers. Such opinion leaders own large fan groups and can significantly affect consumers' car purchase decisions. Through offline test drive activities and detailed product explanation videos, creators can fully display Geely's product advantages to fans. Meanwhile, Geely launches interactive hot topics and user sharing activities on social platforms to stimulate spontaneous secondary communication among users, continuously polish brand image and expand market influence.

4.2.2 Analysis of the Geely Group Using SWOT Analysis

Internal Strengths: High domestic brand recognition; core technology accumulation brought by the acquisition of Volvo; complete product layout covering multiple market segments; comprehensive offline dealer network; rich long-term marketing operation experience.

Internal Weaknesses: The independent research and development capability of some vehicle models is insufficient; there is a certain technical gap between its new energy products and top industry brands; overseas market brand popularity needs further improvement.

External Opportunities: The global automobile industry is comprehensively transforming to electrification and intelligence, with huge market potential; automobile consumption demand in emerging markets keeps rising, bringing new overseas expansion space for Geely.

External Threats: Industry competition intensifies continuously, and competing brands launch new technologies and new models to seize market share; raw material price fluctuation, international trade protectionism and other factors

push up enterprise costs and hinder overseas business expansion.

Comprehensive Strategic Direction Based on SWOT Analysis: Geely takes “electrification, intelligence and globalization” as the three core development directions, aiming to build a world-leading intelligent new energy vehicle technology group.

Short-term target: Accelerate the comprehensive transformation to new energy, rely on multiple sub-brands such as Zeekr and Volvo to realize breakthroughs in high-end market, and increase investment in intelligent driving and vehicle-mounted ecological research.

Medium-term target: Push forward the global market layout, realize localized production in Southeast Asia and build high-end sales channels in European markets.

Long-term target: Build a complete industrial chain covering automobile manufacturing, travel service and intelligent vehicle ecology. Through vertical supply chain integration and platform mass production, the enterprise can reduce comprehensive operation costs and improve operational efficiency. At the same time, explore innovative profit models such as autonomous driving commercialization and vehicle software subscription services, and realize the transformation from traditional automobile manufacturers to the world’s top three new energy vehicle enterprises. [6]

5. CONCLUSION

Chinese local brands have natural promotion strengths in KOL cooperation: complete product supply chain system and high cost-effective product positioning can form competitive barriers in market communication. At the same time, brands also face internal deficiencies such as insufficient overseas popularity. The external market brings multiple development opportunities including the expansion of global consumption market and the prosperity of social media platforms, and KOL marketing is an important carrier to seize these opportunities. However, this promotion mode also cannot ignore potential risks such as unstable KOL personal credibility and poor promotion conversion effect.

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