



A Study on the Influence of Opinion Leaders' Content Production on Fan Consumption Behavior: Taking Xiaohongshu App as an Example

Ruotong Niu^(✉)

Communication University of China, Beijing, People's Republic of China
641140315@qq.com

Abstract. With the development and popularization of internet technology, short video social platforms are playing an increasingly important role in our consumption decisions, and the production of short video content has to some extent promoted the development of platform economy. Based on this background, this study takes the Xiaohongshu app as an example, analyzes the guiding role of key opinion leaders (KOLs) on the platform and the trust mechanism of users through analyzing representative KOLs, and explores the economic development model of the current short video platform and the driving mechanism behind it: the influence of opinion leaders positively affects fans' purchasing intentions, while media algorithms provide power for opinion leaders' content production and accurately push commercial content to the audience.

Keywords: UGC · self-media · opinion leaders · consumption decision-making

1 Introduction

With the continuous development and popularization of Internet technology and computers, short video social platforms are becoming more and more integrated into daily life. Pure video dissemination platforms such as Tiktok and Bilibili, as well as social platforms such as Xiaohongshu, which uses short videos as one of its main forms of communication, are gradually showing characteristics of platform economy. Unlike the pure e-commerce transactions on previous platforms such as Alibaba and Taobao, the current development of e-commerce on short video social platforms in China clearly shows that 'dissemination', a common communication behavior, has become an indispensable part of the e-commerce operation process on short video social platforms. In other words, users' 'self-dissemination of content' and their 'reception of platform-disseminated content' have become part of their participatory behavior.

In marketing, KOL refers to people who have more accurate product information, are accepted, or trusted by relevant groups, and have a greater influence on the purchasing behavior of that group [1]. In the 'community + e-commerce' model of the Xiaohongshu app, e-commerce provides a 'fixed price' or commission for content creators, customizes

the content produced by the creators, to achieve the purpose of product marketing promotion. Currently, there is more research on live streaming e-commerce, while research on the profit model of KOL's self-media is lacking. As a prominent e-commerce model, this article will focus on the combination of self-media content production and e-commerce development, and take the e-commerce model of the Xiaohongshu app, a more typical short video social platform in China.

2 Review of Literature

2.1 Origins and Characteristics of Self-Media Content Production

In July 2003, the Media Center of the American Journalism Society published a research report on 'We Media' jointly proposed by Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis. The report gives a rigorous definition of 'We Media': 'We Media is a way for ordinary citizens to connect with the global knowledge system through digital technology, providing and sharing their true opinions and news' [2].

With the development and popularization of the internet, self-media has evolved from a 'DIY for everyone' model to more professional and commercialized self-media content producers and creator agencies such as 'KOLs' (Key Opinion Leaders) and 'MCNs'. Based on this definition, the author will further analyze user communication behavior and social media traffic conversion on social platforms represented by 'KOLs'.

2.2 Influence Economy

Essentially, media influence is a form of control. This control is exhibited by the influence sender's targeted control over the recipient's cognition, inclination, opinion, attitude, belief, and outward behavior. Media influence is achieved through the process of information dissemination. Therefore, the occurrence of its influence is necessarily based on the recipient's attention and contact. From a content perspective, media influence consists of two basic elements: 'attracting the attention of the media and content' and 'causing passive changes in the audience's cognitive, emotional, volitional, and behavioral responses'.

The market value of the media as an industry lies in the extent to which it can maintain its influence over its target audience, and how much this influence can further affect social processes, social decision-making, market consumption, and people's social behavior [3]. Therefore, further speaking, the economic essence of the media as an industry is the 'influence economy'.

In the current popularization of short video social platforms, the market value of 'KOL' also largely depends on the size of their media influence. Based on this theory, the author will analyze the influence of content creation on audience consumption decisions.

3 Research Methodology

The primary business model of the selected case study from the Xiaohongshu app is to investigate the underlying connection between content production by opinion leaders on short video platforms and fan consumption behaviors, using case analysis as a method.

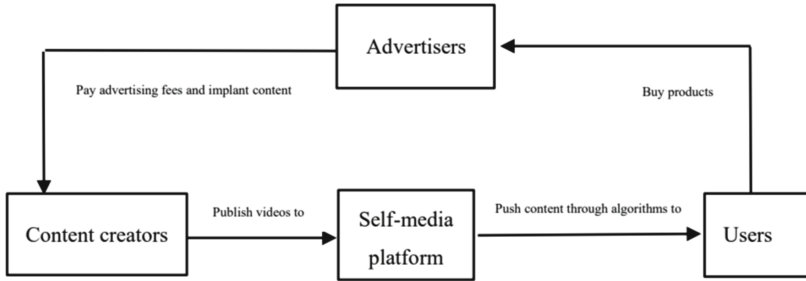


Fig. 1. The mainstream operation mode of the self-media market

As is depicted in Fig. 1, the case selection is mainly based on several factors. Firstly, currently, in the self-media market, more advertising agencies are implanting ads in the content created by self-media bloggers. The platform provides intermediary channels to obtain advertising fees or charging service fees (Chen Wenjing and Zhang Yongqing, Research on Self-media Platform Advertising Distribution Pricing Strategy Considering Content Advertising Implantation, *Economic Management*, 2023). Major short video platforms such as Tiktok, Bilibili, and Kuaishou include this model in their main operating models, which mainly operate as follows: self-media content creators share and communicate their works on the platform, and users can browse the content (videos, tweets, etc.) uploaded by self-media creators for free through the platform. Advertising agencies pay advertising fees to self-media content creators to obtain advertising space implanted in their content, while the self-media platform provides a dedicated advertising platform that pushes ads videos to users through platform algorithms. Finally, users purchase their products based on the impact of advertising videos.

Secondly, Xiaohongshu has a large user base and exposure. As of May 2019, Xiaohongshu had 250 million registered users, and the daily exposure of user-generated content (UGC) was more than 3 billion. Therefore, Xiaohongshu's business model has typical sample research value.

Case analysis, also known as single case study, is a method of detailed examination of a research object from a holistic perspective, including single case analysis and multiple case analysis [4]. This article mainly uses a single case analysis to deeply analyze the influence of Xiaohongshu opinion leaders on their fans' consumption decisions.

4 Research Results

4.1 Elevating Influence of Opinion Leaders - Establishing Audience Trust

American scholar Lazarsfeld proposed the concept of 'Key Opinion Leader (KOL)', which refers to individuals who are granted the power of speech and communication by the mass media due to some outstanding qualities. In the Little Red Book app, the concept of 'KOL' is widely used, and its commercial value mainly depends on how much influence it can maintain over the audience, and how much this influence can further affect people's social behavior. They target specific niche content and relatively small markets, attracting businesses in related fields to place advertisements by focusing on segmented reader groups [5].

Howland et al. divided credibility into professionalism and reliability to measure the impact of information transmission on consumer attitudes [6]. Lafferty & Goldsmith further confirmed that the higher the level of trust consumers have in celebrities, the more likely they are to have the willingness and behavior to purchase products endorsed by them [7]. To enhance the trust of the audience in themselves and their media influence, KOL's content creation mainly falls into the following categories:

Professionalism: Establishing Trustworthy Image

In the evaluation account 'Lao Ba Ping Ce' with 7.72 million followers, the blogger conducts product evaluation using laboratory testing and chart analysis and draws conclusions about the quality of products. His rigorous attitude and experimental methods have received praise and trust from many netizens. The product placement fee for his 'Lao Ba Chou Jian' theme video was as high as 800,000 yuan. The blogger 'Tsinghua Skincare Dr. Yi' is labeled with a Ph.D. from the Peking Union Medical College of Tsinghua University. He shares skincare knowledge through short videos and has 823,000 followers on Xiaohongshu. The head blogger 'Luo Wangyu' gained popularity with his minimalist skincare routine and has 4.894 million followers. He writes in his profile that 'reputation is more important than making money', and has gained the trust of many fans.

Manufacturing Emotions: Enhancing Fan Stickiness

Randall Collins' four elements of the interaction ritual chain are: two or more people gathering in the same place, setting boundaries against outsiders, focusing attention on a common object or activity, and sharing a common emotional experience. Emotional energy becomes the driving force of interaction ritual [8] (Collins, R. (2012). *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Beijing: The Commercial Press.) Watching videos precisely meets these criteria: the audience forms an emotional connection with the video creator on the screen, thereby forming trust in the video creator. Unlike the distant relationship between ordinary people and celebrities, the distance between internet celebrities on short video platforms is reduced through the internet. For example, the head beauty blogger 'Nana doesn't like durian' allows fans to get closer to her life by sharing daily campus life vlogs. She has 1.03 million followers and an advertising fee of 200,000 yuan (source: Pugongying).

Becoming 'Celebrities': Inspiring Fans to Follow Suit

According to sociologist Baudrillard, 'For an object to become an object of consumption, it must become a symbol' [9]. Symbolic economy projects consumers' inner desires onto celebrities, making them highly symbolic figures. Thus, consumption ceases to be solely about products and becomes about people. However, traditional fan culture requires a certain level of wealth and leisure time, which many people do not have. Therefore, in the era of social media, users have shifted from idolizing stars to following internet celebrities. This reduces the economic and physical demands, making it more accessible to more users [10]. Top beauty blogger 'Yi Mengling' gained fame by showcasing her versatile sense of style and producing a high volume of photos. Her recommended products often attract a lot of attention and purchases from fans. Internet celebrity Liu Chang believes that 'When fans look at my photos, my beautiful clothes, traveling, eating,

and drinking tea, they want to have the same ‘refined’ lifestyle as me. However, these lifestyles require financial support, and what provides them with a sense of identification and belonging are beautiful but affordable clothing’ [11]. As her recommended products are often cosmetics and skincare items within the majority of people’s budgets, they are highly imitable, and followers are more likely to identify with her.

4.2 How to ‘Produce’: Manufacturing Emotions and Media Algorithms

Another major feature of the current social media platform economic development model is its focus on emotional marketing. Using Xiaohongshu as an example, a Xiaohongshu blogger who wants to gain more attention in the community needs to simultaneously focus on producing quality content and building a personal IP. On the one hand, they need to provide high-quality content to compete for display positions on the user’s startup page and search page and win more attention through their reputation in specific fields. On the other hand, they also need to build personalized character tags, which means creating a personal influence among users through certain ‘characters’.

On the other hand, media algorithms will create a ‘portrait’ of the audience, identify interests, and aggregate reading, social, and consumption scenes by integrating various data. It accurately recommends information to users and evaluates effects through an intelligent big data evaluation system [12]. Additionally, short video social platform algorithms will decide whether to put the video into the next traffic pool based on the interaction rate. Therefore, the higher the quality of the short video, the more likes, collections, and comments it can garner, resulting in more exposure. E-commerce platforms then select whether to cooperate with bloggers based on their exposure and interaction. Thus, the quality of self-media content production is closely related to commercial cooperation, providing more motivation for bloggers to create more high-quality content. On the other hand, due to algorithms, commercial content can also be more accurately pushed to potential consumers.

5 Conclusion: Reflection on Influence Conversion

Opinion leaders guiding consumer behavior is a popular marketing strategy nowadays, so it is necessary to explore the role of opinion leaders in guiding fan consumption decisions. This article explores the main factors of opinion leaders’ impact on fan consumption decisions through observation and research of representative influencers, as well as the media algorithm’s promotion of influencer content production.

However, despite the rapid development of the Internet and computer technology, China’s short video social platforms’ e-commerce transformation has progressed smoothly and achieved remarkable results. Still, based on the flourishing status of China’s e-commerce industry, we should also consider its shortcomings in a more dialectical way.

Firstly, ‘internet celebrities’ abuse their influence for profit. Due to the huge profits and brand benefits provided by the ‘community + e-commerce’ marketing, e-commerce platforms provide considerable advertising income for ‘KOLs’. Taking Xiaohongshu as an example, roughly speaking, a blogger’s price is one-tenth of their number of followers. For example, the price of a blogger with 100,000 fans is about 10,000 to 20,000 yuan,

and for those with over 1 million fans, it is around 100,000 to 200,000 yuan. The price for 'head KOLs' is generally around 300,000 to 1 million yuan. For KOLs who aim to build their personal IP and establish fans' trust, brand selection is also part of building their own IP, so the possibility of blindly pursuing profit in product selection is not high. In addition, Xiaohongshu has a strict auditing mechanism for advertisements. For example, if a brand claims its product has a 'whitening' effect in its advertisement, it needs to provide certification of that product's whitening properties. However, cases where false IP is deliberately created and skincare products are marketed using the 'fake persona' of a chemistry PhD are still common, and the majority of victims are women over 45 years old.

Finally, the push for consumerism in the internet celebrity economy. First, KOLs have a large proportion of followers from first and second-tier cities, as well as higher consumer purchasing power. Secondly, due to brands favoring a sense of luxury in advertising, KOLs often present themselves in videos as having high spending power and living a high-quality lifestyle. However, in the context of China's uneven development and large proportion of low-income individuals, this overemphasis on consumerism may lead to people making incorrect judgments about their own economic status and create psychological imbalances, which is a problem that requires serious reflection.

References

1. Liu Junting. Analysis of the Communication Effect of KOL Marketing[J]. journal news research, 2020(11):1-2.
2. Bowman, S & Willis, C. We Media[J]. Media Center, 2003.
3. Yu Guo-Ming. Interpretation of Media Influence--Exploration of the Essence of the Media Industry[J]. Chinese Journal of Journalism & Communication. 2003(2), 212-222
4. Riffe, D & S. Lacy & F.G. Fico, Analyzing Media Messages: Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research, Second Edition[M]. London, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005.
5. Zeng Fanxu & Wang Yuqi. The Profit Model of Content Entrepreneurship in the Mobile Internet Era[J]. Shanghai Journalism Review, 2016(04), 20-26
6. Howland C I, Irving J L, Kelley H H. Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change [J] . American Sociological Review, 1953, 19(3):355-357.
7. Lafferty B A, Goldsmith R E. Corporate Credibility's Role in Consumers' Attitudes and Purchase Intentions When A High Versus a Low Credibility Endorser is Used in the Ad(J). Journal of Business Research, 1999, 44(2): 109-116.
8. Colins, R. Interaction Ritual Chains (Lin Juren, Wang Peng, Song Li, Trans.) [M], The Commercial Press, 2012. 51
9. Baudrillard, J. Le Système des objets (Lin Zhiming, Trans.) [J]. Shanghai People Press. 2001. 223-224
10. Wang, Y. The Transformation of Consumer Society: From Stars to Internet Celebrity[J], Modern Communication. 2017(2), 23-33
11. Zhang, Y. Uncover the secrets of the internet celebrity incubator, China Economic Weekly. 2016
12. Duan, P. Communities, Scenes, Emotions: Group Participation and E-commerce Development in Short Video Platforms[J]. Journalism Research, 2022(1). 86-95

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

