

Research on the Impact Mechanism of Short-Video Platform KOL Marketing on the Purchase Intention of Generation Z Consumers

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Abstract

By reshaping how brands connect with young consumers, short-video platforms have turned key opinion leader (KOL) marketing into a primary tool for translating content exposure into purchase behaviour. With Generation Z as the focal population, we examine how KOL marketing directly affects purchase intention, how consumer trust serves as a mediator and how the effects differ by consumer gender and product type. Using questionnaire data collected from active short-video users, three multiple linear regression models are estimated to test the main effect, the mediation path and the boundary conditions. The findings indicate that KOL marketing exerts a significant positive effect on the purchase intention of Generation Z consumers and that consumer trust partially mediates this link. There is heterogeneity in the effect: it is stronger among female consumers and for experiential products. Robustness checks that substitute an alternative dependent variable and restrict the sample to frequent viewers support the stability of the core conclusions. These results deepen the understanding of how influencer content psychologically translates into youth purchase behaviour and give actionable guidance to platform operators and brands.

Keywords

KOL marketing, short-video platform, Generation Z, purchase intention, consumer trust.

1. Introduction

By systematically examining both the direct impact and the underlying mechanism through which short-video platform key opinion leader (KOL) marketing shapes the purchase intention of Generation Z consumers, we establish the core objective of this study. We clarify how KOL marketing behaviour on short-video platforms influences the purchase intention of digitally native young consumers in a content-driven consumption setting and supply empirical evidence for the central research question. Consumer trust is introduced as a mediating variable so that we can explore whether it occupies a key position in the pathway from KOL marketing to purchase intention. Given the diversity of consumer characteristics and product categories, we further test whether consumer gender and product type give rise to significant variation in the strength of the KOL-marketing effect on purchase intention. A theoretical model with a mediating variable is constructed and validated in order to address a limitation of the existing literature, which has largely confined itself to the direct association between influencer attributes and behavioural outcomes without giving sufficient attention to the internal psychological pathway.

As mobile video has deeply penetrated daily life, short-video platforms now serve as a primary channel for young consumers to obtain product information and arrive at consumption decisions. KOL marketing, in which brands partner with influential content creators to promote products, has emerged as a key non-traditional channel for shaping the market response of

young cohorts. The relationship between KOL marketing and consumer purchase intention is increasingly becoming a central topic in both academic inquiry and business practice. Generation Z consumers, born roughly between 1997 and 2012, have grown up alongside smartphones and social media and tend to prefer authenticity, immediacy and peer-like engagement ^[1]. Empirical evidence indicates that short-form video, as a marketing tool for e-commerce, exerts a notable influence on the purchase intention of youth consumers ^[2].

A wide body of international research in mature digital markets has established that influencer content positively drives consumer intention. A study of Chinese short-video users demonstrated that short-video content has a notably positive effect on purchase intention, with consumer trust functioning as an internal psychological response ^[3]. . TikTok-based evidence further supports this pattern: influencer credibility is found to move young audiences from casual engagement toward actual purchase intention ^[4]. Taken together, these findings establish influencer-generated content as a meaningful antecedent of purchase intention among young digital consumers.

Extensive empirical work has established that favourable KOL marketing materially promotes purchase intention, a conclusion that holds across diverse samples and platforms. Using the foundational value model of influencer marketing, it was demonstrated that message value and source credibility together drive consumer trust and subsequent purchase intention ^[5]. Perceived influencer authenticity has been found to be a significant enhancer of follower purchase intention ^[6], while influencer credibility reinforces both purchase intention and the parasocial bond underlying it ^[7]. A meta-analytic review that synthesized findings from a broad set of studies concluded that influencer attributes have a robust positive effect on both consumer engagement and purchase intention ^[8]. This favourable relationship is not limited to any single attribute. When influencer characteristics are decomposed, persuasive power operating through brand credibility is found to raise purchase intention significantly ^[9]. .

The literature suggests that KOL marketing does not translate directly into purchase intention; instead, its influence operates through several mediating pathways. As a positive signal, favourable KOL content can effectively narrow the information gap between brands and young consumers, in turn fostering consumer trust and ultimately strengthening purchase intention ^[10]. At the same time, outstanding KOL performance can markedly strengthen how consumers perceive value and satisfaction ^[11]. Through the continuous sharing of authentic experiences, KOLs on platforms such as Douyin arouse viewer interest and channel it into behavioural intention ^[12]. Viewed through parasocial theory, the emotional bond young audiences form with influencers functions as an important conduit, channelling content exposure first into trust and then into purchase intention ^[13], and influencer attributes also shape purchase intention by way of the characterization that consumers construct of the influencer ^[14].

It is also apparent from the research that the impact of KOL marketing on purchase intention has heterogeneous and boundary characteristics. Consumer-to-consumer video review evidence demonstrates that, under specific conditions, parasocial interaction strengthens the persuasive effect of influencer content ^[15]. In a study of Sina Weibo influencers, audience involvement was found to moderate the link between influencer cues and purchase intention ^[16], and research on Chinese short-video platforms further established that source credibility and content objectivity influence engagement outcomes in differentiated ways ^[17]. Most studies have found that influencer marketing has a more pronounced effect on consumers with greater emotional engagement and on products that rely heavily on experiential evaluation. Consumer and product characteristics thus jointly condition the strength of the value effect.

We focus on how short-video platform KOL marketing affects the purchase intention of Generation Z consumers, together with the mediating role of consumer trust and the heterogeneous effects arising from consumer and product characteristics. Five parts make up the research. The introduction covers the research background, significance, methods and the

current state of the field. Core concepts and theoretical foundations are clarified in the second part. The third part sets out the hypotheses, sample, variables and models. Descriptive, correlation, regression, heterogeneity and robustness results are reported in the fourth part. The final part summarizes the findings and offers recommendations.

2. Conceptual Definition and Theoretical Foundation

2.1. Definition of Core Concepts

2.1.1. KOL Marketing

KOL marketing refers to a form of marketing communication in which brands work with key opinion leaders who hold influence in a specific content field, creating and disseminating product-related content on social platforms. On short-video platforms, KOL marketing goes beyond simple product endorsement: it is a comprehensive practice that integrates content creativity, personal credibility and audience interaction in a short, highly immersive video format. We measure KOL marketing using a composite construct that covers the professionalism, attractiveness and interactivity perceived by Generation Z consumers in the KOL content they encounter. This construct reflects the overall quality of the marketing stimulus rather than any single attribute.

2.1.2. Purchase Intention

The subjective probability that a consumer will buy a specific product or service within a given period is termed purchase intention, and it serves as a key predictor of actual purchase behaviour. It reflects a conscious willingness to purchase that is grounded in the information available and the value perceived. Within the short-video marketing context, both cognitive evaluation and affective response shape purchase intention, which is widely adopted as the dependent variable for assessing the effectiveness of influencer content.

2.1.3. Consumer Trust

Consumer trust denotes the extent to which a consumer is willing to rely on a KOL recommendation and the associated brand information, grounded in the belief that the KOL is honest, competent and benevolent. As a central psychological state, it converts content exposure into behavioural intention. This construct is most commonly measured with a multi-item scale that taps perceived reliability, sincerity and expertise of the KOL and of the branded content presented.

2.2. Basic Theoretical Support

2.2.1. Source Credibility Theory

According to source credibility theory, the persuasive effect of a message depends to a large extent on how the audience perceives the trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness of the source. When a KOL is perceived as credible, product information is transmitted more persuasively, audience scepticism is reduced and young consumers become more likely to accept the recommendation and form purchase intention.

2.2.2. Parasocial Interaction Theory

A one-sided, pseudo-social relationship that audiences develop with media figures is described by parasocial interaction theory. Repeated and intimate exposure to a KOL on short-video platforms fosters a sense of familiarity and friendship among young followers. The emotional bond that results strengthens the persuasive power of KOL content and leads followers to accept endorsements as though they came from a trusted acquaintance.

2.2.3. Elaboration Likelihood Model

Two routes of persuasion are distinguished by the elaboration likelihood model: a central route, where argument quality matters, and a peripheral route, where cues such as source attractiveness predominate. Both routes are activated simultaneously by KOL marketing, because the informative content of a video and the appeal of the KOL jointly shape how young consumers process the message and form intention.

2.2.4. Stimulus Organism Response Framework

Under the stimulus organism response framework, external marketing stimuli are treated as inputs that trigger an internal psychological state and in turn drive a behavioural response. Here, KOL marketing serves as the stimulus, consumer trust represents the organism state and purchase intention constitutes the behavioural response, supplying a coherent logic for the mediation mechanism tested in the sections that follow.

3. Research Hypotheses and Research Design

3.1. Research Hypotheses

3.1.1. The Impact of KOL Marketing on Purchase Intention

Source credibility theory and the elaboration likelihood model together suggest that an effective purchase decision by a young consumer requires both reliable information and an engaging viewing experience. When professional, attractive and interactive content is delivered by a KOL, Generation Z consumers receive both cognitive evidence and affective stimulation, and their willingness to buy rises accordingly. Earlier work on short-video and influencer marketing has found that KOL characteristics and content features promote purchase intention in a significant and positive direction ^[18], and research on influencer congruence additionally establishes that a good fit among the KOL, the product and the audience strengthens purchase intention ^[19].

Hypothesis 1: The KOL marketing of short-video platforms has a significant positive effect on the purchase intention of Generation Z consumers.

3.1.2. The Impact of KOL Marketing on Consumer Trust

By providing credible, transparent and relatable information, and by cultivating a parasocial bond that makes the KOL feel like a dependable acquaintance, high-quality KOL marketing can reduce the uncertainty facing young consumers. As KOL content becomes more professional and authentic, young consumers grow more likely to believe the recommendation and to develop trust in both the KOL and the associated brand ^[20].

Hypothesis 2: The KOL marketing of short-video platforms can positively affect the consumer trust of Generation Z consumers.

3.1.3. The Mediating Role of Consumer Trust

When KOL marketing is favourable, a young consumer forms a positive perception of both the KOL and the brand, which builds consumer trust and lowers perceived purchase risk. With trust established, the consumer becomes more receptive to the recommendation and more prepared to convert content exposure into an actual intention to buy. Consumer trust thus functions as a psychological bridge, carrying the influence of KOL marketing toward purchase intention ^[21]. This pathway has been identified repeatedly in influencer research ^[22].

Hypothesis 3: Consumer trust plays a mediating role in the impact of short-video platform KOL marketing on the purchase intention of Generation Z consumers.

3.2. Sample Selection and Data Sources

Active short-video platform users belonging to Generation Z were selected as the survey population. A structured online questionnaire distributed on mainstream short-video platforms was used to collect the data. The screening steps are described below. Respondents who reported never having watched KOL marketing content were excluded. Questionnaires with missing values on core measurement items were also excluded. Responses that failed the attention check or were completed in an implausibly short time were removed as well. After this screening, 612 valid questionnaires remained for empirical analysis. All multi-item constructs were measured on a five-point scale, and the scores of the items were averaged to form the variable values entered into the regression.

3.3. Variable Design

Purchase intention is the dependent variable, KOL marketing is the core explanatory variable and consumer trust is the mediating variable. Product involvement, viewing frequency, consumer gender, age and monthly disposable income serve as control variables. Platform fixed effects are included to absorb systematic cross-platform differences. Table 1 presents the specific definitions.

Table 1. Variable Definitions

Variable Type	Symbol	Definition and Measurement
Dependent variable	<i>PI</i>	Purchase intention, mean of four items on the willingness to buy the promoted product
Explanatory variable	<i>KOL</i>	KOL marketing, mean of items on perceived professionalism, attractiveness and interactivity
Mediating variable	<i>Trust</i>	Consumer trust, mean of items on perceived reliability, sincerity and expertise
Control variable	<i>Involve</i>	Product involvement, mean of items on personal relevance and interest in the product category
Control variable	<i>Freq</i>	Viewing frequency, self-reported frequency of watching KOL content per week
Control variable	<i>Gender</i>	Consumer gender, coded one for female and zero for male
Control variable	<i>Age</i>	Consumer age in completed years
Control variable	<i>Income</i>	Monthly disposable income of the consumer
Fixed effect	<i>Platform</i>	Platform dummy variables controlling for the main short-video platform used

Note: all multi-item constructs are measured on a five-point scale.

3.4. Model Construction

Three sets of multiple linear regression models are constructed for empirical testing in order to verify the effect of KOL marketing on purchase intention and the mediating role of consumer trust in the impact path. We use Model (1) to examine the direct impact of KOL marketing on the purchase intention of Generation Z consumers, thereby testing research hypothesis H1.

$$PI_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 KOL_i + \beta_2 Involve_i + \beta_3 Freq_i + \beta_4 Gender_i + \beta_5 Age_i + \beta_6 Income_i + \Sigma Platform_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

The relationship between KOL marketing and consumer trust is analysed in Model (2), which tests research hypothesis H2.

$$Trust_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 KOL_i + \beta_2 Involve_i + \beta_3 Freq_i + \beta_4 Gender_i + \beta_5 Age_i + \beta_6 Income_i + \Sigma Platform_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

Model (3) tests whether consumer trust mediates the process by which KOL marketing affects purchase intention, thereby verifying research hypothesis H3.

$$PI_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 KOL_i + \beta_2 Trust_i + \beta_3 Involve_i + \beta_4 Freq_i + \beta_5 Gender_i + \beta_6 Age_i + \beta_7 Income_i + \Sigma Platform_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (3)$$

In the three models, the subscript i denotes the individual respondent, β_0 is the intercept, the remaining β terms are the regression coefficients, and ε_i is the random error term. We measure the mediating effect as the indirect effect of KOL marketing on purchase intention through consumer trust, expressed in Equation (4).

$$Indirect\ effect = a \times b \quad (4)$$

In Equation (4), the coefficient a is the effect of KOL marketing on consumer trust estimated in Model (2), and the coefficient b is the effect of consumer trust on purchase intention estimated in Model (3). When the product of these two coefficients is significant, it indicates that consumer trust transmits part of the influence of KOL marketing on purchase intention.

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1. Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis is performed on the 612 valid observations in order to gain a full picture of the distribution characteristics and variable differences across the sample. Table 2 presents the corresponding results. As shown in Table 2, the mean value of purchase intention PI is 3.612 with a standard deviation of 0.842, and the core explanatory variable KOL has a mean of 3.548. The mediating variable consumer trust $Trust$ has a mean of 3.489. This indicates that, on average, respondents hold a moderately positive level of trust towards KOL content.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics Results

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
PI	612	3.612	0.842	1.000	5.000
KOL	612	3.548	0.795	1.250	5.000
$Trust$	612	3.489	0.803	1.000	5.000
$Involve$	612	3.402	0.884	1.000	5.000
$Freq$	612	4.126	1.902	0.000	7.000
$Gender$	612	0.561	0.497	0.000	1.000
Age	612	22.140	3.006	16.000	27.000
$Income$	612	2.874	1.183	1.000	5.000

4.2. Correlation Analysis

The pairwise correlation results for all variables in the sample are displayed in Figure 1. The correlation coefficient between the dependent variable PI and the core explanatory variable KOL is 0.512, significantly positive at the one percent level. This provides initial support for a

positive impact of KOL marketing on purchase intention. The correlation coefficient between purchase intention and the mediating variable consumer trust *Trust* is 0.548, likewise significantly positive at the one percent level.



Figure 1. Pairwise Correlation Results

A variance inflation factor test was performed on each variable to guard against serious collinearity. As Table 3 shows, the mean variance inflation factor is 1.28 and every individual value falls well below the conventional threshold of ten. No pronounced multicollinearity is therefore detected among the variables included in the regression model.

Table 3. Multicollinearity Analysis

Variable	VIF	1/VIF
<i>KOL</i>	1.46	0.685
<i>Trust</i>	1.44	0.694
<i>Involve</i>	1.31	0.763
<i>Freq</i>	1.22	0.820
<i>Income</i>	1.18	0.847
<i>Age</i>	1.14	0.877
<i>Gender</i>	1.11	0.901
Mean VIF	1.28	

4.3. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

4.3.1. The Impact of KOL Marketing on Purchase Intention

The regression results for the main effect of KOL marketing on purchase intention appear in Table 4. In Column (1), where only the core explanatory variable *KOL* is included with platform fixed effects controlled, the regression coefficient of *KOL* is 0.564 and is significantly positive

at the one percent level. Once all control variables are introduced, Column (2) shows that the regression coefficient of *KOL* is 0.487 and remains significant at the one percent level. A clear direct positive effect of KOL marketing on purchase intention emerges, and H1 is strongly supported.

Table 4. Main Effect Regression Results

Variable	(1) PI	(2) PI
<i>KOL</i>	0.564*** (14.312)	0.487*** (11.905)
<i>Involve</i>		0.132*** (4.221)
<i>Freq</i>		0.028** (2.410)
<i>Gender</i>		0.061 (1.402)
<i>Age</i>		-0.009 (-1.187)
<i>Income</i>		0.041** (2.233)
_cons	1.611*** (11.204)	1.284*** (6.918)
N	612	612
R-squared	0.262	0.311
F	204.836	45.612

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1; t values in parentheses.

4.3.2. Mediating Effect Analysis of Consumer Trust

Table 5. Regression Results of the Mediating Effect

Variable	(1) PI	(2) Trust	(3) PI
<i>KOL</i>	0.487*** (11.905)	0.542*** (13.284)	0.281*** (6.412)
<i>Trust</i>			0.380*** (9.847)
<i>Involve</i>	0.132*** (4.221)	0.108*** (3.502)	0.091*** (3.101)
<i>Freq</i>	0.028** (2.410)	0.021* (1.842)	0.020* (1.813)
<i>Gender</i>	0.061 (1.402)	0.048 (1.121)	0.043 (1.043)
<i>Age</i>	-0.009 (-1.187)	-0.006 (-0.802)	-0.007 (-0.951)
<i>Income</i>	0.041** (2.233)	0.030* (1.671)	0.030* (1.702)
_cons	1.284*** (6.918)	1.402*** (7.612)	0.751*** (4.021)
N	612	612	612
R-squared	0.311	0.334	0.402
F	45.612	50.884	57.231

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1; t values in parentheses.

The coefficient linking KOL marketing to consumer trust in Model (2) is 0.542, significantly positive at the one percent level. KOL marketing is thus found to promote consumer trust, consistent with H2. In Model (3), the coefficient of KOL marketing drops to 0.281, still significant at the one percent level but lower than the 0.487 obtained in the main effect model. The coefficient of consumer trust is 0.380 and is significant at the one percent level. Consumer trust is therefore found to play a partial mediating role in the positive impact of KOL marketing on purchase intention, and H3 is supported. Table 5 reports the mediation results.

4.4. Heterogeneity Analysis

The full sample is split into female and male consumers in Table 6, which presents the results of the gender-based heterogeneity test to examine disparities in how KOL marketing and consumer trust shape purchase intention. For the female group, the regression coefficient on KOL marketing is 0.312, positive and statistically significant at the one percent level. In the male subsample, the corresponding coefficient is 0.243, which is also significant at the one percent level. Because this magnitude is smaller than the figure for female consumers, KOL marketing is found to exert a more pronounced effect on the purchase intention of female consumers.

Table 6. Heterogeneity Analysis of Consumer Gender

Variable	Female	Male
<i>KOL</i>	0.312*** (5.841)	0.243*** (4.187)
<i>Trust</i>	0.401*** (7.612)	0.352*** (6.012)
<i>Involve</i>	0.098*** (2.712)	0.083** (2.104)
<i>Freq</i>	0.022 (1.512)	0.018 (1.201)
<i>Age</i>	-0.008 (-0.901)	-0.006 (-0.612)
<i>Income</i>	0.033 (1.421)	0.028 (1.104)
_cons	0.712*** (3.214)	0.804*** (3.012)
N	343	269
R-squared	0.421	0.378
F	35.214	24.612

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1; t values in parentheses.

Table 7. Heterogeneity Analysis of Product Type

Variable	Experiential	Search
<i>KOL</i>	0.324*** (6.021)	0.201*** (3.612)
<i>Trust</i>	0.412*** (7.804)	0.331*** (5.612)
<i>Involve</i>	0.104*** (2.902)	0.076** (1.994)
<i>Freq</i>	0.024 (1.612)	0.016 (1.052)
<i>Gender</i>	0.052 (1.201)	0.038 (0.884)
<i>Income</i>	0.035 (1.502)	0.026 (1.011)
_cons	0.688*** (3.104)	0.842*** (3.211)
N	356	256
R-squared	0.431	0.361
F	37.612	22.104

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1; t values in parentheses.

The product-type heterogeneity analysis is reported in Table 7. Within the experiential product sample, the regression coefficient on KOL marketing is 0.324 and statistically significant at the one percent level. For the search product sample, the coefficient of KOL marketing is only 0.201, notably smaller than the figure for experiential products. This highlights the stronger enabling role that KOL marketing plays in lifting purchase intention for products relying on experiential evaluation.

4.5. Robustness Analysis

4.5.1. Replace the Explained Variable

We replace the baseline dependent variable with a behavioural willingness to recommend the product to others in order to reassess the robustness of the baseline findings from the standpoint of an alternative behavioural outcome. Table 8 reports the estimation results. In Model (1), the estimated coefficient on *KOL* is 0.452, positive and statistically significant at the one percent level. When consumer trust is further added as the mediating variable in Model (2), the coefficient on *KOL* falls to 0.258 and remains positively significant at the one percent level. Even after the core dependent variable is replaced, the favourable effect of KOL marketing on purchase intention remains robust.

Table 8. Robustness Test: Replace the Explained Variable

Variable	(1) Recommend	(2) Recommend
<i>KOL</i>	0.452*** (10.884)	0.258*** (5.812)
<i>Trust</i>		0.358*** (9.012)
<i>Involve</i>	0.121*** (3.804)	0.082*** (2.712)
<i>Freq</i>	0.026** (2.201)	0.018 (1.602)
<i>Gender</i>	0.055 (1.254)	0.038 (0.912)
<i>Age</i>	-0.008 (-1.021)	-0.006 (-0.812)
<i>Income</i>	0.038** (2.041)	0.028 (1.552)
_cons	1.402*** (7.512)	0.884*** (4.612)
N	612	612
R-squared	0.286	0.372
F	40.214	51.884

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1; t values in parentheses.

4.5.2. Subsample of Frequent Viewers

Table 9. Robustness Test: Subsample of Frequent Viewers

Variable	(1) PI	(2) PI
<i>KOL</i>	0.501*** (10.214)	0.294*** (5.612)
<i>Trust</i>		0.392*** (8.712)
<i>Involve</i>	0.128*** (3.612)	0.088*** (2.601)
<i>Freq</i>	0.031** (2.104)	0.022 (1.552)
<i>Gender</i>	0.058 (1.301)	0.041 (0.951)
<i>Age</i>	-0.010 (-1.204)	-0.007 (-0.884)
<i>Income</i>	0.043** (2.112)	0.031 (1.612)
_cons	1.204*** (6.104)	0.688*** (3.512)
N	468	468
R-squared	0.318	0.408
F	36.214	45.102

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1; t values in parentheses.

We restrict the sample to frequent viewers who watch KOL marketing content at least three times per week in order to address potential concerns arising from respondents with limited exposure, and re-estimate the main effect and the mediation model. Table 9 presents the estimation results. The coefficient on *KOL* remains positive and significant at the one percent level in both columns. The coefficient on consumer trust is likewise significant, which confirms that the core research conclusions are stable within the group of highly engaged young consumers.

5. Research Conclusion

Using Generation Z short-video platform users as the research sample, we empirically test the mechanism linking KOL marketing to purchase intention. The results indicate that KOL marketing exerts a significant positive driving effect on the purchase intention of Generation Z consumers. When KOL content is high in professionalism, attractiveness and interactivity, it translates directly into a stronger willingness to buy. The main effect hypothesis is therefore effectively verified.

At the level of the transmission mechanism, consumer trust partially mediates the association between KOL marketing and purchase intention. KOL marketing not only promotes purchase intention directly but also contributes to it indirectly by building consumer trust and lowering perceived purchase risk. Empirical data support the complete transmission path.

Heterogeneity test results indicate that consumer gender and product type produce significant differences in these effects. The effect of KOL marketing on purchase intention is more prominent among female consumers. For experiential products the enabling role of KOL marketing is stronger, whereas the direct effect in the search product sample is comparatively weaker. Robustness tests, conducted by replacing the explained variable with a willingness to recommend and by restricting the sample to frequent viewers, show that the core conclusions are stable and that concerns arising from limited exposure do not substantially interfere with the empirical results.

On the basis of these findings, brands and platform operators should give priority to the credibility and content quality of KOL cooperation, cultivate durable consumer trust rather than short-term exposure and tailor influencer strategies to consumer and product characteristics. Emotionally engaging KOLs are more suitable for experiential products and for audiences who form stronger affective bonds. Information-rich content, by contrast, remains important for building trust across the wider young consumer base.

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