

# KOL Strategies for Corporate Branding--The Digital Forbidden City as an Example

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## Abstract:

This study focuses on the KOL marketing strategy of the Digital Forbidden City in corporate branding, discussing how companies can carry out branding through KOL strategy in the digital era, especially taking the Digital Forbidden City as an example, analysing how it can leverage the power of KOL to achieve innovation and breakthroughs in branding. By studying the application of KOL strategy in strengthening brand influence and promotion effect, this paper reveals the significant effect of KOL strategy in enhancing brand awareness, shaping brand image and strengthening consumers' emotional connection, and proposes specific insights for cultural heritage organisations and other enterprises. This study not only enriches the theoretical system of KOL strategy, but also provides operational practical guidance for enterprises.

**Keywords:** corporate branding, KOL strategy, digital Forbidden City, branding; key opinion leaders

## 1. Introduction

In the wave of globalisation and digitalisation, enterprises are facing increasingly fierce competition in the market, and brand building and promotion have become an important engine to drive their development. In this era of information explosion, consumers receive a huge amount of information, how enterprises can stand out from the many brands and establish a unique brand image has become the key to corporate strategy. Traditional marketing methods such as advertisements and public relations activities, although they can enhance brand awareness to a certain extent, their effects are often diminished by information overload. Therefore, companies need to find new and more effective ways to promote their brands in order to attract and keep consumers' attention.

Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) are individuals with expertise, influence and trust in a specific field, who can significantly influence public attitudes and behaviors through social media and other platforms. The importance of KOLs in modern brand promotion is self-evident. From the perspective of influence, KOLs have a huge fan base, which can rapidly expand brand exposure and achieve "viral" communication; from the perspective of trust, KOLs' professional knowledge and in-depth insights make them authoritative in the dissemination of information, which helps to build consumer trust; from the perspective of

innovation, KOLs can provide unique perspectives and creativity, and promote brand content. From the perspective of innovation, KOLs can provide unique perspectives and creativity to promote brand content innovation and enhance brand appeal. In addition, the close interaction between KOLs and their fans helps build emotional connections and enhance brand loyalty.

In practice, KOL strategy also faces some problems. Firstly, choosing the right KOL is a big challenge, and we need to make sure that it is highly compatible with the brand's tone and has enough influence; secondly, content creation needs to be constantly innovated in order to maintain freshness and avoid aesthetic fatigue of the fans; furthermore, the data analysis and effect evaluation need to be accurate and effective in order to adjust the strategy in a timely manner; and lastly, how to build a long-term and mutually beneficial KOL cooperation relationship is also a problem that enterprises need to solve. The problem.

Currently, there is an increasing amount of research on the application of KOLs in brand promotion, mainly focusing on KOL selection, influence evaluation, and content creation. However, there is still a lack of research on how to apply KOL strategies to specific industries (e.g., cultural heritage organisations) and how to customise accurate and efficient KOL cooperation strategies in different market environments.

Based on these shortcomings, this study takes the digital

Forbidden City as an example to explore in depth the application of KOL strategy in corporate branding. Through empirical analyses, it reveals the significant effects of KOL strategy in enhancing brand awareness, shaping brand image, and strengthening consumers' emotional connection, and proposes specific insights for cultural heritage institutions and other enterprises. This study not only enriches the theoretical system of KOL strategy, but also provides practical guidance with operability for enterprises. Therefore, this study has important theoretical and practical significance.

## 2. KOL Theory and Corporate Branding

### 2.1 KOL Strategy

The KOL theory, or Key Opinion Leader theory, originated in the field of social psychology and was proposed by Lazarsfeld and Merton in 1944 to explain the phenomenon of diffusion of information in the process of social communication. The core idea of this theory is that there exists a small group of people in a social network who are able to significantly influence the attitudes and behaviours of the general public due to their expertise, influence and level of trust in a particular field. These people play the role of key nodes in the dissemination of information, which can accelerate the diffusion of information and influence the acceptance of information by the general public.

In marketing practice, KOL marketing, as a modern marketing tool, can be traced back to the beginning of the rise of social media in its infancy, and gradually gained importance around the late 2000s to the early 2010s. In corporate branding, especially in the context of digital transformation, the study of KOL strategy has gradually deepened with the popularity of social media. In the study of KOL strategy, several scholars have explored it from different perspectives. Liao, MJ et al., in "Simulation research on online marketing strategies of branded agricultural products based on the difference in opinion leader attitudes," constructed an evolutionary model of online promotion strategies of agricultural brands by combining evolutionary game theory and analyzed the effect of the difference in opinion leader attitudes on brand promotion strategies. Yuan, L et al. in "The effect of advertising strategies on a short video platform: evidence from TikTok", the effect of KOL endorsement and inline advertising on short video platforms is explored, revealing the role of different advertising strategies in boosting product sales or traffic. Specific to the KOL strategy of corporate branding, the brand marketing practices of cultural heritage units represented by the Forbidden City through new media

platforms in recent years have provided a wealth of cases for both academia and practice. The Forbidden City has successfully used KOL strategies to promote its cultural and creative products through new media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and Jitterbug, which has become a model for corporate branding.

According to existing research, in the application of KOL strategy in corporate brand promotion, the theoretical school focuses on theoretically exploring the role mechanism of KOL in brand promotion, mainly exploring the theoretical framework of KOL in brand promotion, although the theoretical framework has been constructed, the complexity of the actual application may be beyond the scope of the theoretical model's explanation, and in the future, the theoretical model can be further refined and more variables can be taken into consideration to make it more explanatory power and universality. Empirical research school verifies the effect of KOL strategy in brand promotion by collecting and analysing actual data, and verifies the effect of KOL strategy in different contexts through empirical data, but there may be bias in data collection and analysis, and the results of the research are limited to specific contexts, which makes it difficult to promote universally, and empirical research of cross-industry and cross-platform can be strengthened to verify the applicability of KOL strategy in different scenarios. The case study genre takes specific enterprises as cases to analyse the successes and shortcomings of their KOL strategies to provide a reference for other enterprises. Take the Forbidden City as an example, it analyses how it promotes its cultural and creative products through WeChat public number, microblogs, jittery voice and other new media platforms, using KOL strategies to rejuvenate its brand and expand its influence. Although specific cases are provided, the case studies may lack systematicity and it is difficult to form a replicable model. Reproducible model, the experience of multiple successful cases can be systematically summarised to extract reproducible models and strategies to provide guidance for enterprise practice.

### 2.2 Corporate Branding

In the field of brand management, the study of brand-consumer relationships began at the beginning of the 21st century, and Fournier (2001) was the first to propose the "Brand Relationship Analysis Model", which marked the beginning of the research on this topic. Through in-depth analyses, he subdivided the relationship between consumers and brands into four levels: consumer-product, consumer-brand, consumer-consumer, and consumer-company. This model laid the theoretical foundation for subsequent research and pointed out the research direction. On the basis of Fournier's model, many scholars

have carried out in-depth expansion and extension, and Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) put forward the "Brand Community Triangle Model", which not only focuses on the emotional connection between consumers and brands, but also emphasises the role of brand community in cultivating consumer loyalty. This model provides a new perspective for brand community research and promotes the development of brand community theory. In addition, Alexand (2002) further revealed the position of brands in consumers' minds and their influencing factors by exploring the brand core consumer model. His study not only focuses on intrinsic factors such as emotional value and identity of the brand, but also involves extrinsic factors such as product and consumer relationship, which provides an important reference for brand management practice.

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## 2.3 Literature review

Existing literature has achieved some results in the theoretical construction, empirical research and case analysis of KOL strategy and brand promotion, but there are still some shortcomings. Especially in the KOL strategy of enterprise brand promotion, how to combine the characteristics of specific enterprises and the market environment to formulate an effective strategy is an issue worthy of in-

depth research. As a representative of cultural heritage units, the successful practice of the Forbidden City on the new media platform provides useful inspiration and reference for other enterprises.

This study is entitled "KOL Strategy in Corporate Branding: The Digital Forbidden City as an Example", which aims to analyse the KOL marketing strategy of the Forbidden City on new media platforms, and to extract its successful experience and replicable model. The study not only helps to enrich the theoretical system of KOL strategy in enterprise brand promotion, but also provides practical guidance for other enterprises, especially cultural heritage units. Through this study, it can further promote enterprises to use KOL strategy to rejuvenate their brands, expand their influence and enhance their market competitiveness in the context of digital transformation.

## 3. Branding Practices of the Digital Forbidden City

### 3.1 Background and Features of the Digital Forbidden City

The Digital Forbidden City, one of China's most iconic cultural heritage organisations, has a branding practice that embodies the perfect fusion of traditional culture and modern technology. Located in the heart of Beijing, it boasts a 600-year history and a collection of millions of precious relics, the jewels of ancient Chinese civilisation. However, in the face of the growing digital demands of the younger generation and global cultural competition, how to make these sleeping historical heritages "come alive" has become a pressing issue for the Digital Palace. Against this backdrop, the Digital Palace has launched a series of digital projects, including digital exhibitions, AR/VR experiences, online courses, and digital art creations, which transform static cultural relics into dynamic, immersive stories by means of modern technology and provide audiences with a brand-new visiting experience. These innovations have not only revitalised traditional culture, but also attracted a large number of young fans, making the culture of the Forbidden City widely influential on social media. The digital Forbidden City is characterised by its courage to experiment and innovate, always standing at the intersection of technology and culture, and committed to creating a brand image that both respects tradition and embraces the future.

In the practice of brand promotion, the digital Forbidden City pays special attention to the cooperation with KOLs, through their influence to promote traditional culture to a wider audience. the choice of KOLs is often unique, both academic history scholars and famous artists in the art world, who interpret the Forbidden City with their own

professional knowledge and artistic perspectives, so that each story is full of unique charm. In addition, the digital Forbidden City is also good at using KOL's social media platforms, such as Weibo and Jitterbug, to spread the culture of the Forbidden City to millions of fans through live broadcasts, short videos and other forms of communication, achieving rapid brand proliferation.

The digital Forbidden City is also characterised by its fine-tuning of its content, which is not satisfied with simple information delivery, but strives to turn every promotional activity into an in-depth cultural experience. For example, the historical storytelling short films produced in cooperation with KOLs not only let the audience understand the history of the cultural relics, but also, through storytelling, let them feel the temperature and emotions behind the history. This content strategy has successfully transformed the Forbidden City from a distant museum into a platform that triggers emotional resonance and interactive engagement.

The background and characteristics of the Digital Forbidden City provide unique conditions for the use of KOL strategies. It gives new life to traditional culture through the power of science and technology, and at the same time provides a broad stage for KOLs to show their influence. This kind of promotion practice combining history, technology and innovation not only enhances the brand awareness of the Digital Forbidden City, but also successfully attracts the attention of the younger generation, realising the inheritance and innovation of traditional culture.

### **3.2 Analysis of KOL Strategy of Digital Palace**

The KOL strategy of Digital Forbidden City is the core driving force for the success of its brand promotion, which cleverly integrates history, technology and innovation to create a unique promotion system. First of all, the Digital Palace adheres to the principle of high compatibility with the brand in the selection of KOLs, and selects historical scholars, cultural celebrities and art creators as its brand promotion partners. These KOLs, with their profound professional knowledge, extensive influence and personal charisma that matches the culture of the Forbidden City, provide a solid cornerstone for the promotion of the Digital Palace.

During the execution stage of the cooperation, the Digital Palace carefully planned all kinds of content to ensure that each activity is consistent with the brand image, whether it is telling the stories behind the Palace collections through live broadcasts or creating Palace-inspired digital artworks with artists, all of which are aimed at perfectly integrating the traditional culture with modern technology, thus generating a unique attraction. In addition, the digital

Forbidden City makes full use of the characteristics of social media platforms, choosing channels that are popular with the younger generation, such as Weibo and Jitterbug, to spread the story of the Forbidden City to every corner by leveraging the fan base and communication power of KOLs.

Effectiveness monitoring is a key part of evaluating the effectiveness of promotional activities. The Digital Forbidden City monitors the impact of promotional activities in real time by analysing data from social media platforms, such as the number of views, likes and comments. It also pays attention to the conversion rate, such as the increase in the number of visits to the official website of the Forbidden City and the increase in ticket sales, which are actual results that are hard indicators to measure the effectiveness of brand promotion. Through these data, Digital Forbidden City is able to adjust its strategy in time in order to achieve the best promotion effect.

In the optimisation and enhancement stage, Digital Palace studies the data in depth to find out the forms of content and types of KOLs that can touch consumers the most, and then adjusts the promotion strategy. It attaches importance to long-term cooperation, establishes stable partnerships with KOLs, and continuously optimises promotion channels to ensure the brand's sustainable development. This data-based, continuous optimisation strategy keeps the Digital Palace's brand promotion activities fresh and attractive.

The case study reveals the remarkable effectiveness of the Digital Forbidden City's KOL strategy in raising brand awareness, shaping brand image, and enhancing consumers' emotional connection. The Digital Forbidden City practice demonstrates that KOLs are able to use personal stories and emotional resonance as a medium to communicate traditional culture to young audiences in an engaging way, thereby inspiring them to emotionally identify with the brand in a way that is difficult to match with traditional marketing methods. The case of the Digital Forbidden City provides valuable insights for other enterprises and cultural heritage organisations, emphasising that the characteristics of KOLs should be taken into full consideration when formulating branding strategies, and that their potential for content innovation, fan interaction and community building should be tapped in order to maximise the value of the brand.

The Digital Forbidden City's KOL strategy demonstrates how to achieve the perfect combination of history and technology in brand promotion, successfully conveying the essence of traditional culture to every corner of modern society through innovative content marketing and precise social media promotion. The flexibility of its strategy, the data-driven decision-making process and the deep

excavation of KOL potential have not only promoted the innovative communication of the Forbidden City brand, but also set an example for the whole industry. Future research should further explore the differential impact of different industries and types of KOLs in brand promotion, as well as how to develop a more refined and efficient KOL cooperation strategy to cope with the ever-changing market environment.

## 4. Conclusion

In the study of corporate branding - the relationship between KOL strategy and cultural heritage in the promotion of the Digital Forbidden City, we conducted an in-depth discussion through the application of KOL strategy in the brand promotion of digital Forbidden City exhibits. In the course of the study, we found that the influence of KOL has a significant effect on the brand promotion of digital Forbidden City exhibits. By cooperating with KOLs, digital Forbidden City exhibits can get wider exposure and attract more target audiences, thus enhancing brand awareness and reputation.

The effectiveness of KOL strategy in corporate branding has been empirically verified. Through in-depth cooperation with KOLs such as historical scholars, cultural celebrities and artists, the Digital Forbidden City succeeded in spreading traditional culture to modern audiences in an innovative form, increasing brand awareness, creating a unique brand image, and enhancing consumers' emotional connection. This strategy provides a path for companies, especially cultural heritage organisations, to combine tradition with modern technology to effectively reach young consumers.

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