
Leveraging Key Opinion Leaders Marketing Strategies: Beauty of Joseon on TikTok

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Abstract

The rapid growth of social commerce has transformed influencer marketing into a credibility-driven strategy, particularly within Indonesia's highly competitive beauty industry. This study aims to examine Beauty of Joseon's Key Opinion Leader (KOL) marketing strategy on TikTok by analyzing KOL selection criteria, content development approaches, and implementation challenges. Adopting a constructivist paradigm, this research employs a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, content analysis of TikTok marketing activities, and secondary data from industry reports and digital marketing sources. The findings reveal that Beauty of Joseon prioritizes KOL credibility, skincare expertise, and audience relevance over follower count. The brand further enhances consumer engagement through authentic, educational, and experience-based content that aligns with TikTok's platform culture. Consistent with Source Credibility Theory, Social Media Authenticity, and Trust-Transfer Theory, the results demonstrate that credibility and authenticity contribute significantly to consumer trust formation and positive brand perception. However, challenges related to limited human resources, centralized approval processes, and affiliate campaign management continue to affect strategic responsiveness. The study highlights the importance of balancing commercial objectives with authenticity and trust-building to achieve sustainable KOL marketing performance within social commerce environments.

Keywords: Key Opinion Leader, Influencer Marketing, Beauty of Joseon

INTRODUCTION

Lim (2023) says that the audience gains the impression of an influencer as an expert, consistent with their content, and relatable to their audience, which is why micro and mid-tier influencers are particularly successful in the categories of products that demand high levels of trust. The increased use of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) is one of the major changes that can be currently observed in digital marketing. According to Valente and Pumpuang (2015, 2007), KOLs are key players who can influence the opinion of the people, whose power can restructure the opinions, attitudes, beliefs, motivations, and behaviors. Kotler and Keller (2016) opine that companies have resorted to social networks to reach people who have moved to digital platforms.

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the way businesses communicate with consumers and conduct marketing activities. Social media platforms have evolved into integrated ecosystems where content, interaction, and commerce coexist. According to DataReportal (2024), approximately 4.9 billion people worldwide use social media, representing nearly 60% of the global population, while Indonesia

accounts for 167.6 million users. This rapid expansion has encouraged brands to adopt communication strategies that emphasize engagement, credibility, and consumer participation rather than conventional one-way promotional approaches.

Among various social media platforms, TikTok has emerged as one of the most influential channels for social commerce. By early 2024, TikTok had surpassed one billion active users globally and continued to experience substantial growth in Indonesia. Unlike conventional social media platforms, TikTok's algorithm prioritizes engagement, watch time, and content relevance rather than follower count, enabling brands and content creators to reach wider audiences organically. This characteristic has transformed TikTok into an effective platform for influencer marketing, affiliate marketing, and direct consumer engagement.

While previous studies have widely examined influencer marketing through variables such as engagement rate, purchase intention, brand awareness, and electronic word-of-mouth, most studies continue to conceptualize platform effectiveness from a marketing-performance perspective. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to TikTok as a communication environment where algorithmic content distribution, participatory culture, and user interaction jointly shape message credibility. Unlike traditional social networking sites that rely heavily on follower-based visibility, TikTok prioritizes content relevance, audience interests, and interaction patterns, allowing relatively unknown creators to gain significant exposure. Consequently, communication effectiveness is increasingly determined by how brand narratives are interpreted, recreated, and circulated within platform culture rather than by influencer popularity alone. This perspective remains underexplored in communication scholarship, particularly within the context of skincare branding in Indonesia.

The growing popularity of TikTok has strengthened the role of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) in digital marketing. KOLs possess expertise, credibility, and strong relationships with their audiences, allowing them to influence consumer attitudes and purchasing decisions. Their importance is further supported by findings from Inmar Intelligence (2021), which reported that 84% of consumers had made purchases based on online recommendations. Consequently, brands increasingly rely on KOL collaborations to enhance brand awareness, establish trust, and improve conversion performance.

The Indonesian skincare industry provides a particularly relevant context for examining KOL marketing strategies. The industry has become highly competitive due to the expansion of local, regional, and international brands. While South Korean skincare brands dominated more than 50% of the imported skincare market between 2016 and 2019, their market share declined to approximately 25–28% during 2020–2023 as local brands such as Somethinc and Avoskin strengthened their market positions and Chinese brands such as Skintific and Y.O.U expanded aggressively through digital channels (Euromonitor & NielsenIQ, 2023). Furthermore, Jakpat (2023) reported that approximately 65% of skincare transactions in Indonesia are conducted online, indicating the increasing importance of digital marketing and social commerce strategies.

One brand that has successfully adapted to this competitive environment is Beauty of Joseon (BOJ), a South Korean skincare brand that has gained significant popularity among Indonesian consumers through products such as Relief Sun and Ginseng Serum. The brand's success is closely associated with its strategic use of TikTok and collaborations with KOLs who emphasize authenticity, educational content, and consumer trust. Through credibility-based partnerships, BOJ has been able to strengthen brand awareness and maintain relevance within Indonesia's rapidly evolving skincare market.

Beyond product performance, Beauty of Joseon represents an interesting communication phenomenon because its brand identity is rooted in the Hanbang philosophy, a traditional Korean approach to herbal medicine that emphasizes holistic wellness, natural ingredients, and historical heritage. Rather than communicating Hanbang merely as a functional product attribute, Beauty of Joseon translates this cultural narrative into short-form storytelling through TikTok creators who combine educational explanations, personal skincare experiences, and visually engaging demonstrations. From a marketing communication perspective, this process illustrates how traditional cultural values can be reconstructed into contemporary digital narratives that resonate with Indonesian consumers, particularly younger audiences seeking authenticity, transparency, and evidence-based skincare information. Consequently, TikTok functions not only as a promotional platform but also as a communication space where cultural meaning, trust, and consumer identity are continuously negotiated through creator-generated content.

Although influencer marketing has gained significant attention, existing studies primarily focus on engagement metrics such as views, likes, and shares, while providing limited evidence regarding its measurable financial outcomes and return on investment (ROI) (Lanz et al., 2023). The lack of granular sales data and empirical examination of paid endorsements has constrained a comprehensive evaluation of influencer marketing effectiveness (Batra & Keller, 2016). Furthermore, previous studies have produced inconclusive findings regarding the comparative effectiveness of high- and low-followerhip influencers, particularly in paid collaboration contexts. While low-followerhip influencers are often associated with stronger audience engagement, it remains unclear whether these advantages translate into superior marketing performance and business outcomes (Lanz et al., 2023). This gap highlights the need for further research on strategic KOL implementation, particularly within TikTok's social commerce ecosystem and the highly competitive skincare industry. Accordingly, unlike previous studies that primarily evaluate influencer performance using quantitative engagement indicators, this study positions TikTok as a communication ecosystem and investigates how platform culture, authenticity, and culturally embedded storytelling through the Hanbang philosophy jointly shape Beauty of Joseon's KOL communication strategy. By adopting a qualitative communication perspective, this study extends existing KOL literature beyond performance metrics toward understanding strategic meaning construction and trust development in social commerce. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the KOL marketing strategy employed by Beauty of Joseon on TikTok, focusing on KOL selection criteria, content strategies, and implementation challenges. This study adopts a qualitative case study approach and is expected to contribute to the growing literature on influencer marketing and digital branding.

The online beauty market in Indonesia is a fast-growing industry that poses strategic challenges for K-beauty brands. In this evolving digital ecosystem, the genuine and strategic application of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) plays a vital role in establishing brand trust and fostering meaningful consumer engagement. Therefore, this study examines the strategic necessity of effective KOL implementation by focusing on three key aspects: (1) the criteria employed by Beauty of Joseon in selecting KOLs to ensure the credible and authentic delivery of its brand message, (2) the creative content approaches designed and implemented by KOLs to reinforce Beauty of Joseon's authenticity and transparency narrative, and (3) the challenges encountered in executing its KOL strategy and the strategic insights gained from these experiences. Accordingly, this study aims to identify the selection criteria used by Beauty of Joseon in collaborating with KOLs, analyze the creative content approaches developed to enhance brand

authenticity and consumer trust, and examine the implementation challenges and strategic insights derived from its KOL marketing strategy. This study adopts a constructivist paradigm, which views reality as socially constructed through individual experiences and interpretations. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research explores and interprets Beauty of Joseon's KOL marketing strategy on TikTok through the analysis of relevant literature, digital content, and secondary data sources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Key Opinion Leader (KOL) marketing has become an important strategy for brands to increase awareness, engagement, and sales in digital environments. KOLs are individuals who possess expertise, credibility, and influence within specific communities, enabling them to shape consumer attitudes and purchasing decisions (Sanjaya et al., 2022; Charoennan & Huang, 2018). The growth of social media has further strengthened the role of KOLs in facilitating brand-consumer interaction and creating authentic communication that fosters trust and engagement (Tafesse & Wien, 2023; Tuten & Solomon, 2018). Previous studies have shown that influencer marketing positively affects brand perception, consumer engagement, and purchase intention (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernandez, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). In addition, the integration of social commerce and affiliate marketing has enabled influencers to play a more direct role in driving online sales and consumer conversion (Liu & Zhang, 2021; Putu & Fredy, 2024). Despite the growing body of literature on influencer marketing, existing studies have primarily focused on engagement outcomes and general influencer effectiveness. Limited attention has been given to how brands strategically select KOLs, develop authentic content approaches, and address implementation challenges in building consumer trust, particularly within culturally specific markets such as Indonesia. Therefore, this study investigates the KOL marketing strategy of Beauty of Joseon on TikTok, focusing on KOL selection criteria, content strategies, and implementation experiences.

Source Credibility Theory

Source Credibility Theory developed by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) explains that the effectiveness of persuasive communication depends on the perceived credibility of the communicator. Credibility is primarily determined by expertise and trustworthiness. In influencer marketing, consumers are more likely to accept recommendations from KOLs who demonstrate knowledge, experience, and honesty regarding the promoted product. Consequently, KOL credibility becomes a crucial factor in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase decisions. This theory is relevant to the present study because it explains how Beauty of Joseon selects KOLs capable of delivering credible and authentic brand messages that strengthen consumer confidence in the brand.

Social Media Authenticity

Social Media Authenticity refers to the perception that online interactions and content genuinely reflect the identity, values, and experiences of the content creator (Knoll et al., 2015). Authenticity is characterized by transparency, sincerity, consistency, and relatability, which contribute to the development of trust and engagement between influencers and their audiences. In influencer marketing, authentic content is generally perceived as more persuasive than highly commercialized messages because consumers view authentic influencers as trusted peers rather than paid endorsers. This theory provides a useful framework for understanding how Beauty of Joseon utilizes KOL-generated content to reinforce authenticity, strengthen consumer trust, and foster meaningful engagement on TikTok.

Trust-Transfer Theory

Trust-Transfer Theory explains that trust established toward one entity can be transferred to another related entity (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Within influencer marketing, consumers who trust a KOL are likely to extend that trust to the endorsed brand. This process reduces perceived risk, increases confidence in product evaluations, and positively influences purchasing decisions. The theory is particularly relevant to Beauty of Joseon's marketing strategy because the brand relies on trusted KOLs to communicate product benefits and establish credibility among consumers in an increasingly competitive skincare market.

Key Opinion Leader (KOL)

A Key Opinion Leader (KOL) is an influential individual recognized for expertise, credibility, and the ability to shape opinions and behaviors within a particular audience or community (Sanjaya et al., 2022; He & Jin, 2022). KOLs play a significant role in digital marketing because they serve as intermediaries between brands and consumers through content creation, product recommendations, and social interaction. According to Xiong et al. (2021), effective KOLs generally possess three important characteristics: familiarity with their audience, trustworthiness, and expertise in a specific field. These attributes enable KOLs to influence consumer perceptions and strengthen brand communication. In the context of this study, KOLs represent a key component of Beauty of Joseon's marketing strategy on TikTok, serving as credible communicators who help build trust, authenticity, and consumer engagement.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a constructivist paradigm, which views reality as socially constructed through individual experiences and interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A qualitative case study approach was employed to explore Beauty of Joseon's Key Opinion Leader (KOL) marketing strategy on TikTok, focusing on KOL selection criteria, content development, and implementation challenges. The unit of analysis is Beauty of Joseon's KOL marketing strategy in the Indonesian skincare market.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected key informant, namely the Beauty of Joseon KOL Strategist. Purposive sampling was employed because the informant is directly involved in planning and implementing the brand's KOL strategy and therefore possesses the most relevant knowledge regarding KOL selection, content adaptation, campaign implementation, and strategic decision-making (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interview was conducted virtually via Google Meet, audio-recorded with the participant's consent, and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis.

Secondary data consisted of a strategic content audit of TikTok content published by Beauty of Joseon and collaborating micro- and nano-influencers, complemented by industry reports and aggregated market data from Kalodata and other market intelligence sources. The content audit focused on videos that represented Beauty of Joseon's KOL collaborations and examined how KOLs communicated brand narratives, presented product benefits, employed authenticity cues, and adapted their communication styles to TikTok's platform characteristics. Market reports were utilized to provide contextual understanding and competitive benchmarking of influencer marketing practices within the Indonesian skincare industry.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). Interview transcripts and digital content observations were repeatedly reviewed to achieve data familiarization before being systematically coded. The initial codes were subsequently grouped into broader themes related to KOL selection criteria, authenticity,

credibility, trust-building, creative content strategies, implementation challenges, and strategic decision-making. The findings derived from interviews and digital content observations were then interpreted collectively to explain Beauty of Joseon's KOL marketing strategy from a constructivist perspective.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Beauty of Joseon's Key Opinion Leaders Strategy

Upon entering the Indonesian market in April 2023, Beauty of Joseon (BOJ) adopted a digital-first market entry strategy centered on TikTok Shop and Shopee rather than relying heavily on Instagram, which has traditionally been the primary platform for K-beauty marketing. This strategic decision was driven by the rapid growth of social commerce in Indonesia and the increasing integration of entertainment, content consumption, and purchasing behavior within TikTok's ecosystem. By focusing on platforms that allowed consumers to discover, evaluate, and purchase products in a single environment, BOJ was able to maximize market exposure while maintaining relatively low marketing costs. The strategy reflected a strong understanding of Indonesian consumer behavior, particularly among Gen Z and Millennial consumers who increasingly rely on short-form video content when seeking product recommendations.

Organic Growth Through Social Commerce Platforms

During the initial stage of market entry, BOJ prioritized organic content creation rather than paid promotional activities. Content focused primarily on skincare education, ingredient transparency, product demonstrations, and explanations of the brand's Hanbang-inspired philosophy. Instead of emphasizing direct selling, BOJ sought to build consumer trust through informative and experience-based communication. This approach enabled the brand to establish credibility among Indonesian consumers while differentiating itself from competitors that relied heavily on conventional advertising and celebrity endorsements.

The findings indicate that this organic strategy generated significant engagement and visibility. Several TikTok videos achieved viral reach and attracted substantial consumer attention, resulting in rapid stock depletion despite the brand's limited initial inventory. The success of this stage demonstrates that authentic educational content can function as a powerful mechanism for generating awareness, trust, and product adoption within social commerce environments. Furthermore, the results suggest that strong product-market fit combined with platform-appropriate content can accelerate market acceptance even in the absence of extensive advertising expenditures.

Key Opinion Leader and Affiliate Marketing Strategy

As consumer awareness increased, BOJ gradually incorporated influencer marketing into its broader digital strategy. Rather than collaborating with high-profile celebrities, the brand primarily partnered with micro- and mid-tier creators whose content style, skincare expertise, and audience characteristics aligned with BOJ's brand identity. This selective approach reflected the brand's commitment to authenticity and consumer relatability, recognizing that trust and relevance often generate stronger influence than follower numbers alone.

The findings reveal that KOL collaborations were designed not only to increase reach but also to reinforce credibility and strengthen consumer engagement. Influencers were encouraged to explain product ingredients, share personal experiences, and demonstrate product usage through educational and experience-driven content. As a result, KOLs

functioned as trusted intermediaries between the brand and consumers, facilitating information transfer and reducing uncertainty associated with skincare purchases. This strategy contributed significantly to strengthening BOJ's brand positioning within the Indonesian skincare market.

Table 1. Beauty of Joseon's KOL Selection Criteria

Criteria	Micro/Nano KOL	Macro KOL
Primary objective	Build trust and engagement	Increase campaign reach
Content specialization	Skincare education, ingredient explanation, skin concerns	General beauty/lifestyle exposure
Communication style	Personal storytelling, tutorials, product experience	Promotional campaign support
Audience relationship	High interaction and community engagement	Broad audience visibility
Main evaluation	Engagement quality, audience trust, conversion	Reach and brand awareness
Role in BOJ strategy	Trust-building and education	Campaign amplification

The comparison above demonstrates that Beauty of Joseon places greater emphasis on communication quality than audience size. Rather than viewing KOLs merely as promotional channels, the company positions them as communicators who translate complex skincare information into everyday language understood by consumers. This finding highlights that the effectiveness of BOJ's communication strategy depends on symbolic interaction between creators and followers, where educational explanations, personal experiences, and conversational storytelling generate stronger trust than purely promotional messages.

Moving to Paid KOL Collaborations

Following several months of successful organic growth, BOJ expanded its influencer strategy by introducing paid KOL collaborations. However, unlike many beauty brands that prioritize influencer quantity and reach, BOJ maintained a highly selective partnership model. Influencers were chosen based on content quality, audience relevance, communication style, and alignment with the brand's values of transparency, education, and authenticity.

The transition to paid collaborations enabled the brand to scale its marketing efforts while preserving the trust established during the organic growth phase. Performance evaluation extended beyond visibility metrics and included engagement quality, audience sentiment, and conversion outcomes. Consequently, paid KOL campaigns served not merely as promotional activities but as strategic extensions of BOJ's broader trust-building and brand education efforts. This approach allowed the company to increase market penetration without compromising the authenticity that had become central to its brand identity.

Expansion into Affiliate Marketing and Performance-Based Strategy

In October 2024, BOJ further expanded its digital marketing ecosystem through the implementation of an affiliate marketing program that offered competitive commission structures, particularly on TikTok. The program attracted a large number of content creators and encouraged the large-scale production of user-generated content through

reviews, tutorials, livestreams, and product recommendation videos. This strategy transformed creators from passive endorsers into active participants within BOJ's marketing ecosystem.

The affiliate initiative significantly expanded brand visibility and accelerated content dissemination across TikTok. By combining performance-based incentives with creator autonomy, BOJ successfully established a self-reinforcing social commerce ecosystem where affiliates simultaneously functioned as marketers, reviewers, and consumer advocates. The findings suggest that the integration of KOL collaborations and affiliate marketing created a sustainable growth mechanism that strengthened consumer trust, increased engagement, and improved sales conversion. More importantly, the strategy demonstrates how modern beauty brands can leverage creator-driven communities to achieve scalable growth while maintaining authenticity and credibility within highly competitive digital markets.

Beauty of Joseon Content Performance

Beauty of Joseon (BOJ) consistently found that educational content outperformed conventional promotional content across key performance indicators, including engagement, conversion, and social commerce performance. Content explaining skincare ingredients, product benefits, Korean beauty philosophy, and skincare routines generated stronger audience responses because Indonesian consumers valued transparency, authenticity, and informative communication. To maintain this positioning, BOJ provided only general content guidelines for paid KOLs while allowing creators significant freedom in presenting products. Affiliate creators received even greater autonomy, enabling content to remain personalized, educational, and less commercially driven. "This sunscreen doesn't leave a white cast because it uses modern UV filters. I personally use it every morning since my skin is sensitive, and it feels lightweight under makeup." The observed content illustrates that persuasive communication is constructed through a combination of ingredient explanation, personal testimony, and practical demonstration. Rather than directly encouraging purchase, the creator first reduces consumer uncertainty by explaining functional product attributes before sharing personal experience. From a qualitative content analysis perspective, the message contains three dominant communication elements: educational information, experiential narrative, and implicit recommendation. These elements collectively create perceptions of authenticity and encourage audiences to interpret the recommendation as genuine advice rather than commercial persuasion.

The brand allocated approximately IDR 700 million monthly for paid KOL collaborations and targeted a minimum ROI of 50%. However, performance evaluation extended beyond sales metrics to include engagement quality, audience sentiment, and brand exposure consistency. BOJ's strategic focus on TikTok Shop and Shopee reflected the growing importance of social commerce in Indonesia, where TikTok users spend substantial time on the platform and increasingly integrate content consumption with purchasing behavior. This platform alignment enabled BOJ to capitalize on TikTok's virality while creating a seamless consumer journey from discovery to purchase.

As part of its performance-driven strategy, BOJ expanded into large-scale live-streaming campaigns and affiliate marketing programs. Collaborations with celebrities and mega affiliates during TikTok's K-Beauty Campaign generated significant short-term sales while maintaining the brand's educational communication style. Rather than relying on aggressive sales tactics, livestream hosts focused on explaining product ingredients, skincare concerns, and the philosophy behind BOJ formulations. This approach strengthened consumer trust while simultaneously improving conversion performance.

The findings also reveal that BOJ prioritizes content relevance and audience fit over follower count when selecting KOLs. Creators are chosen based on their expertise in skincare-related topics such as acne-prone skin, sensitive skin, hyperpigmentation, sunscreen usage, and other concerns relevant to Indonesian consumers. Review content typically includes ingredient explanations, usage recommendations, and balanced product evaluations, reinforcing perceptions of expertise and trustworthiness. Consistent with Source Credibility Theory, these characteristics increase the persuasive power of KOL recommendations and contribute to stronger consumer trust.

Furthermore, BOJ applies a dual briefing strategy. Paid collaborations receive structured briefs to ensure message consistency and alignment with brand objectives, whereas affiliate collaborations receive simplified guidelines that preserve creator authenticity and personal storytelling. This approach reflects the principles of Social Media Authenticity, where audiences respond more positively to content perceived as genuine and experience-based. Performance data further indicate that micro- and nano-influencers contribute most significantly to brand visibility and gross merchandise value (GMV), demonstrating that credibility, authenticity, and audience relevance are more influential than numerical popularity. The combination of selective sampling, content autonomy, educational communication, and performance-based partnerships has enabled BOJ to sustain consumer interest, strengthen brand trust, and maintain long-term growth in the Indonesian market.

Table 2. Communication Characteristics of Beauty of Joseon Educational Content

Communication Aspect	Observation
Dominant message	Ingredient education and skincare solution
Message style	Conversational and experience-based
Persuasive approach	Personal testimony supported by product explanation
Interaction pattern	Questions, comments, product discussion
Credibility indicator	Expertise and trustworthiness
Communication outcome	Trust formation and consumer engagement

The communication characteristics summarized above indicate that BOJ's content strategy emphasizes informational value rather than persuasive intensity. Educational explanations combined with conversational interaction enable KOLs to function as credible communicators who facilitate trust-building through continuous dialogue with followers.

Challenges and Barriers

Despite its success on TikTok Shop and affiliate marketing in Indonesia, Beauty of Joseon (BOJ) continues to face several internal and external challenges that limit the optimization of its marketing strategy. Interview findings indicate that the primary barriers involve limited human resources and restricted decision-making autonomy at the local level. These constraints affect the management of KOL relationships, campaign execution, affiliate monitoring, and overall marketing responsiveness.

The Indonesian team operates with a relatively small workforce, requiring employees to simultaneously manage influencer relations, campaign implementation, content evaluation, and performance tracking. This situation often creates operational inefficiencies, delays in monitoring affiliate performance, and limited capacity to conduct comprehensive trend analysis and content audits. During peak promotional periods, such

as major e-commerce campaigns and seasonal sales events, coordination among creative, affiliate, and commercial functions becomes increasingly challenging, resulting in communication bottlenecks and reduced campaign effectiveness.

Another significant challenge is the centralized approval system that requires major campaign initiatives, including bundling programs, contests, sponsorship activities, and partnership proposals, to receive approval from the Korean headquarters. Although intended to maintain brand consistency, this process frequently slows decision-making and reduces the ability of local teams to respond quickly to emerging trends and real-time market opportunities. In Indonesia's highly dynamic digital environment, where consumer behavior is strongly influenced by viral content and seasonal promotions, delayed approvals can reduce competitiveness against local brands that possess greater marketing flexibility.

The study also found that limited campaign flexibility affects affiliate performance and KOL collaborations. Delays in campaign approvals, budget allocation, and promotional execution may reduce enthusiasm among creators and limit opportunities to maximize conversions through bundled offers, giveaways, and other engagement-based activities. As a result, BOJ may be unable to fully capitalize on high-performing affiliates, trending content, and time-sensitive sales opportunities. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening local operational capacity and increasing localized decision-making authority. Additional marketing personnel, outsourced support functions, and more flexible approval mechanisms could improve responsiveness, enhance affiliate and KOL management, and enable more effective adaptation to the Indonesian digital marketplace. Furthermore, clearer communication channels between local teams and headquarters would facilitate better alignment regarding campaign flexibility, cultural adaptation, and strategic priorities, ultimately supporting more sustainable growth in the Indonesian market.

The findings demonstrate that Beauty of Joseon's success in the Indonesian market is not solely driven by product quality but also by its strategic utilization of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), authentic content, and social commerce mechanisms on TikTok. The results indicate that KOL selection, content development, and affiliate-based marketing activities collectively contribute to consumer engagement, trust formation, and purchase intention. To better understand these relationships, the discussion interprets the findings through the perspectives of Source Credibility Theory, Social Media Authenticity, and Trust-Transfer Theory. This analysis aims to explain how credibility, authenticity, and trust function as interconnected mechanisms that influence consumer behavior within TikTok's social commerce ecosystem.

The Influence of KOL Credibility on Consumer Trust Formation

The findings indicate that KOL credibility serves as a fundamental element in the formation of consumer trust toward Beauty of Joseon. Rather than prioritizing influencers with the largest audiences, the brand strategically collaborates with creators who possess skincare expertise, ingredient literacy, and the ability to communicate product benefits in a relatable manner. Many of the selected KOLs regularly discuss skincare concerns relevant to Indonesian consumers, including acne-prone skin, sensitive skin, hyperpigmentation, and sunscreen usage. As a result, consumers perceive these creators not merely as product endorsers but as knowledgeable sources of information whose recommendations are considered credible and trustworthy.

This finding is consistent with Source Credibility Theory proposed by (Hovland et al., 1953), which argues that the effectiveness of persuasive communication depends largely on the perceived expertise and trustworthiness of the communicator. In the context of

Beauty of Joseon, credibility is established through the KOLs' ability to explain product ingredients, demonstrate product usage, and provide balanced evaluations based on personal experience. Such credibility helps reduce both functional risk, relating to product performance and suitability, and psychological risk, relating to consumer concerns about adverse reactions or unsatisfactory results. Consequently, consumers are more willing to trust information delivered by credible KOLs and develop favorable perceptions toward the brand.

The findings also suggest that credibility within TikTok's social commerce ecosystem extends beyond technical expertise. KOLs are expected to translate complex skincare knowledge into engaging and platform-native content formats, such as tutorials, skincare routines, ingredient breakdowns, and interactive discussions. Therefore, credibility is not only a personal attribute but also a communicative capability that allows creators to make information accessible and relevant to their audiences. This observation indicates that persuasive influence on TikTok is shaped by both professional competence and the ability to communicate authentically within the platform's content culture.

Furthermore, the results support Trust-Transfer Theory, which explains that trust established toward a trusted source can be transferred to an associated entity. Consumers who trust a KOL's expertise and recommendations are more likely to extend that trust to Beauty of Joseon as the endorsed brand. Through repeated exposure to credible reviews and educational content, consumers gradually perceive the brand as reliable and trustworthy. Therefore, KOL credibility functions not only as a communication tool but also as a strategic mechanism for strengthening consumer confidence, reducing uncertainty, and facilitating long-term brand trust within Indonesia's competitive skincare market.

Credibility as a Mediating Mechanism Between Exposure and Persuasion

The findings demonstrate that content exposure alone is insufficient to generate persuasive outcomes. Although TikTok's algorithm enables content to reach large audiences, consumer engagement and purchase consideration are influenced by the perceived credibility of the creator delivering the message. Beauty of Joseon's preference for nano- and micro-influencers reflects an understanding that audience trust, expertise, and relatability often contribute more to persuasion than follower count alone. As a result, consumers are more likely to engage with and trust recommendations from creators whose content consistently reflects skincare knowledge and genuine product experience.

Interview findings further reveal that BOJ deliberately prioritizes creators capable of explaining skincare ingredients, discussing skin-related problems, and sharing balanced product experiences instead of producing purely promotional messages. For example, KOLs commonly explain the function of ingredients such as rice extract, niacinamide, or ginseng while simultaneously relating these ingredients to their own skincare routines. This communication pattern reflects the expertness dimension proposed by Hovland et al. (1953), as audiences perceive creators to possess relevant knowledge rather than merely acting as endorsers.

At the same time, creators are encouraged to disclose personal experiences, including both product strengths and limitations, while avoiding exaggerated promotional claims. Such communication strengthens the trustworthiness dimension because audiences perceive recommendations as honest, transparent, and experience-based. Therefore, the persuasive effectiveness observed in Beauty of Joseon's KOL strategy is mediated not only by message exposure but also by the simultaneous presence of expertness and trustworthiness within creator-generated communication.

This finding supports Source Credibility Theory, which emphasizes that expertise and trustworthiness enhance message effectiveness. Within TikTok's highly saturated content environment, consumers are exposed to numerous product recommendations daily. Consequently, credibility functions as a filtering mechanism that helps consumers determine which information is worthy of attention and consideration. The study suggests that visibility may create awareness, but credibility transforms awareness into persuasion. Therefore, the effectiveness of KOL marketing depends not only on content reach but also on the ability of influencers to establish trust and authority within their communities. Furthermore, the findings indicate that persuasive influence emerges from the interaction between platform exposure and influencer credibility. While TikTok's algorithm facilitates content discovery, the credibility of KOLs determines whether consumers interpret the message positively and develop favorable perceptions of the brand. This highlights the importance of selecting influencers whose expertise and audience characteristics align closely with the brand's positioning and communication objectives.

Content Authenticity and Consumer Engagement

The findings reveal that content authenticity is a key factor in generating consumer engagement within TikTok's social commerce ecosystem. Beauty of Joseon encourages creators to share personal experiences, skincare routines, product demonstrations, and educational content rather than relying on highly scripted promotional messages. This approach allows audiences to perceive recommendations as genuine and relatable, increasing interaction through likes, comments, shares, and discussions.

Audience engagement was also reflected through interactive communication patterns commonly found in TikTok content, including questions regarding skin suitability, requests for product comparisons, and discussions of personal skincare experiences within the comment sections. These interactions demonstrate that communication between KOLs and followers is not one-directional but dialogic, allowing audiences to negotiate product meanings collectively. Consequently, consumer engagement emerges from continuous interaction rather than solely from message exposure.

These findings align with Social Media Authenticity theory, which argues that transparency, sincerity, and relatability contribute to stronger audience engagement. Consumers increasingly value content that reflects real experiences rather than overt commercial promotion. In the case of Beauty of Joseon, authentic storytelling enables KOLs to connect product benefits with everyday skincare concerns, making content more relevant and meaningful to consumers. As a result, engagement is driven not only by entertainment value but also by the perceived usefulness and credibility of the information shared.

The findings further suggest that authenticity should be viewed as a strategic organizational resource rather than merely a content characteristic. By providing broad content guidelines while allowing creators creative flexibility, Beauty of Joseon successfully balances brand consistency with influencer individuality. This strategy enables the brand to maintain its core message while preserving the authenticity that audiences expect from social media content.

Authenticity as a Mechanism for Building Trust

Beyond generating engagement, authenticity functions as an important mechanism for trust formation. Consumers tend to perceive recommendations as more credible when influencers integrate products naturally into their existing content and demonstrate actual experiences with the products being reviewed. Rather than relying solely on promotional claims, audiences evaluate the consistency between influencer identity, content style, and product recommendations when determining trustworthiness.

The findings indicate that Beauty of Joseon intentionally adopts a decentralized content strategy by allowing KOLs considerable autonomy in presenting products. This approach enables creators to communicate using their own style, language, and storytelling methods, thereby increasing the perceived genuineness of the message. Such flexibility is particularly important in TikTok's environment, where highly commercialized content often receives lower engagement and trust compared to experience-based narratives.

From the perspective of Trust-Transfer Theory, authenticity facilitates the transfer of trust from influencers to brands. When consumers perceive influencer recommendations as sincere and experience-based, they become more willing to extend their trust to the endorsed brand. Consequently, authenticity serves not only as a communication strategy but also as a relational mechanism that strengthens long-term consumer trust and reinforces positive brand perceptions.

Purchase Intention and the Constraints of Affiliate-Based Conversion

The findings indicate that strong engagement does not automatically translate into purchase intention. Although affiliate marketing and creator-generated content effectively increase product visibility and consumer awareness, purchasing decisions remain influenced by factors such as price sensitivity, product relevance, perceived risk, and purchasing power. This suggests that engagement metrics alone are insufficient indicators of commercial success within social commerce environments. The study also found that excessive emphasis on affiliate links and sales-

driven messaging may reduce perceived authenticity and generate consumer skepticism. While affiliate marketing provides creators with incentives to promote products, audiences may question the objectivity of recommendations when commercial motives become overly apparent. Therefore, brands must balance conversion-oriented objectives with authenticity and trust-building efforts to maintain consumer confidence.

In the case of Beauty of Joseon, successful conversion outcomes are achieved through the integration of credible KOLs, authentic content, and educational communication. Rather than focusing exclusively on direct sales tactics, the brand prioritizes consumer trust and long-term relationship building. This finding suggests that affiliate marketing should be viewed not merely as a sales mechanism but as part of a broader trust-building ecosystem in which credibility, authenticity, and consumer value collectively influence purchase intention and brand loyalty.

CLOSING

This study examined the Key Opinion Leader (KOL) marketing strategy employed by Beauty of Joseon on TikTok, focusing on KOL selection criteria, content approaches, and implementation challenges. The findings reveal that the effectiveness of the brand's KOL strategy is primarily driven by credibility, authenticity, and trust transfer. Rather than prioritizing follower count, Beauty of Joseon collaborates with creators who possess skincare expertise, ingredient literacy, and strong audience relevance. Furthermore, the brand emphasizes educational and experience-based content that allows consumers to perceive recommendations as authentic rather than purely promotional. These practices strengthen consumer trust and support positive engagement within TikTok's social commerce ecosystem.

The study also demonstrates that credibility and authenticity function as important mechanisms in influencing consumer perceptions and brand trust. Consistent with Source Credibility Theory, Social Media Authenticity, and Trust-Transfer Theory, consumers are more likely to trust brands endorsed by knowledgeable and trustworthy KOLs whose content reflects genuine experiences. However, the findings indicate that high

engagement does not necessarily translate into purchase intention, as purchasing decisions remain influenced by factors such as product relevance, perceived risk, and consumer purchasing power. Therefore, successful KOL marketing requires a balance between commercial objectives and long-term trust-building strategies.

From a practical perspective, brands should prioritize KOL credibility, audience alignment, and authentic storytelling over follower size alone. Greater flexibility in campaign execution, stronger support for affiliate ecosystems, and the integration of social commerce features such as live streaming may further enhance marketing effectiveness. For Beauty of Joseon specifically, strengthening local operational capacity and increasing decision-making autonomy could improve responsiveness to the dynamic Indonesian digital market.

This study is limited to a single brand and a single social media platform, which may restrict the broader applicability of its findings. Future research is encouraged to conduct comparative studies across multiple beauty brands, investigate influencer effectiveness using quantitative or mixed-method approaches, and explore the relationship between organizational structures, local market adaptation, and social commerce performance in different cultural contexts.

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