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A Strategy for Leveraging Key Opinion Leaders to Increase Brand Awareness for Photoplace Indonesia

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A B S T R A C T

The rapid development of the creative industry has increased competition in the photobox business in Indonesia. This situation requires photobox service providers to implement more innovative marketing strategies that are relevant to current trends. Photoplace Indonesia, as one of the modern photobox providers, strives to increase brand awareness through digital marketing strategies, particularly by utilizing collaborations with key opinion leaders (KOLs) who are effective in reaching young audiences on social media. This study aims to analyze the strategy of utilizing KOLs in building brand awareness for Photoplace Indonesia, identify supporting factors that are indicators of campaign success, and identify inhibiting factors that can affect the smooth implementation. The research method used a qualitative approach through direct observation, interviews with the marketing communications team, participation during internship activities, and literature studies related to marketing strategies, KOLs, and brand awareness. Based on the findings, the KOL utilization strategy was carried out through appropriate KOL selection, systematic brief preparation, coordination during the content production process, and evaluation of campaign performance based on indicators such as engagement and audience response. Supporting factors included strategic planning, maximum utilization of social media platforms, and good internal communication, while inhibiting factors included limited local KOLs, variations in content production capabilities, and technical constraints at outlets. Overall, collaboration with KOLs was proven to increase message reach, digital interaction, and brand awareness at Photoplace Indonesia.

Keywords: *Strategy, KOL, Brand Awareness, Social Media, Photoplace Indonesia*
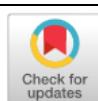
INTRODUCTION

Business development in the creative industry sector has shown significant growth, particularly in photobox services, which are currently trending among young people due to their ability to offer an aesthetic and contemporary photo experience. Hadir and Ikaningtyas (2024) explain that the use of photoboxes not only provides better visual quality but also plays a crucial role in building brand awareness in the digital market.

At present, the development of the photobox business continues to increase, accompanied by high audience interest that has led to intense competition among photobox providers. The growing number of photobox brands encourages each business to strive to build strong brand awareness in the minds of consumers. One brand that offers business opportunities in the photobox sector is Photoplace Indonesia.

Photoplace Indonesia is a modern photobox brand that carries the concept of "Not just a photobox, but a way to capture moments in a cool way." Based on interviews with key informants, Photoplace uses the tagline "Catchyours," which emphasizes the importance of capturing moments in a unique and memorable manner.

With a vision to become a pioneer in creative and classy photobox services, Photoplace Indonesia offers high-quality, innovative, and trend-setting photo experiences. Its target market consists of individuals aged 16–29 in second-tier cities, particularly those who frequent local malls or viral locations and tend to be trend-oriented, impulsive, FOMO-driven, and visually oriented.

Photoplace Indonesia adopts an urban, youthful, and hype concept, making the brand highly relevant to contemporary social media culture. As a result, digital communication strategies—particularly collaborations with key opinion leaders (KOLs)—have become the primary approach for strengthening brand image and increasing brand awareness amid the increasingly competitive photobox industry.

Key opinion leaders (KOLs), or influencers, are considered capable of influencing the opinions and behaviors of their followers through the content they share. Utilizing KOLs is an effective strategy for expanding message reach while building emotional closeness between brands and audiences by delivering personal, authentic, and easily accepted messages.

According to Dharmawan and Yoedtadi (2024), content produced by KOLs plays a crucial role in building brand awareness on social media, particularly through soft-selling approaches tailored to audience characteristics on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. This is reinforced by Agrina et al. (2025), who found that creative KOL-generated content can increase follower numbers, engagement, and brand reach, highlighting the strategic role of KOLs as trusted and relatable brand messengers.

However, previous studies still present several limitations. Most research focuses on the general role of KOLs in increasing brand awareness, with limited attention to their application in the photobox industry, which has distinct visual characteristics and audience behavior. Additionally, prior studies often emphasize content effectiveness without thoroughly examining supporting and inhibiting factors from an operational brand perspective, particularly in second-tier cities with unique audience dynamics. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to analyze the strategy of utilizing KOLs in building brand awareness for Photoplace Indonesia while identifying the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing the success of its implementation, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of KOL collaboration practices in the photobox industry.

METHOD

This research This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design, which focuses on the marketing communication activities of Photoplace Indonesia under the auspices of the ET AL Global company. The case study design was chosen because this research examines in depth the process of utilizing key opinion leaders (KOL) in one specific research object, namely the marketing communication management practices of Photoplace Indonesia during the Field Work Practice (PKL) period.

Data collection was conducted directly at the ET AL Global office through actual observation of the marketing communication division's activities. The research data consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through participatory observation of the collaboration process with KOLs, semi-structured interviews with marketing communication managers and staff, and the author's active involvement in the stages of KOL selection, brief preparation, content monitoring, and campaign coordination. Secondary data were obtained through literature studies from scientific journals, articles, and documents related to marketing communication, KOLs, and brand awareness. The research instruments included interview guidelines, observation notes, and devices for documentation.

Data collection techniques were carried out through four main procedures: (1) participant observation to study the KOL campaign implementation mechanism directly; (2) active participation to understand the team's workflow through involvement in KOL collaboration activities; (3) semi-structured interviews with field supervisors and related parties to explore strategies, driving factors, and inhibiting factors; and (4) literature studies to strengthen the analysis with theoretical foundations and previous research findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Key Opinion Leader (KOL) Utilization Strategy
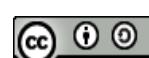
Research findings indicate that Photoplace Indonesia employs a selective and structured KOL (KOL) utilization strategy. The process begins with KOL selection based on communication style, audience segmentation, content relevance, and appropriateness of outlet locations. Once a KOL is selected, the team conducts initial communication via DM to explain the campaign concept and provide an initial brief. Once the KOL expresses interest, communication continues via WhatsApp to send a complete brief, content guidelines, and technical information. The collaboration is formalized by completing an agreement form.

KOL content is dominated by short videos based on firsthand experiences using Photobox. Observations indicate that some KOL posts have reached up to 50,000 views. Audience engagement increases through comments and DMs regarding outlet locations, pricing, and service quality. These findings indicate that the KOL collaboration strategy has an impact on expanding message reach and increasing digital engagement.

Implementation of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)

Photoplace Indonesia implements IMC through consistent messaging and visuals across all KOL content. Brief observations indicate that all KOLs are guided to maintain visual elements, information, and narratives consistent with the brand identity. Monitoring is conducted before content is published to ensure message consistency. By implementing IMC, Photoplace successfully maintains message alignment across various digital platforms. According to Suherman (2017), the primary goal of integrated marketing communication (IMC) is to directly impact audience behavior. IMC views all social media as capable of connecting brands with audiences to convey messages. IMC also utilizes various forms of communication that are relevant and acceptable to the target audience. Thus, the communication process in IMC begins with the audience's needs and perceptions, then becomes the basis for brands in designing and determining the forms and methods of persuasive communication that need to be developed.

The implementation of IMC involves coordinating various communication elements, such as advertising, sales promotions, public relations, digital marketing, and communication through key opinion leaders (KOLs). By integrating these elements, companies are able to create effective and sustainable communication and build long-term relationships with their audiences. The main principle of IMC emphasizes that the message delivered must be cohesive, relevant, and memorable to influence perceptions and trigger positive responses from consumers.

The Role of Key Opinion Leader (KOL) in Brand Awareness

Monitoring data shows that collaboration with KOLs increases content reach on TikTok and Instagram, two platforms with the largest audiences among 16–29-year-olds. KOL content generates increased views, likes, shares, and comments. Audience interactions typically involve questions about pricing, outlet locations, and photo booth quality. Findings also indicate that KOLs are able to drive audiences from the digital realm toward purchase intention, as indicated by an increase in the number of DMs received after a post is published. Experience-based content (storytelling) creates a perception of credibility and brand familiarity.

In the context of digital communication, key opinion leaders (KOL) have an important role as a liaison between the brand and the target audience. Collaboration with KOLs significantly contributed to expanding information reach through comprehensive content distribution on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, two platforms with the largest user base in the 16–29 age group, characterized by impulsiveness and FOMO. Content published by KOLs showed increased engagement, such as views, likes, shares, saves, and comments, significantly reflecting the audience's increased interest in the brand. Interactions in the comments section generally included questions about service prices, outlet locations, photobox quality, and reviews from audiences who had visited one of Photoplace's outlets. KOLs contributed to building brand awareness not only through content reach but also through the personal, narrative, and authentic nature of their communication. Content created based on KOLs' firsthand experiences of trying Photoplace services made promotional messages more credible and easily accepted by the audience.
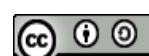
Supporting Factors for the Utilization of Key Opinion Leaders (KOL)

Photoplace Indonesia's KOL utilization strategy is supported by several structural and operational factors that contribute to the effectiveness of marketing communications. Based on field findings, successful strategy implementation is primarily influenced by four key aspects: systematic planning, a measurable KOL selection process, strategic social media platform selection, and an ongoing campaign performance evaluation mechanism. These four factors play a crucial role in ensuring message cohesion, optimizing audience reach, and increasing accuracy in assessing the impact of communications on consumer behavior.

Field findings revealed four key supporting factors:

Structured strategic planning, from campaign objective setting and audience segmentation to content concept.

Selective KOL selection, based on communication style, content quality, personal image, and location relevance.

Appropriate utilization of social media platforms, particularly TikTok and Instagram, which are effective in reaching younger audiences.

Campaign performance evaluation was conducted through analysis of views, likes, shares, saves, comments, and increased foot traffic.

Factors Inhibiting the Utilization of Key Opinion Leaders (KOL)

The implementation of the KOL utilization strategy at Photoplace Indonesia also faced several obstacles that impacted the campaign's effectiveness. Findings indicate that the primary challenge stemmed from the limited availability of relevant KOLs in some operational areas, resulting in lengthy selection and collaboration processes. Furthermore, there was significant variation in content production capabilities among KOLs, resulting in inconsistent visual quality and content misalignment with the brief. Technical challenges at outlets—such as long customer queues, unstable lighting, and photobox equipment disruptions—also hampered the smooth content capture process. The inconsistency of some KOLs' communication styles with Photoplace's youthful, modern, and aesthetic brand tone also reduced the effectiveness of message delivery. Furthermore, changes in the KOLs' publication schedules required readjustments to the campaign timeline, disrupting the overall consistency of the campaign flow.

The findings identified several key barriers:

Limited availability of relevant KOLs in some operational areas.

Differences in content production capabilities, which impacted visual quality and adherence to briefs.

Technical challenges at outlets, such as long queues, machine breakdowns, and unstable lighting.

Inconsistency between KOL communication styles and Photoplace's youthful, modern, and aesthetic tone.

Changes in KOL publication schedules, which impacted campaign timelines.

Discussion

KOL Collaboration as an Effective Communication Strategy

The discussion shows that Photoplace's KOL utilization strategy is consistent with modern marketing communications theory. KOL selection, brief development, and content monitoring support the effective delivery of personalized and authentic messages. The findings of increased digital interaction reinforce the argument that KOLs have greater credibility than conventional promotions. This improvement demonstrates that the KOL utilization strategy contributes to expanding the reach of the message and increasing audience interaction. Conceptually, the strategy implemented by Photoplace illustrates the implementation of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) that emphasizes consistency and alignment of messages. Based on the results of brief observations, all KOLs are directed to maintain the alignment of visual elements and the information conveyed. Thus, Photoplace's KOL collaboration flow demonstrates a structured communication pattern oriented towards strengthening the brand image.

Alignment of Photoplace's Strategy with IMC Principles

The research results show that Photoplace successfully implemented IMC principles, namely consistency of message, visuals, and brand identity. The implementation of a clear brief and content monitoring have proven to strengthen Photoplace's image as a modern, aesthetically pleasing photobox that is relevant to social media culture. These findings align with Suherman (2017), who emphasized the importance of message consistency in IMC. In the context of Photoplace Indonesia, IMC is a crucial foundation for utilizing KOLs as a communication medium. Through the implementation of IMC, Photoplace ensures that the messages conveyed by KOLs remain aligned with the brand's visual identity and values. This is achieved through the development of clear briefs, consistent visual guidelines, and a monitoring process before content is published. By consistently applying IMC principles, Photoplace is able to maintain message alignment across various digital platforms and strengthen brand awareness among young audiences.

Impact of KOLs on Building Brand Awareness

The discussion shows that KOLs play a significant role in increasing Photoplace's brand awareness through brand exposure through high views, brand recognition through audience interaction, brand recall through authentic storytelling content. This aligns with Agrina et al. (2025), who stated that KOLs can increase engagement and brand reach. The finding that DMs increased after content was published indicates that the audience is moving towards the interest and consideration stages. The role of key opinion leaders (KOLs) in building Photoplace Indonesia's brand awareness is evident through increased brand exposure and audience interaction across various social media platforms. Their research shows an increase in social media followers, engagement rates, and content reach after implementing a KOL strategy, demonstrating that collaboration with KOLs can strengthen brand awareness amidst a competitive industry.

Content created by key opinion leaders (KOLs) increases audience engagement on social media, indicating that the audience has entered the initial stage of brand recognition and is moving towards brand recall. After this interaction, they enter the brand recognition stage, showing a greater interest in trying Photoplace's services directly. In other words, KOL collaboration not only increases brand visibility but also moves the audience towards the purchasing stage. For Photoplace Indonesia, brand awareness is not just about name recognition, but also about creating an image as a modern, urban, creative, and youth-friendly photobox. Collaborating with KOLs provides an opportunity to expand the reach of the message and instill a more personal and authentic brand identity. With strong brand awareness, Photoplace can build trust, increase loyalty, and maintain its position among other photobox competitors.

Supporting Factor Analysis

Strategic planning, KOL selection, utilization of TikTok and Instagram, and regular evaluation are crucial elements in strengthening the effectiveness of KOL utilization. The integration of these factors demonstrates that campaign success depends not only on the KOL, but also on the company's internal preparedness. These supporting factors demonstrate that the success of KOL utilization at Photoplace Indonesia depends not only on the KOL itself, but also on the integration of strategic planning, selecting the right figure, utilizing appropriate media platforms, and ongoing performance evaluation. The integration of these factors forms a strong and effective marketing communications system in strengthening Photoplace Indonesia's brand awareness.

Inhibiting Factor Analysis

The discussion shows that barriers to KOL utilization stem from both internal and external factors. The limited availability of local KOLs indicates challenges in reaching second-tier markets. Variations in KOL content production capabilities emphasize the importance of providing more detailed visual and technical guidance. Technical constraints at outlets indicate the need for improved operational management to support content production. These inhibiting factors indicate that the successful utilization of KOLs is heavily influenced by internal readiness, the availability of external resources, and technical stability in the field. The existence of these obstacles is an important consideration in planning future campaigns,

particularly regarding improving the system for searching and selecting KOLs, strengthening content standardization, and optimizing technical readiness at outlets to support smooth content production.

CONCLUSIONS

The strategy of utilizing key opinion leaders (KOLs) has proven to be an effective and relevant approach for building brand awareness for Photoplace Indonesia amid the increasingly competitive photo booth industry, as evidenced by its successful implementation through targeted KOL selection, consistent brief preparation, strong coordination, and regular evaluation of content performance. The role of KOLs as credible and audience-proximate messengers has expanded information reach, increased digital interaction, and encouraged audiences to visit Photoplace outlets, while the application of integrated marketing communication (IMC) principles has ensured message consistency through the alignment of visual elements, communication style, and brand values across all KOL content. As a result, Photoplace's communication process remains directed, integrated, and focused on building a strong brand image in the audience's mind, with increased brand awareness reflected in indicators such as views, likes, comments, shares, saves, and rising direct messages (DMs) that signal initial interest and engagement. Beyond increasing exposure, KOLs also foster positive brand associations by delivering authentic, first-hand experiences that make promotional messages more acceptable and memorable. The success of this strategy is supported by thorough strategic planning, appropriate platform selection, selective KOL recruitment, and structured internal communication, although several obstacles remain, including limited availability of relevant KOLs in certain regions, inconsistent content quality, changes in publication schedules, and technical issues at outlets that affect content production. Overall, this study confirms that KOL utilization is an effective and sustainable digital marketing strategy for Photoplace Indonesia, contributing not only to higher brand awareness but also to a stronger brand position as a modern photobox aligned with youth lifestyles; however, future development should focus on improving content standardization, diversifying KOL types, and optimizing technical readiness at outlets. The findings also reinforce key influencer marketing theories, as the effectiveness of KOL-based promotion aligns with Source Credibility Theory through the importance of authenticity and trustworthiness, supports Match-Up Theory by demonstrating the impact of congruence between KOL identity and brand personality, and extends Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Theory by showing that influencer-generated content becomes more impactful when embedded within a unified and consistent communication framework across platforms.

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