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ABSTRACT

The Food and Beverage (F&B) industry is experiencing rapid growth and intense competition, necessitating innovative marketing strategies to attract consumers. One effective approach that is gaining popularity is the use of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) through social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. This study analyzes the collaboration of KOLs in the promotional marketing strategies of F&B businesses, identifying key factors that contribute to their success. Using a qualitative descriptive methodology, it is possible to explore in depth how KOLs collaborate with the promotional marketing strategies of F&B businesses. The results of this study indicate that credible and relatable KOLs can significantly increase brand awareness, consumer engagement, and purchase intentions. Furthermore, strategic KOL selection, content creativity, platform choice, and consumer alignment are crucial for achieving higher marketing and sales effectiveness. The results of this study provide insights for F&B business owners who aim to optimize their marketing strategies in an increasingly digital and consumer-oriented landscape.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Promotion, Key Opinion Leader (KOL), Food and Beverage, Social Media

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development and increasingly fierce competition in the food and beverage (F&B) industry require businesses in this sector to formulate appropriate marketing strategies. A growing trend in marketing in recent years is the integration of Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) marketing strategies. The KOL method has a significant impact on consumer behavior by influencing opinions and ultimately product purchasing decisions. By optimizing social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube, KOLs can build and foster trust and follower engagement, helping them accelerate growth and credibility through authentic recommendations.

This study analyzes how marketing strategies incorporating the KOL method can develop and maintain the sustainability of F&B businesses. The KOL method in F&B business promotion can have a significant impact through factors that influence consumer behavior, both in influencing opinions and product purchasing decisions. By analyzing the effectiveness of the KOL method in its marketing strategy, F&B businesses are expected to optimize sales and gain a competitive edge in the increasingly competitive F&B industry. Although marketing strategies using influencers on social media are widely adopted in the F&B business, the KOL method has not been widely used to help marketing strategies that are able to lead opinions and influence consumer behavior in making product purchasing decisions. According to Cheah, C.W., et.al., (2024), that based on data, half of the existing social media is social media that is easily accessible to everyone and all ages, one of which is TikTok. Most TikTok users are filled with influencers who discuss food and drinks. Of all the existing food videos, we most often see them using the same mechanism, namely by promoting the food brands they try. The KOL method with influencers is different, that influencers have loyal followers on social media platforms. Influencers can be famous because of their personal charm and ability to influence their followers. In marketing strategies, influencers collaborate with brands to advertise products or services to their own consumers. Meanwhile, KOL, someone recognized as an expert or authority in a particular field, for example the F&B business. KOL is considered a provider of information that can be trusted by producers in the industry and collaborate with them, so that it can improve brand reputation, influence and lead consumer opinion and make purchasing decisions for the industry's products.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the marketing development of F&B businesses through promotional marketing strategies using the KOL method. Utilizing KOLs in the F&B business is crucial for building mutually beneficial relationships. Good collaboration and mutual attention to their needs will significantly impact business success. According to Freberg et al. (2011), KOLs have high credibility among consumers because they are perceived as experts in their fields or authentic figures. This increases purchase intention for F&B products when promoted by KOLs. This influence is even more significant when utilizing and optimizing social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Promotion. According to Lima (2015), "promotion includes advertising, public relations, personal selling, and sales promotion." In marketing, promotion represents a very interesting dimension because strategic elements and rational thinking naturally combine with elements of composition and destiny. Therefore, it can be said that promotion is more of an art than a science. Kotler and Keller (2016) state that promotion is a means used by industry to convey information about its products, persuade, and remind consumers about the products and brands they sell. Promotion has a significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions. Through effective communication strategies, promotion can create awareness, build interest, and even encourage purchase action. Stanton (2004) explains that promotion is the best strategic combination of advertising, personal selling, and other promotional tools to achieve sales goals.

In the modern marketing context, digital promotion is growing and plays a crucial role in influencing consumer behavior. Social media, digital advertising, and influencer marketing are effective means of reaching consumers more broadly and interactively. According to Kotler (2017), digital marketing enables companies to interact directly with consumers, making communication more personalized and effective. Furthermore, digital promotions also allow for real-time performance measurement, allowing companies to more accurately evaluate the effectiveness of promotional strategies.

2.2 Key Opinion Leader (KOL). A Key Opinion Leader (KOL) is someone who has a strong influence on the opinions, attitudes, and behavior of a specific group of consumers. In the context of marketing development, KOLs are often utilized as a marketing or promotional strategy to increase consumer trust and interest in a product or service. According to Philip Kotler and Keller (2016), an opinion leader is someone who has the ability to influence the attitudes or behavior of others due to their expertise, knowledge, or credibility. This opinion emphasizes that the primary strength of KOLs lies in consumer trust. Furthermore, Lazarsfeld and Katz (1955), in their two-step flow of communication theory, stated that information from mass media does not directly influence the wider public, but rather through the intermediary of opinion leaders, who then spread that influence to others.

In marketing development, KOLs play a crucial role as a liaison between companies and consumers. KOLs can increase the effectiveness of marketing communications because their messages are more easily accepted by consumers. According to Shimp (2014), the use of opinion leaders in promotions can increase the persuasive power of messages because consumers tend to trust the recommendations of individuals considered experts or influencers more than traditional advertising. Furthermore, Frederick (2003) emphasized that recommendations from trusted individuals (such as KOLs) can increase customer loyalty and strengthen the relationship between consumers and brands.

KOLs are one of the most powerful methods for increasing sales in businesses, as they possess or can possess expertise in specific areas and are recognized by the community. A study by Wei He and Chenyuan Jin (2022) used dual systems theory to explain how KOL characteristics influence consumer purchase intentions in the context of live commerce. The results showed that KOL expertise and credibility can increase consumer trust, and drive purchase intention. Furthermore, research by Cartwright et al. (2022) highlights the importance of selecting KOLs who align with brand values and image to achieve optimal marketing effectiveness. KOLs with a relevant audience and values aligned with the brand can increase consumer engagement and strengthen the brand's image.

2.3 Food and Beverage Business.The Food and Beverage (F&B) business is a service industry engaged in providing food and beverages to consumers. This industry encompasses various types of businesses, such as restaurants, cafes, catering establishments, and fast food services. According to Pantelidis (2022), F&B encompasses various sub-segments of the hospitality industry involved in the provision of food and beverages, including production, distribution, storage, processing, serving, and waste management. According to Schmidgall (2013), the food and beverage business is a subset of the hospitality industry that focuses on the production, presentation, and service of food and beverages to customers with the goal of generating profit. Walker (2017) further states that the F&B industry is a sector that provides a consumption experience through a combination of quality products, services, and ambiance offered to consumers.

The success of an F&B business is determined by various factors. According to Kotler (2016), business success is greatly influenced by a company's ability to understand consumer needs and desires. Meanwhile, Hayes and Ninemeier (2009) mentioned several main factors, namely: Quality of food and beverage products, Quality of service, Competitive prices, Business location, Cleanliness and food safety. Consumer behavior has a major influence on the success of the F&B business. According to Schiffman and Leslie (2010), consumer purchasing decisions are influenced by cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors. In the F&B business, factors such as taste, price, atmosphere, and recommendations (word of mouth) greatly influence consumer decisions in choosing a place to eat.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative. Qualitative research is a systematic approach to understanding current phenomena or events by collecting, analyzing, and presenting data with descriptive or narrative quality (Cresswell, 2007). In this method, researchers will attempt to document characteristics, relationships, and patterns that exist in context without intervention or manipulation of variables. The informants for this study were individuals who had been exposed to F&B promotional content by KOLs on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved the following steps: transcribing the data, initial coding of key themes such as KOL credibility, content delivery style, content creativity, influence on purchasing decisions, and preferred social media platforms, grouping dominant themes based on patterns identified across different participant responses, and validating the data through source triangulation by comparing responses from different participants and checking for narrative consistency. The raw data is available at: <https://data.mendeley.com/drafts/n2mcbbhx37>

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study shows that the use of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) in food and beverage (F&B) business promotional strategies has a significant positive impact on increasing brand awareness, consumer appeal, and increasing sales. This study used a descriptive qualitative approach, observing the collaborative practices of F&B businesses with KOLs through social media platforms, particularly Instagram and TikTok. Marketing development in F&B business promotions using the KOL method shows that KOLs have become a key strategy in F&B business promotion development, especially in the current social media era. This strategy is developed through the following stages: 1) Identifying promotional needs and target audiences (defining the problem); 2. Selecting KOLs that align with the brand persona, market niche, and follower base; 3. Creating creative and relevant promotional content; 4. Implementing digital campaigns through social media (especially Instagram and TikTok); 5. Evaluating promotional effectiveness through metrics such as engagement, reach, and sales conversions.

The use of KOL is considered effective in building brand awareness, creating more natural communication with consumers, and driving increased purchase intentions and decisions (Freberg, et. al., 2011 and Cheah, et. al., 2024). Factors that influence the development of F&B promotional marketing using KOL, include: 1. Credibility and Expertise of KOL KOL who are considered experts or experienced in the F&B field are more trusted by the audience, thus significantly influencing purchasing decisions; 2. Alignment between KOL and Brand Values The selection of KOL must consider the alignment between the KOL image and brand identity to create effective communication; 3. Social Media Platforms Used TikTok and Instagram have proven to be the most effective promotional channels for F&B businesses due to their visual and viral nature. Journal of Medical Internet Research (2025); 4. Engagement Level KOL with a high level of interaction tends to have a greater influence on sales conversions than those who only have a large number of followers. De Veirman, et. al., (2017), that micro-influencers with high engagement are more effective in F&B marketing than KOLs with wide reach but low engagement; 5. Content delivery style - Content that is creative, relevant, and does not feel like advertising is more easily accepted by consumers and has a greater impact in shaping brand perception and loyalty; 6. Evaluation and measurement of results - businesses that evaluate their KOL campaigns regularly (through digital analytics data) can adjust their strategies and increase sales volume.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that a marketing promotion strategy using KOLs has a significant impact on increasing promotional effectiveness, brand awareness, and driving consumer purchasing decisions. KOLs are not only promotional tools but also emotional bridges between brands and consumers. By prioritizing relevant and authentic content, KOLs can convey brand messages more naturally and believably than conventional advertising. This collaborative marketing strategy has been proven to expand market reach, increase consumer trust, and accelerate the growth rate of F&B businesses.

Factors such as KOL credibility, brand-KOL fit, the social media platform used, engagement levels, content delivery style, and data-driven evaluation are key to determining the success of a promotional strategy. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram are the most effective channels due to their powerful visual nature and high viral potential.

KOL in the context of F&B business marketing are not only promotional tools but can also function as brand ambassadors, deeply shaping consumer perceptions. In a fast-paced digital world, consumers are looking not only for information but also for emotional connections and trust. This is where the power of KOLs proves to be highly effective. This study also implies that food and beverage businesses can be more competitive if they are able to strategically integrate KOLs into their marketing strategies, not just as a complement to campaigns, but as a core part of the brand communication ecosystem.

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Authors 1 and 4 contributed to conceptualization, methodology, software, data curation, and correspondence. Authors 2 and 3 contributed to writing the original draft. Authors 5 and 6 contributed to reviewing, editing, supervision, and final approval of the manuscript.

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