The Role of Influencers and Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) in Skincare Marketing: A Systematic Review of Strategies to Increase Brand Awareness

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Abstract. In the digital era, marketing through influencers and key opinion leaders (KOLs) has become a popular strategy, particularly in the skincare industry, to increase brand awareness. This study is a systematic review that aims to evaluate the role of influencers and KOLs in skincare marketing strategies focused on increasing brand awareness. The study analyzed academic literature obtained from the Scopus indexed database, with inclusion criteria such as topic relevance, clear methodology, and publication within the last five years. The review results indicate that credibility, level ofEngagement and fit between influencers/KOLs and brands are key factors in campaign success. Social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have proven effective in conveying brand messages through authentic and persuasive content. The implications of these findings emphasize the importance of selecting the right personas and tailoring content strategies to maximize the impact of brand awareness in digital skincare campaigns.

Keywords:influencer marketing, key opinion leaders (KOL), brand awareness, digital marketing, social media, credibility, skincare industry

Introduction

The skincare industry has experienced rapid growth in recent years. This growth is driven by increasing consumer awareness of the importance of skincare, as well as the significant role of social media in shaping public opinion. In this context, influencers and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) have become a key strategy used by various brands to build brand awareness, especially among young people. They are considered capable of conveying product information in a more personal manner and building an emotional connection with their audience, which can ultimately influence purchasing decisions.

Several previous studies, such as those conducted by (Febriyanti & Fajri, 2024; Sumanti et al., 2024), have shown that influencer marketing can positively impact brand image, consumer trust, and product awareness. Unlike traditional celebrities, influencers tend to connect more closely with their followers through relatable lifestyles and two-way interactions. In the skincare industry, this connection is crucial because the products they offer are directly related to skin health and safety.

Other studies (Lim et al., 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019) also confirm that content delivered by influencers as long as it is authentic, credible and consistent can have a significant influence on purchase intentions and brand perception. KOLs are also considered to play a crucial role because their expertise often provides added value in the form of more objective and convincing information.

While the literature on the effectiveness of influencer marketing and KOLs continues to grow, several gaps remain that need further exploration. First, most existing studies tend to generalize the influence of influencers on a wide

range of products, without considering the specific context of each industry. In this regard, the skincare industry has unique characteristics such as skin sensitivity and a high need for trust, which differentiate consumer behavior from other industries like food or fashion. Second, there is still little research that examines the differences in effectiveness between micro-influencers (with smaller, niche audiences) and macro-influencers, or KOLs (who have broader reach and recognized expertise) in promoting skincare products.

Micro-influencers are generally considered more approachable and able to build strong relationships with their audiences. While they don't always have a professional background, their "no-nonsense" approach makes their content seem more honest and relatable. Conversely, macro-influencers and KOLs command a higher level of trust because they are perceived as experts, which can enhance brand credibility. Unfortunately, the specific context of the skincare industry is rarely a primary focus when discussing the influence of audience size on campaign effectiveness.

This research aims to provide both academic and practical contributions. First, we present a literature review specifically focused on the skincare industry, identifying contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Second, we compare the roles of micro-influencers and KOLs in increasing brand awareness. This is crucial for brands with limited budgets and needing to choose the most effective strategy. Third, this research proposes a conceptual framework that links influencer attributes (such as authenticity, attractiveness, and expertise) with desired outcomes in brand awareness (such as brand recognition, trust, and recall).

Practically, the findings of this study are expected to help skincare businesses determine the right marketing strategy, particularly in selecting the right influencer type for their campaign objectives. For example, emerging brands with dermatologically tested claims may be better suited to partnering with KOLs, while smaller brands can achieve higher engagement through micro-influencers. Furthermore, the study provides guidance on best practices in influencer collaboration, including the importance of alignment between influencer and brand values and transparency in promotional content.

Theoretically, this research expands the study of influencer marketing by integrating theories from social media, brand awareness, and consumer behavior, particularly in high-involvement products like skincare. The study highlights how aspects such as social proof, source credibility, and parasocial relationships can shape consumer perceptions and increase brand awareness.

In short, while marketing strategies using influencers and KOLs have become a major trend in the digital world, their application in the skincare industry requires special attention. By focusing on the industry context and influencer types, this research is expected to provide more relevant insights for marketers and enrich the academic literature on digital branding.

Formulation of the problem
1. What is the role of influencers and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) in shaping and increasing brand awareness in the skincare industry?
2. What factors influence the effectiveness of marketing strategies through influencers and KOLs on brand awareness?

3. To what extent do the roles of micro-influencers, macro-influencers, and KOLs differ in building brand awareness for skincare products?

Methods

This study uses a quantitative approach with a causal associative approach. It aims to determine the effect of influencer or Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) use on consumer brand awareness in the skincare industry. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for testing causal relationships between variables that can be measured statistically through quantitative data. The research designThe method used was a quantitative survey with an instrument in the form of a questionnaire compiled based on theoretical indicators of each variable and measured using a five-point Likert scale.

The population in this study consisted of individuals who are active social media users and have been exposed to promotional content for skincare products by influencers/KOLs in Indonesia. The sample consisted of 33 respondents selected using purposive sampling with the following inclusion criteria:

1. Minimum age 18 years;
2. Have you ever seen or followed influencer/KOL content on social media such as Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube related to skincare products?
3. Willing to fill out the questionnaire honestly and responsibly.

The purposive sampling technique was chosen because it allows researchers to capture respondents who are specifically relevant to the research topic and objectives, as suggested in digital media-based social studies (Etikan, 2016).

The research instrument was developed based on indicators from two main constructs, namely:
● Use of Influencers/KOLs, which includes credibility, brand fit, attractiveness, and audience engagement (adapted from (Lim et al., 2017));
● Brand Awareness, which includes brand recognition, recall, perception of brand attributes, and belief in brand quality (referring to (Made et al., 2024)

The instrument was first tested using validity (Pearson's item-total correlation) and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha). Valid data were considered to have a significance value <0.05, while the instrument was considered reliable if the Cronbach's Alpha value was ≥0.60.

Data was collected online via Google Form over a two-week period. After data collection, classical assumption tests were conducted, including:

1. Normality Test with Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk,
2. Pearson Correlation Test to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables,
3. Simple Linear Regression Test to determine the influence of influencer/KOL variables on brand awareness directly.

All analyses were performed using SPSS software.

Results and Discussion

A. Result

1. Validity test

Validity testing was carried out by analyzing the Pearson correlation between each indicator item and the total construct score of each variable, namely Influencer/KOL (X) and Brand Awareness (Y).

Tabel 1: Correlations x

		x1	x2	x3	x4	Totalx
x1	Pearson Correlation	1	.044	.487**	-.358*	.596**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.806	.004	.041	.000
	N	33	33	33	33	33
x2	Pearson Correlation	.044	1	.023	.182	.502**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.806		.899	.312	.003
	N	33	33	33	33	33
x3	Pearson Correlation	.487**	.023	1	-.010	.723**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.899		.956	.000
	N	33	33	33	33	33
x4	Pearson Correlation	-.358*	.182	-.010	1	.344*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.041	.312	.956		.050
	N	33	33	33	33	33
Totalx	Pearson Correlation	.596**	.502**	.723**	.344*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.003	.000	.050	
	N	33	33	33	33	33

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Tabel 2: Correlations y

		y1	y2	y3	y4	Totaly
y1	Pearson Correlation	1	-.043	.158	.177	.589**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.812	.381	.326	.000
	N	33	33	33	33	33
y2	Pearson Correlation	-.043	1	-.330	.116	.371*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.812		.061	.522	.034
	N	33	33	33	33	33
y3	Pearson Correlation	.158	-.330	1	.071	.483**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.381	.061		.696	.004
	N	33	33	33	33	33
y4	Pearson Correlation	.177	.116	.071	1	.623**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.326	.522	.696		.000
	N	33	33	33	33	33
Totaly	Pearson Correlation	.589**	.371*	.483**	.623**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.034	.004	.000	
	N	33	33	33	33	33

Results: The results of the validity test show that most of the statement items in both variable X (Influencer/KOL) and variable Y (Brand Awareness) have a significant correlation with the total score.This is indicated by a sig. (2-tailed) value < 0.05 and a fairly strong positive correlation, especially in items x1, x3, and y1, y4. Thus, the items in the questionnaire are declared valid and suitable for further analysis.

2. Normality Test

Normality tests were conducted using the Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov methods. The results showed that:

Tabel 3: Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Totalx	33	100.0%	0	0.0%	33	100.0%
Totaly	33	100.0%	0	0.0%	33	100.0%

Tabel 4: Descriptives

			Statistic	Std. Error
Totalx	Mean		15.2424	.38196
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	14.4644	
		Upper Bound	16.0204	
	5% Trimmed Mean		15.2811	
	Median		15.0000	
	Variance		4.814	
	Std. Deviation		2.19417	
	Minimum		9.00	
	Maximum		20.00	
	Range		11.00	
	Interquartile Range		2.00	
	Skewness		-.367	.409
	Kurtosis		1.145	.798
Totaly	Mean		15.7273	.33505
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	15.0448	
		Upper Bound	16.4097	
	5% Trimmed Mean		15.7189	
	Median		16.0000	
	Variance		3.705	
	Std. Deviation		1.92472	
	Minimum		12.00	
	Maximum		20.00	
	Range		8.00	
	Interquartile Range		2.50	
	Skewness		-.034	.409
	Kurtosis		-.040	.798

Tabel 4: Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Totalx	.153	33	.049	.963	33	.323
Totaly	.162	33	.027	.959	33	.246

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Results: Normality testing was performed using the Shapiro-Wilk test, where the results showed that the data from the variables Totalx (p = 0.323) and Totaly (p = 0.246) had a significance value of more than 0.05. This means that the data are normally distributed and meet the basic assumptions for regression and correlation analysis.

3. **Person Correlation Test**

Pearson correlation test was conducted to see the relationship between variables X and Y. The results showed that:

Tabel 5: Correlations

		Totalx	Totaly
Totalx	Pearson Correlation	1	-.169
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.348
	N	33	33
Totaly	Pearson Correlation	-.169	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.348	
	N	33	33

Correlation coefficient value (r)as big as **-0.169**, with p = 0.348 (> 0.05), which means the relationship between Influencer/KOL (X) and Brand Awareness (Y) is very weakly negative and not significant.

4. **Simple Linear Regression Test**

A simple linear regression test is used to determine the direct effect of variable X on Y.

a. **Model Summary**

Tabel 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.169a	.029	-.003	1.92744

a. Predictors: (Constant), Totalx

The R value = 0.169 and R^2 = 0.029, which means that only 2.9% of the variation in brand awareness can be explained by influencers/KOLs. The adjusted R^2 value of -0.003 indicates that the model has very low predictive power.

b. **F Test (Simultaneous)**

Tabel 7: ANOVA a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3.380	1	3.380	.910	.348b
	Residual	115.166	31	3.715		
	Total	118.545	32			

a. Dependent Variable: Totaly

b. Predictors: (Constant), Totalx

The F value is 0.910 with a significance level of p = 0.348 (> 0.05), indicating that the regression model is not simultaneously significant. This means there is no strong evidence that X influences Y simultaneously.

c. **t-test (Partial)**

Tabel 8: Coefficientsa

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	17.985	2.391		7.523	.000
	Totalx	-.148	.155	-.169	-.954	.348

a. Dependent Variable: Totaly

The regression coefficient of X against Y is B = -0.148 with p = 0.348, indicating that the effect is not statistically significant.

d. **Regression Equation**

Brand Awareness (Y)=17.985−0.148×Influencer/KOL (X)\text{Brand Awareness (Y)} =

17.985 - 0.148 \times \text{Influencer/KOL (

(X)}Brand Awareness (Y)=17.985−0.148×Influencer/KOL (X)

This means that the increase in the Influencer/KOL variable is actually followed by a decrease in Brand Awareness, but this influence is not statistically significant (consumptive) at 0.894 points, assuming the other variables are constant.

B. Discussion

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that influencer or Key Opinion Leader (KOL) activity does not significantly influence consumer brand awareness of skincare products. This is evident from the very weak correlation and regression results, which do not indicate a strong relationship between the two variables.

These results align with research (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), which explains that not all influencer content significantly impacts brand awareness, especially if the content doesn't feel relevant or resonates with the target audience. This means that even if an influencer is popular, if their values and communication style don't align with the brand image, their campaign's effectiveness will decrease.

Furthermore, according to Schouten et al., 2020, the fit between influencer and brand, or brand-influencer fit, is a crucial factor in the success of a digital marketing strategy. If audiences perceive an influencer as merely promoting a product without truly believing in it, the promotional message is less likely to be trusted.

Credibility and authenticity are also important determinants. (Audrezet et al., 2020) states that Overly promotional or inauthentic content can actually diminish followers' trust in an influencer. In the skincare industry, which relies heavily on trust, this is especially significant.

Research by (Lim et al., 2017) also shows that KOLs with expertise and knowledge in their field can have a greater influence on consumer trust and attitudes. However, it's possible that respondents in this study were more exposed to regular influencers than professional KOLs, resulting in a less pronounced impact on brand awareness.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the success of an influencer campaign is determined not only by the number of followers or popularity, but also by the relevance, credibility, and authenticity of the content they present. Therefore, skincare brands need to be more selective in selecting influencers or KOLs who truly align with their brand image and audience needs.

Conclusion

This study concluded that while influencers and KOLs play a crucial role in skincare marketing strategies, the analysis showed no significant correlation between their activities and increasing brand awareness. This finding suggests that the effectiveness of influencer campaigns depends heavily on factors such as credibility, brand fit, and audience engagement.

The implication is that the type of influencer selected must be tailored to the product's objectives and characteristics. Skincare brands need to be more selective and strategic in selecting influencers, or KOLs, to ensure their campaigns have an optimal impact on brand awareness.

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