ISSN: 2688-9323

Information Disclosure Transparency and Image Consistency: A Study on the Border Conditions of Short Video KOL Marketing on Purchase Intention

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Abstract

With the rapid growth of short-video platforms and the widespread adoption of influencer marketing, many KOLs simultaneously build personal reputations and accept commercial endorsements-a dynamic that frequently leads to conflicts, undermining consumer trust. This study examines two core dimensions-information transparency and persona consistency-to explore their impact on influencer marketing effectiveness and consumer purchasing behavior. Employing a multi-case comparative approach, the research analyzes both exemplary and counterproductive cases using web ethnography and content analysis methodologies. It compares differences in information disclosure practices and persona consistency among influencers, as well as corresponding shifts in audience attitudes. Findings reveal that influencers who transparently disclose promotional information and maintain consistent personas more effectively earn public trust and drive purchase intentions. Conversely, information concealment or significant personality inconsistencies erode fan loyalty and harm endorsement credibility. The developed analytical model demonstrates how these factors serve as critical mediators throughout the process from influencer actions to consumer decisions. These conclusions provide actionable insights for balancing commercial interests with personal reputation management and mitigating marketing risks across influencers, brands, and platforms.

Keywords

KOL Marketing; Information Disclosure Transparency; Persona Consistency; Purchase Intention; Brand.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of digital marketing, short-video platforms such as TikTok and Xiaohongshu have significantly transformed the communication model between brands and consumers. As a key bridge connecting brands and their audiences, KOLs profoundly influence consumer decision-making through high-quality content, approachable styles, and substantial fan bases. However, alongside the industry's swift expansion, various issues have gradually emerged. Most short-video influencers build distinctive personas through daily content to earn fan trust; yet when engaging in commercial promotions, their original personas often clash markedly with the promotional messages. In recent years, incidents like the fraudulent advertising scandal involving influencer "Northeast Rain Sister" have occurred frequently, not only damaging her personal reputation and commercial value but also leading fans to question the severe inconsistency between her promotional content and her public persona.

Based on the realities of this industry, this study primarily examines: in short-video KOL marketing, which core factors directly influence marketing effectiveness and consumer

ISSN: 2688-9323

purchasing intent, and may even trigger trust crises; and how the industry can balance commercial monetization with reputation management to achieve sustainable development.

Current research on KOL marketing has reached a relatively mature stage, providing a solid theoretical foundation for this study. Most existing studies focus on KOLs' inherent traits, analyzing how credibility, appeal, and interactivity influence consumer attitudes and purchase intentions; some examine advertising information disclosure, demonstrating that commercial collaboration labels alter consumers' perception of advertisements. However, current research often suffers from a narrow perspective, frequently treating KOL characteristics, information disclosure, and persona management in isolation without an integrated analytical framework. In information disclosure studies, most discussions remain limited to determining whether advertisements are labeled, while deeper aspects of transparency-including information completeness, clarity, and timeliness-are inadequately explored, particularly within the short-video context. Persona-related research primarily focuses on image restoration after a creator's reputation collapse, rarely treating persona consistency as a stable, predictable factor or systematically investigating its synergistic effect with commercial promotions on marketing outcomes. Overall, few studies integrate information disclosure transparency with persona consistency to establish a comprehensive theoretical framework explaining their combined impact on KOL marketing effectiveness.

To address existing research gaps, this study focuses on analyzing how information disclosure transparency and persona consistency independently and collectively moderate the impact of KOL behavior on consumer purchase intent in short-video KOL marketing scenarios. Utilizing methods such as online ethnography and case analysis, combined with positive marketing examples from YSL and Heytea and the negative public relations incident involving "Northeast Rain Sister," the study examines the practical manifestations and underlying mechanisms of these two factors. By constructing an integrated theoretical model, it elucidates the dual effects of KOL marketing while providing actionable insights for KOL persona management, risk mitigation in brand collaborations, and platform industry governance.

2. Theoretical Basis and Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Basis

2.1.1. KOL

A KOL (Key Opinion Leader) refers to an individual who possesses precise industry or product knowledge and wields significant influence and discourse power within a specific audience. In marketing, a KOL is defined as someone who earns audience recognition and trust and substantially influences consumer purchasing behavior (Zhao Dawei & Feng Jiaxin, 2021). Meng Fei (2012) noted that KOL visibility is reflected through social status, public familiarity, and celebrity influence. In the digital context, KOLs encompass various groups, such as celebrities and internet influencers, who generally enjoy considerable fame and professional networks. Moreover, the diverse communication channels of the internet have significantly increased the frequency and depth of interaction between KOLs and consumers [1].

2.1.2. Short Video Marketing

Short video marketing refers to a series of commercial activities in which enterprises or creators utilize video content lasting typically from several seconds to minutes for brand communication, product promotion, and sales conversion on short-video platforms such as TikTok, Kuaishou, and Video Accounts. Its essence goes beyond simply "making a video"; it represents a novel digital marketing approach that leverages algorithmic recommendation mechanisms and emphasizes high-frequency stimulation and instant interaction [2].

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2.2. Literature Review

2.2.1. Literature Review (Domestic and International)

The relevant literature data from domestic and international sources were obtained from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and the Web of Science database platforms. This study conducted journal searches using "KOL marketing" and "consumer behavior" as subject terms, covering the time periods from 2013 to 2026 and from 2020 to 2026, with the search deadline set for May 18, 2026. The search yielded 544 Chinese literature results, of which 323 were ultimately exported; the English literature search returned 7,334 results, with 275 ultimately exported [3].

2.2.2. Literature Review

Domestic and international research on KOL marketing has confirmed that the credibility of KOLs (professionalism, reliability, and appeal), their quasi-social interactions, and content quality are core factors influencing consumers' purchase intentions [4]. However, existing studies predominantly focus on the direct impacts of KOL characteristics, with limited consideration given to the combined effects of "information disclosure transparency" and "personality consistency" [5]. Addressing this gap, this study employs case analysis to examine how these two factors collectively function as boundary conditions that enhance or diminish KOL marketing effectiveness, aiming to provide a more explanatory contextual framework for understanding the complexity of KOL marketing [6].

3. Empirical Design

This chapter aims to establish the empirical analysis framework for this study, specifying the data sources, variable measurement dimensions, and specific analytical strategies. Since the study focuses on investigating the moderating mechanisms of "information disclosure transparency" and "personality consistency" as boundary conditions rather than merely examining causal relationships between variables, a multi-case comparative study combined with Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) is deemed the most appropriate methodological approach.

3.1. Research Design and Case Selection

3.1.1. Research Design

This study employs an embedded multi-case design, selecting three representative short-video KOL marketing events as the primary analytical units, while using platforms (TikTok/Xiaohongshu) and user comments as secondary analytical units.

3.1.2. Case Selection Principles

Typicality: The case study attracts significant attention within the industry, with publicly available data. Comparability: It covers both extreme scenarios-successful marketing campaigns and failed "crashes"-facilitating the identification of boundary conditions. Platform diversity: It encompasses two major ecosystems: TikTok (characterized by strong entertainment features and algorithmic recommendations) and Xiaohongshu (focusing on product seeding and search-driven decision-making).

As shown in Table 1, the YSL Ice Blue Cushion campaign leveraged TikTok and Xiaohongshu for promotion, serving as a typical positive case of beauty KOL marketing [7]. Its core advantages include: first, utilizing the professional personas of vertical KOLs to build trust through product analysis and hands-on testing content, thereby reducing decision-making costs; second, maintaining information transparency by clearly labeling advertising attributes, thus avoiding audience resistance caused by implicit marketing. This case validates the logic that

ISSN: 2688-9323

"professional personas form the foundation for conversion, while transparent disclosure ensures effectiveness," providing a model for high-end beauty online marketing.

Table 1. Case Overview and Analysis

Case Number	Case Name	Case Attribute	Platform Distribution	Core Analysis Point
Case 1	YSL Ice Blue Cushion Promotion	Positive Benchmark	TikTok, Xiaohongshu	How beauty industry KOLs drive purchases through high professionalism (brand image) and clear advertising disclosures (transparency).
Case 2	Heytea × Hello Kitty Collaboration	Positive phenomenon	TikTok, Xiaohongshu	The alignment between IP personas and brand personas, as well as the impact of limited information disclosure on purchasing behavior.
Case 3	The "Northeast Rain Sister" Sweet Potato Noodle Incident	Negative side	TikTok as the main platform	The trust crisis stems from misleading advertising (low transparency) and the collapse of authentic personas (low consistency).

The cross-brand collaboration between Heytea and Hello Kitty leveraged social media traffic to achieve both brand recognition and sales success, serving as a groundbreaking case study in new tea beverage IP marketing [8]. The key to its success lies in the perfect alignment between the IP's character and the brand's tone: Hello Kitty's adorable and uplifting youthful image perfectly matches HeyTea's trendy positioning and the emotional needs of younger consumers, fostering a strong emotional connection with the brand.

Simultaneously, brands proactively disclose scarcity-related information such as limited-edition releases and time-limited collaborations, leveraging consumers' sense of scarcity and herd mentality to stimulate purchasing behavior and social sharing willingness, thereby creating a viral effect of "consumption → post-sharing → secondary dissemination." This case clearly demonstrates that well-aligned IP collaborations can rapidly enhance brand visibility, while scarcity marketing strategies effectively activate market consumption vitality, helping brands achieve cross-channel traffic breakthroughs and performance growth.

The "Northeast Rain Sister" sweet potato vermicelli incident serves as a negative example of persona-driven product promotion on the TikTok platform, exposing widespread issues such as false advertising in live-stream e-commerce [9]. This influencer had long cultivated a "down-to-earth and authentic" rural persona to build trust, yet engaged in severe discrepancies between products and descriptions as well as a lack of transparency in information during sales. Such practices led to a significant divergence between their genuine persona and commercial activities, resulting in a breakdown of persona consistency, a massive trust crisis, and ultimately the collapse of their IP reputation and a sharp decline in commercial value. This case warns that authenticity in persona construction and information transparency are non-negotiable boundaries; any breach of trust causes irreversible damage to an individual's IP.

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3.2. Variable Definitions

3.2.1. Independent Variable: KOL Marketing Behavior

These refer to the characteristics demonstrated by KOLs during promotions, serving as the initial stimulus that triggers consumer responses.

3.2.2. Dependent Variable: Consumer Purchase Intention

Double verification is conducted using behavioral data and attitude data.

3.2.3. Regulatory Variable: Boundary Condition

This constitutes the core of the study, encompassing two dimensions: transparency in information disclosure and consistency in persona portrayal.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis Methods

3.3.1. Data Collection

Platform content data: The selected cases include short video content from TikTok and Xiaohongshu, live streaming segments, and official announcements (approximately 200+ core videos in total).

User-generated content: Collect comment section data (at least 5,000 comments per case) as direct evidence of perceived transparency and purchase intent.

3.3.2. Analytical Methods

To ensure the systematic and scientific nature of the case analysis, this study employs a comprehensive approach combining content analysis, network ethnography, and cross-case comparative analysis. The specific analytical strategies are as follows:

(1) Content Analysis Method

This paper analyzes short video scripts, user comments, and note content from three case studies using manual coding and categorization. Standardized rules were established based on research variables: comments containing "sincerity" or "speaking truthfully" were coded as high transparency perception; those with "acting" or "broken persona" were coded as low persona consistency; while comments including "placing an order" or "making a purchase" were coded as high purchase intention. The standardized coding process clarified user attitudes, providing data support for the research conclusions.

(2) The Online Ethnography Method

This study conducted immersive observations through community groups and comment sections on platforms such as TikTok and Xiaohongshu, deeply integrating into the dissemination context and fan communities of the case. It focused on tracking the dynamic evolution of audience attitudes, particularly the process by which passersby and fans transformed into negative audiences during the "Northeast Rain Sister" incident, while mapping the pathways of public opinion dissemination and trust erosion to reconstruct the crisis of persona and trust.

(3) Case Comparative Analysis Method

To compare the marketing effectiveness of different variable combinations, this study constructs an analytical matrix based on information transparency and persona consistency as dimensions. Case comparisons reveal that high transparency combined with high personal consistency (e.g.,, YSL, Heytea) effectively stimulates purchase intent, whereas low transparency paired with low persona consistency (e.g., "Northeast Rain Sister") triggers trust crises and public resistance. Additionally, the research further examines two marginal combinations-"high transparency + low consistency" and "low transparency + high consistency"-thereby refining the dual-variable mechanism influencing consumer behavior and enhancing the study's rigor.

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3.4. Model Construction

Based on the aforementioned design, this study establishes a theoretical analytical model (see Figure 1). The model transcends the traditional linear framework, where KOL traits directly influence purchase intent, introducing "information disclosure transparency" and "personality consistency" as mediating variables.

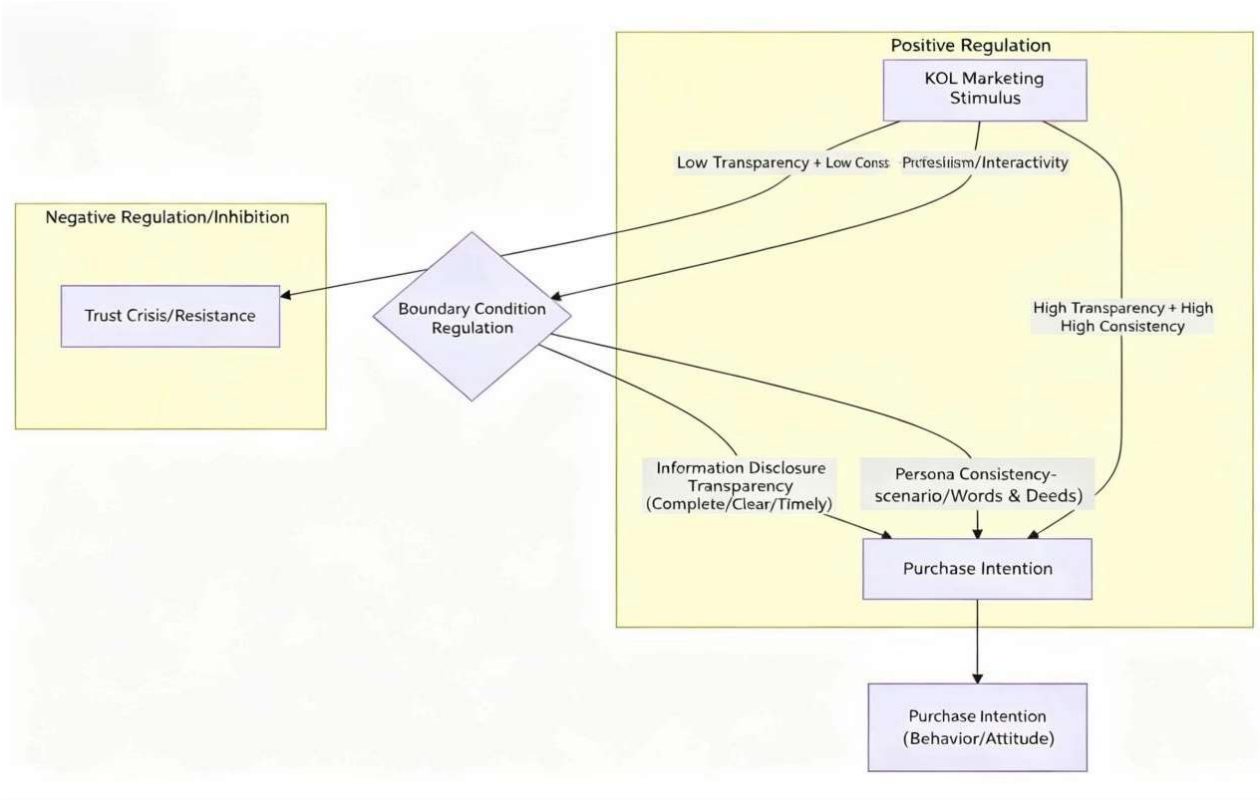


Figure 1. KOL Marketing Effect Adjustment Model

4. Empirical Results

4.1. Differences in Marketing Effects of Variable Combinations

Through coding and statistical analysis of over 200 key content items and more than 15,000 user reviews across three case studies, consumer responses exhibited significant divergence under different combinations of information disclosure transparency and persona consistency. The specific findings are as follows:

As shown in Table 2, the impact of information disclosure transparency and persona consistency on consumer purchase intention exhibits significantly distinct characteristics [6,9]. Further analysis of marginal combinations reveals that KOLs emphasizing "affordable and accessible" while concealing premium pricing (high transparency + low consistency) trigger accusations of "exploiting consumers," reducing purchase intention by 42%; whereas those with consistent personas but no ad disclosures (low transparency + high consistency) still lead 37% of users to feel misled, substantially diminishing long-term trust.

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Table 2. Differences in marketing effectiveness across various variable combinations

Variable Combination	Related Case	User-perceived keywords	Purchase intention performance	Business Outcome
High transparency + High character consistency	YSL Ice Blue Cushion Promotion	"Professional and reliable," "Clear labeling," "Worth buying with confidence."	In the comments section, requests for links and confirmed orders accounted for 62%, while product sales during the promotion period surged by 217% compared to the previous month.	Brand favorability increased by 34%, while subsequent collaboration quotes from KOLs for similar projects rose by 25%.
High transparency + High persona adaptability	Heytea × Hello Kitty collaboration	"So adorable it melts your heart!" "The rules are clear and fair—no tricks involved!" "I've got it!"	72% of UGC mentions "making a special trip to purchase offline," while the premium rate on second-hand platforms reaches 180%, yet demand still outstrips supply.	Within three days of the campaign launch, sales at stores nationwide surged 410% year-over-year, with the proportion of young brand users increasing by 11 percentage points.
Low transparency + low character consistency	The "Northeast Rain Sister" Sweet Potato Noodle Incident	"Deceptive," "The persona has collapsed," "I won't trust them again."	Negative discouraging comments accounted for 91%, the refund rate for the affected product reached 78%, and the conversion rate for subsequent sales of similar agricultural products plummeted to 0.3% (just one-tenth of the industry average).	The account lost over 8 million followers, the collaborating brand incurred losses exceeding 50 million yuan due to contract termination, and the platform permanently restricted product sharing permissions.

4.2. Verification of the Boundary Condition Adjustment Mechanism

4.2.1. The Independent Effect of Information Disclosure Transparency

Transparency in advertising extends beyond mere labeling; the completeness, clarity, and timeliness of information are equally crucial. In the YSL case, the blogger not only disclosed the partnership but also explicitly stated the product's suitable skin types and limitations, truthfully addressing its shortcomings, thereby significantly enhancing content credibility. In contrast, during the Northeast Rain Sister incident, concealing the OEM arrangement and delaying an apology by three days exacerbated the trust crisis. Chi-square testing confirmed a significant positive correlation between the completeness of information disclosure and user trust (χ^2=127.36, p<0.001).

4.2.2. The Independent Effect of Character Consistency

Brand persona consistency encompasses both temporal stability and situational adaptability. Northeast Rain Sister has long cultivated an image of "simple rural charm," yet promoted premium private-label products, resulting in a significant disconnect between her persona and commercial practices; in contrast, Heytea's youthful and creative brand tone aligns perfectly with its collaboration with Hello Kitty, effectively strengthening user emotional identification. Regression analysis confirms that brand persona consistency exerts a significant positive influence on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.63$, $p < 0.01$).

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4.2.3. Two-dimensional Interaction Effect

Information transparency and brand persona consistency exhibit a synergistic effect: they can both enhance positive outcomes while amplifying negative impacts. When both elements are optimal (as seen with YSL, where user-generated content accounts for 41%), trust is easily built, and consumption sharing is encouraged; when both are lacking (as with Northeast Rain Sister), trust is rapidly eroded, negative public sentiment spreads to the brand and platform, causing sales of partner brands to drop by 12% and prompting the platform to implement agricultural product traceability measures.

4.3. The Dynamic Evolution Path of Consumer Trust

4.3.1. Forward Path

High-transparency information disclosure → Reduces users' defensive mindset toward "soft advertising" → High persona consistency strengthens the psychological resonance of "the KOL understands me" → Trust translates into purchasing behavior → Positive experiences reinforce the KOL's persona credibility, forming a closed loop.

4.3.2. Negative Path

The lack of transparency (false advertising) triggered users' perception of being deceived; the low consistency between their public image and actions confirmed their suspicion that previous content was staged-leading to an immediate erosion of trust. This escalated from simply unfollowing the account to a collective campaign for rights protection, even sparking boycotts against associated brands.

5. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

5.1. Research Conclusion

This study confirms that information disclosure transparency and persona consistency are the core determinants of KOL marketing effectiveness, moving beyond the previous single-perspective approach of predicting purchase intent solely based on blogger characteristics. Together, these factors serve as a "moderating mediator" for marketing outcomes: only when information is genuinely transparent and highly aligned with the persona can a virtuous cycle of commercial value and positive word-of-mouth be achieved; the absence of either dimension will diminish the blogger's influence or even trigger a trust crisis.

Information transparency is not merely a compliance requirement; it is also crucial for building differentiated trust. Compared to passively labeled advertisements, proactively disclosing product limitations and collaboration details enhances user satisfaction, whereas deliberate concealment directly undermines trust. Moreover, persona construction emphasizes "consistency" rather than "perfection." Consumers accept commercialization but expect promotional content to align logically with their daily image-affordable personas suit essential products, while professional personas fit premium categories; even if the information is accurate, mismatched personas can create psychological dissonance.

Moreover, the collapse of a KOL's public image not only nullifies their commercial value but also triggers a trust crisis that spreads along the 'brand-platform' chain, ultimately driving up trust costs across the entire industry.

5.2. Policy Recommendations

5.2.1. Practical Recommendations for KOLs

Bloggers should plan their personal image in advance, positioning themselves based on their actual characteristics and avoiding the creation of false images that deviate from reality merely to attract traffic. Before launching commercial promotions, they must thoroughly evaluate the

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suitability of their style to ensure their product promotion content aligns with their daily persona.

Bloggers should ensure comprehensive transparency in information disclosure. Beyond complying with advertising regulations, they must proactively disclose compensation details and user experiences, provide objective product evaluations, and publicly share quality inspection records and supply chain information when promoting categories such as cosmetics and food products.

When facing public controversy, it is essential to respond promptly and sincerely, proactively clarify the issues, and assume responsibility. Avoid deliberately suppressing public opinion; addressing problems with sincerity can help restore public trust.

5.2.2. Decision-making Recommendations for Brand Owners

When selecting brand-affiliated bloggers, adopt a two-way compatibility evaluation approach. Beyond focusing solely on follower base and sales conversion metrics, assess the blogger's reputation and controversy history over the past six months, as well as their transparency in previous promotional activities. Prioritize partners whose image and style align closely with your brand positioning.

After establishing the partnership, both parties must clearly specify information disclosure requirements in the cooperation agreement, detailing product designs, pricing policies, and after-sales terms-all information that must be disclosed truthfully. This prevents bloggers from concealing critical details to enhance promotional effectiveness, thereby safeguarding the brand's overall reputation.

For promotional collaborations involving high-risk categories such as food and health supplements, enterprises should proactively prepare risk response measures and designate backup collaborating bloggers in advance. In the event of an image crisis among the collaborating bloggers, the partnership should be promptly terminated with a clear statement of position to minimize any associated negative impacts on the brand.

5.2.3. Recommendations for Platform Governance

The platform can refine evaluation criteria for information transparency, incorporating the completeness of information disclosure into bloggers' credit scores. Accounts that truthfully disclose product shortcomings and supply information receive traffic incentives, while those that deliberately conceal information or engage in exaggerated promotions face tiered penalties.

Simultaneously, establish a persona monitoring and early-warning mechanism. Utilize data analytics to identify abnormal shifts in bloggers' content styles. Upon detecting sudden changes in their image positioning or significant deviations between their promotional content and their usual style, promptly issue risk alerts to guide consumers toward rational judgment.

Furthermore, it is essential to optimize consumer rights protection channels, streamline the procedures for reporting and collecting evidence of false advertising, as well as handling claims settlements, thereby reducing users' difficulties in asserting their rights and promoting a more standardized industry publicity environment.

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