

# Cognitive Guidance and Purchase Conversion: The Path and Optimization of “Grass-Planting” Marketing on RedNote

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**Abstract.** "Grass-planting" marketing is an emerging content strategy in the era of new media. Against the backdrop where brand competition has expanded to consumers' choices, many new media practitioners effectively utilize the "grass-planting" model relying on the unique content ecology of online platforms such as RedNote. Many bloggers have established positive emotional connections with consumers by providing practical suggestions, shopping guides and other measures, which has effectively enhanced brand awareness and marketing effectiveness. This study considers the core mechanism of "Grass-planting" marketing of new media and the balance between the authenticity of product content and promotion needs as core issues. Aiming to combine the relevant theories of user-generated content (UGC), this study uses the case analysis method to analyse typical "grass-planting cases" on the RedNote platform. Through this, it explores the complex interactions among key opinion leaders (KOLs), key opinion consumers (KOCs) and ordinary consumers in the new media environment, clarifies the current situation and principles of "Grass-planting" marketing, and provides further strategic guidance on "Grass-planting" marketing for merchants and self-media.

**Keywords:** "Grass-planting" marketing; user-generated content; key opinion leaders; RedNote..

## 1. Introduction

Amid the rise of new media, social platforms increasingly shape consumer purchasing decisions, with traditional advertising being supplanted by interactive "Grass-planting" marketing. Platforms like RedNote exemplify this shift, where users act as dual consumer-creators, generating user-generated content (UGC) that bridges brands and audiences through trust-based, peer-driven recommendations. This software disrupts unidirectional communication, enabling brands to achieve purchase conversion via user engagement. However, challenges persist, including precise audience targeting, content credibility enhancement, and consumer resistance to overt commercialization. While existing research emphasizes key opinion leaders (KOLs) and word-of-mouth effects, systematic studies on grass-planting mechanisms, strategic evolution, and efficacy in China's unique digital ecosystem remain scarce. This study addresses these gaps by analyzing the core mechanisms of grass-planting marketing and proposing frameworks to balance content authenticity with commercial imperatives.

Theoretically, this study advances understanding of UGC-driven brand-consumer dynamics in new media contexts. Practically, it offers actionable strategies for optimizing marketing effectiveness while prioritizing ethical transparency, thereby aiding brands in sustaining long-term trust and competitive advantage.

## 2. Literature Review

Amid the rapid growth of social media and e-commerce, "Grass-planting" marketing has emerged as a pivotal strategy for influencing consumer decisions through user-generated content (UGC), key opinion leaders (KOLs), and social interactions. However, challenges persist in maintaining user trust.

Existing scholarship explores its mechanisms through psychological, behavioural, and platform-based lenses.

In terms of psychological drivers, consumers exhibit a preference for authentic, peer-generated product experiences within their social groups. Studies demonstrate that positive group emotions foster UGC creation, driving a virtuous cycle of engagement [1]. Other researchers further link susceptibility to Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)-measured via the DFS scale—to heightened social media usage, low self-esteem, and anxiety, rendering consumers more receptive to peer recommendations [2].

In terms of behavioural patterns, consumers increasingly rely on shared opinions for decision-making in liberalized online communities. Using online customer decision-making style (eCDMS) model, researchers identify nine factors, including self-efficacy and customer experience, as key determinants [3]. Platform-specific behaviours, such as RedNote users' strategic hashtag adoption (e.g., "#InfantFood"), exemplify user agency in algorithmic ecosystems [4]. Concurrently, there are studies argue that shared economy models democratize luxury consumption through leasing or collective ownership, mitigating class-based judgment [5].

In terms of platform mechanisms, trust in platform ecosystems underpins UGC dissemination. Multiple researchers highlight viral marketing dynamics and the positive impact of transparent sponsorship disclosures on engagement [6,7]. However, there are also several studies that reveal a disconnect between consumers stated environmental/moral values and actual behaviours, underscoring weak ethical commitments [8].

Despite these insights, existing research predominantly focuses on Western contexts, neglecting China's unique socio-cultural and platform ecosystems. Systematic analyses of the tension between content authenticity and commercial promotion in grass-planting marketing remain scarce, as does a cohesive framework for UGC mechanisms. Future studies should prioritize localized investigations of Chinese social media and consumer behaviour to address these gaps.

### 3. Case Study

#### 3.1. Grass-planting and Virtuous Cycle of Florasis Cosmetics

Regarding the core mechanism of "Grass-planting" marketing in the era of new media, this study examines the "Grass-planting" marketing mechanism through UGC-based campaigns of "Florasis" on RedNote. The platform's evolution since 2013 established critical infrastructure: its 2017 product link feature enabled direct purchases from "grass-planted" content, while the 2022 in-app store function further facilitated conversions. Florasis leveraged these technical features through dual strategies targeting consumers and content creators [9].

From the consumer perspective, Florasis implemented an "interactive marketing grass-planting" model combining "product experience officers" and "cultural communication officers." This participatory mechanism enabled users to co-create the brand's Oriental aesthetic identity, fostering cultural engagement that enhanced loyalty through process involvement. For content dissemination, Florasis collaborated with KOLs to generate 85 high-engagement posts (3.8% rate) containing implicit advertisements. Campaign metrics from September 2022 demonstrate effectiveness: 80,430 topic reads, 3.058 million CNY monthly ad expenditure yielding 14.95 million impressions, 1.073 million interactions, and 2.85 CPE [9]. The strategy particularly targeted cosmetics users and Chinese style enthusiasts through cultural narratives.

In general, this strategic platform partnership focused on emphasizing product quality and Chinese aesthetics, effectively targeting core demographics including cosmetics users and cultural enthusiasts. The integrated UGC strategy successfully amplified brand visibility while demonstrating Florasis' innovative adaptation of "Grass-planting" marketing within the new media ecosystem [9].

### **3.2. Exaggerated Propaganda of "Internet Celebrity Fake Scenic Spots" on RedNote and the Decline of Public Sentiment**

Although the "Grass-planting" marketing model has great profit potential, if it is not used properly, it may instead increase the risk of a decline in public sentiment. For example, there is a scandal of "Internet celebrity fake scenic spots" on RedNote.

As a lifestyle search application, "travel guides" is one of the important sections of RedNote. In the era of new media, consumers who travel and sightsee can freely express their experiences of the quality of scenic spots. This attracts other consumers to visit the scenic spots. When the attention accumulates to a certain extent, the scenic spots may become "Internet celebrity scenic spots" and obtain huge benefits.

However, in recent years, many scandals of false marketing of scenic spots, commonly known as "Internet celebrity fake scenic spots", have been exposed in the travel section of RedNote. Examples such as the "filtered scenic spot" - the Blue Cottage in Qingshui Bay, Sanya, the Internet celebrity scenic spot "Mirror of the Sky", and the Internet celebrity tent camp in Inner Mongolia are all typical cases criticized for improper "grass-planting". Some Internet celebrities and local cultural and tourism departments have used the "Grass-planting" marketing model to deliberately exaggerate and stage photos of mediocre scenic spots, "grass-planting" many travel enthusiasts, resulting in a significant increase in local tourism revenue for a while. However, after being exposed by a large number of consumers that the actual situation does not match the publicity, the scenic spots suffered a backlash from traffic and were strongly criticized.

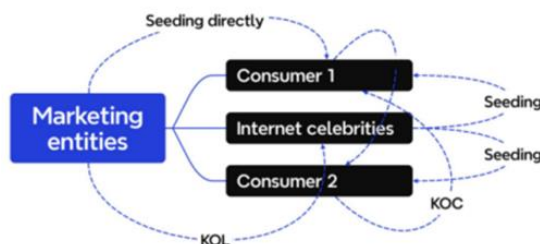
In summary, merchants should adhere to honest operations and not conduct exaggerated propaganda that does not conform to the facts. Otherwise, it will have an adverse impact on the public opinion conditions and long-term development of the merchants' brands.

## **4. Path Analysis**

### **4.1. Grass-planting and Virtuous Cycle of Florasis Cosmetics**

The core mechanism of "Grass-planting" marketing relies on the UGC to produce stealth advertisements. The "Grass-planting" marketing of the "Florasis" brand on the RedNote platform fully utilizes the unique ecosystem of this online community, which is characterized by the high correlation between social value and information retrieval [10]. From inviting consumers for product experiences to implementing "Cultural Communication Officers," these measures promote brand products through consumer experiences without triggering consumer resistance, effectively enhancing audience stickiness and winning more exposure and potential audiences. This study argues that transforming users into "Cultural Communication Officers" significantly narrows the distance between consumers and brands. From the perspective of consumers, leveraging social trust mechanisms, enhances brand awareness and facilitates the conversion of potential consumers.

This study summarizes the complex interactions in information dissemination among marketing entities, KOLs, and KOCs. Marketing entities (see Figure 1), which can be marketing companies or brands, and content creators, who are the "leaders" promoted by KOLs on RedNote (i.e., influencers), as well as consumers who are potential customers of the product and ordinary RedNote users, have the following relationships: marketing entities (merchants) can hire content creators to act as KOLs for promotional activities or directly engage in "Grass-planting" marketing toward consumers. Meanwhile, content creators, leveraging their influence, can directly promote products to consumers, and there exists a phenomenon of mutual "Grass-planting" marketing among consumers, where they share their product experiences and promote each other. The study by R. Ayswarya et al. revealed through empirical research that consumers' perceptions of social media marketing largely stem from people they are familiar with or have made purchases from [11].



**Fig. 1** Communication strategy of "Grass-planting" marketing combined with UGC

#### 4.2. Balancing Content Authenticity and Commercial Promotion Needs

The powerful potential of "Grass-planting" marketing can easily strengthen market disorders such as false advertising. Behind the "internet celebrity fake scenic spots," some unscrupulous merchants have quickly created their "internet celebrity check-in scenic spot" image characteristics by leveraging RedNote's recommendation function. These merchants make full use of RedNote's powerful information retrieval function to quickly and accurately "plant grass" among the target audience of their brand. The authenticity of the information such as "recommendations," "shares," and "strategies" received by consumers is difficult to discern. The deliberate exaggeration of some merchants' marketing behaviors indicates that their "Grass-planting" marketing actions have broken the balance between commercial promotion needs and content authenticity, disrupted market order, occupied topic traffic, and deceived consumers. From the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) perspective, the packaging of peripheral conditions of fake attractions can induce consumers to make quick consumption decisions mainly through peripheral paths. However, such actions ignore the content ecosystem and public sentiment effects, as well as the importance of "product" quality itself in the 4P theory. They may also induce other merchants to compete in imitation, leading to a vicious market cycle where "bad money drives out good money."

Marketing is a major proposition in commercial promotion. Exaggerated marketing and grass-planting have the effect of rapidly achieving ideal commercial promotion results and bringing considerable business revenue. However, they also violate public orders and good customs and are not accepted by the market. In the new media era, where information transmission is highly efficient, it is very likely to suffer backlash from traffic and fail to achieve marketing goals.

### 5. Strategic Recommendations

#### 5.1. Strategic Product Selection and Synergistic KOL-KOC Integration

Firstly, merchants must prioritize content authenticity as the cornerstone of marketing practices and enhance practitioners' social responsibility and critically assess whether their products inherently align with the grass-planting model. Brands seeking product promotion should conduct rigorous evaluations of product attributes, target market demands, and competitive dynamics. Concurrently, precise audience targeting should guide the strategic integration of "Key Opinion Consumers (KOCs)" and "Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs)". KOCs resonate with consumers through genuine purchasing experiences and relatable personas, while KOLs amplify product visibility through their influence. A synergistic collaboration can achieve disproportionate returns.

#### 5.2. Strengthen Risk Management in KOL Partnerships

Secondly, merchants must prioritize "risk mitigation" in KOL collaborations. Beyond evaluating KOLs' reach and sales performance, brands should scrutinize their public image, reputation, and historical conduct. To minimize risks, commission structures should be revised to tie compensation directly to verified sales outcomes. This approach incentivizes KOLs to promote products responsibly while safeguarding brands from reputational or financial losses due to KOL misconduct.

### 5.3. Platform Accountability and Consumer Empowerment

Thirdly, platforms must enforce stringent oversight, penalizing non-compliant marketing practices. Violators, including internet celebrities engaged in fraudulent activities, should face severe consequences such as account suspensions or permanent bans. A robust "blacklist system" should be institutionalized. Simultaneously, platforms must enhance consumer protection mechanisms, ensuring timely compensation for aggrieved users. Consumers, for their part, should resist blind idolization of internet celebrity. By actively reporting deceptive practices or substandard products, consumers can hold brands accountable, indirectly incentivizing platforms to elevate curation standards and foster a healthier e-commerce ecosystem, which reveals the sustainable development of "Grass-planting" marketing requires coordinated efforts.

## 6. Conclusion

This study analyses "grass-planting" marketing on RedNote through case studies of Florasis' UGC-driven campaigns and fabricated scenic spot promotions. It reveals how synergistic KOL-KOC collaborations enhance brand-consumer interactions while underscoring the reputational risks of prioritizing commercialization over authenticity. Theoretically, it systematizes UGC-driven communication mechanisms, addressing gaps in literature. Practically, it proposes strategies to balance promotional goals with content integrity, emphasizing authenticity as a prerequisite.

However, this study has several limitations, including a narrow platform focus; future research should expand to Douyin and Weibo, integrate mathematical models to quantify long-term brand risks, and refine suitability criteria for grass-planting applications.

## Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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