Daxue Talks 9: Leverage Douyin to reach gen Z

My name is Fabian, I am the founder and co-director of UPLAB, a company where we help influencers become better at who they are and at the same time we do influencer marketing mainly specialized in Douyin, for China.

1. What is unique of KOLs on Douyin compared to other platforms?

Well, I think that Douyin KOLs are very unique and it’s partly because they are young and very creative. So, in terms of the content creation if you compare it with WeChat KOLs or Weibo KOLs, I feel like Douyin KOLs are using way more creativity and they’re investing a lot of time actually in their content creation, partly because it’s not tech-based, it’s not photo-based, it’s video-based. So, it’s really tough for people actually, to create a good piece of content in 10 or 15 seconds. So, let’s basically make a storyline which is interesting for a certain group of people and kind of convince them for something or to sell a product in 10 or 15 seconds. I think that is very impressive from these content creators, that they are able to do that and they can grow their channel, basically just on content based on a couple of seconds. I think other KOLs from other channels on WeChat or Weibo can learn way more from that, how to stay relevant if you just have a couple of seconds time, and at the same time companies can also learn a lot from that in terms of the content creation and how to stay relevant in just a couple of seconds.

1. Which KOLs are the most followed today on Douyin?

I cannot say exactly the names, like, there are plenty of very successful KOLs. I think that there is a kind of a big difference between popular KOLs who have already been popular on other platforms and later join Douyin, that could be KOLs popular on other channels or celebrities who started to join the platform, so, kind of naturally they became very popular in a very short time, and at the same time you have KOLs who started, let’s say, on Douyin since their launch in 2016 and actually just have been doing Douyin and not any other channel, and they have also been growing very fast. And, you see the biggest difference is that these celebrities just do more lifestyle so they are very popular there; and the people that have been doing Douyin from the start are more into, I would say beauty or gaming or something like that so they have a very niche specific audience build-up. I think that’s the biggest difference. But the followers are going, I think, from popular 5 million to 50million/60 million followers per channel. So, it really depends on category you’re in. You see, beauty and actually people who are really popular like famous actors or singers are popular on the platform.

1. Are there any foreign KOLs who are successful on Douyin? Who are they? Are their videos in English or Chinese?

Yes, there are some foreign KOLs popular on Douyin in China. Some came actually very early so they joined already a couple of years ago, some are just kind of joining. Most of these KOLs are English-speaking, a lot, but they actually add kind of subtitle in Chinese. Some of these KOLs are popular but just a little and they do everything in Chinese and actually sometimes become popular because they have a very strong local dialect from the region they have been living in and learning Chinese. So, that is one group, for the most part English-speaking with Chinese subtitles, or they do it together, or with their boyfriend or girlfriend for example, or with another Chinese business partner because they are doing, let’s say, English teaching or something like that so they will teach English over Douyin in very short videos, the way how you pronounce the words, etc. So, there are foreign KOLs popular through this kind of things.

1. How brands can leverage Douyin? Are KOLs the only way?

So, brands can leverage Douyin, I think, through couple different ways. I think the main thing we see, because we are doing quite a bit marketing for brands, is you should definitely step out of your comfort zone. Douyin is a whole new type of channel if you compare it with the common channels for brands which are WeChat, Weibo and now actually Xiaohongshu which I would say are more the comfortable channels: you can write a piece of text, add a couple of pictures you have with your company and keep doing that, sometimes doing a KOLs campaign.

Again, for Douyin it really asks about your creativity also as a brand, so how do you actually create relevant content for your business in 10 or 15 seconds in video form. That’s a very big challenge, like, even if you look at the West but also in China, there are not many companies which are succeeding in video content. I think, for brands to succeed is …do it out of a personal perspective, create content out of a personal name who is kind of an ambassador for your brand, and either that’s an employee of your company or that’s a KOL you are using as an ambassador for your brand, I think you can do it these different ways.

I think one company who does it very well is Alipay, they create very interesting content, if you have Douyin you should check it out. They kind of do it in a very Alibaba style but also in Douyin style where they make funny content around Jack Ma but at the same time their social media manager is also recording content how he is sneaking into Jack Ma’s office and stuff like that, and using the popular songs which are popular on Douyin at that time. So, they do very well and I think that is kind of out of their comfort zone and I think if a company as big as Alibaba is able to create that type of content, I think other companies should take that as an example and create similar content instead of trying to be too much in their brand guidelines. Because it is really tough to create relevant content for a young audience in 10 to 15 seconds if you want to create advertisement types of videos.

So, really down to earth content, easy understandable and more from a personal perspective; I think that’s how you can succeed on Douyin.