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Streamer Characteristics and Platform Interaction on Purchase Intention in Live E-Commerce: The Mediating Role of Trust

Luyao Ouyang Phanasarn Kohsuwan** Junshan Ma***

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Abstract

This study examines how streamer characteristics and platform interaction features influence consumer purchase intention, focusing on their broader implications for consumer quality of life (QoL) and digital satisfaction. Drawing on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework and Trust Theory, the research explores how the live-streaming environment serves as a socio-technical stimulus that shapes the consumer's internal state. Data were collected from 486 users with experience using platforms such as Douyin, Taobao Live, and Kuaishou. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to validate the hypothesized relationships.

The results demonstrate that streamer professionalism, trustworthiness, and interactivity, alongside platform-level factors, such as real-time interactivity, community atmosphere, and interface usability, significantly and positively affect purchase intention. Notably, consumer trust serves as a vital mediator, accounting for approximately 40%–43% of the total effect. From a QoL perspective, these findings suggest that high-quality live-streaming interactions mitigate perceived risk and uncertainty, providing consumers with emotional support and a sense of belonging to a community. By integrating streamer-level and platform-level factors into a unified framework, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in live-streaming commerce.

Recommendation: This study contributes to understanding how digital commerce can be optimized not only for transactional success but also to enhance users' psychological well-being and social connectivity in the digital age.

Keywords: consumer trust / live streaming e-commerce / platform interactivity / purchase intention/streamer traits

* Master of Business Administration (MBA), Panyapiwat Institute of Management

** Panyapiwat Institute of Management

Corresponding author: Luyao Ouyang, E-mail: 1060782985@qq.com

Introduction

Driven by mobile internet and smart devices, China's e-commerce has evolved from text to short video and, recently, to real-time live streaming, which has become a major driver of digital consumption. According to CNNIC (2023), China's online shopping users reached 842 million (78.6% of internet users), of whom 469 million (55.7%) engaged in live-streaming e-commerce, a market reaching 2.1 trillion yuan in 2022, up 16.8% year on year.

The pandemic-era stay-at-home economy accelerated this trend: over 20 million live-streaming sessions in 2020 contributed 1.2 trillion yuan in annual sales (Ministry of Commerce Research Institute, 2022). Traditional retailers, brands, manufacturers, and agricultural producers adopted live streaming as a mainstream channel, forming a landscape of "universal live streaming" that reshaped seller-consumer relationships.

Unlike traditional e-commerce's "search–compare–purchase" model, live streaming integrates content, social interaction, and purchase into a single process, shifting behavior from rational evaluation to emotion-driven, socially influenced decisions (Huang and Zhang, 2021; Sun et al., 2019). Streamers act as opinion leaders whose professionalism, credibility, and interaction ability shape consumer trust and purchase decisions (Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut, 2020), while platforms shape the environment through real-time interactivity, community atmosphere, and interface usability, influencing social presence and reducing uncertainty.

Although prior studies have examined streamer characteristics and platform features separately, integrated research on how they jointly influence consumer trust and purchase intention remains limited. Moreover, the psychological mechanism underlying these relationships particularly the mediating role of consumer trust requires further empirical verification. Therefore, this study aims to construct a comprehensive analytical framework integrating streamer characteristics and platform interaction features to examine how they influence consumer trust and, consequently, purchase intention in live-streaming e-commerce environments.

Research Questions

Drawing on the above background, this study addresses the following core questions:

1. How do different dimensions of streamer characteristics (professionalism, credibility, and interaction ability) influence consumer trust and purchase intentions?

2. How do platform interaction features (real-time interactivity, community atmosphere, and interface usability) affect consumer trust and purchase intentions?

3. Does consumer trust mediate the relationship between streamer characteristics, platform interaction features, and purchase intention?

These questions aim to reveal the psychological mechanisms through which external stimuli in live-streaming environments influence consumer decision-making. By addressing these questions, this study seeks to provide both theoretical insights and practical guidance to stakeholders in the live-streaming e-commerce ecosystem.

Objectives

To address the research questions, this study proposes the following objectives:

1. To examine the effects of streamer characteristics on consumer trust and purchase intentions.

2. To empirically test how platform interaction features contribute to trust building and purchasing decisions.

3. To test the mediating role of consumer trust in the relationships between streamer characteristics, platform interaction features, and purchase intentions.

4. To provide empirical evidence and theoretical insights for optimizing streamer management, platform design, and brand marketing strategies in live-streaming commerce.

Literature Review

1. Theoretical Foundation

Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory. Proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), S-O-R theory explains how environmental stimuli (S) influence behavioral responses (R) by shaping individuals' internal states (O). Eroglu et al. (2001) applied it to online shopping, treating website atmospheric cues as stimuli affecting consumers' cognitive and emotional states and, ultimately, shopping behavior. In this study, streamer characteristics and platform interaction features serve as stimuli (S), consumer trust as the internal state (O), and purchase intention as the response (R).

Trust Theory. Mayer et al. (1995) defined trust as a party's willingness to be vulnerable to another's actions based on positive expectations. McKnight et al. (2002) divided e-commerce trust into institutional trust (in platforms) and interpersonal trust (in streamers), a useful basis for live-streaming contexts. Where consumers cannot directly examine products and decide quickly, trust is especially crucial in reducing perceived risk and uncertainty.

Opinion Leader Theory. Opinion leader theory derives from Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1955)

"two-step flow" model, in which information passes from opinion leaders to wider audiences. In live streaming, streamers act as online opinion leaders. Ohanian's (1990) three-dimensional model of opinion leader influence (expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) provides a theoretical framework for understanding the composition and mechanisms of influence of streamer characteristics.

Social Presence Theory. Social presence theory (Short et al., 1976) concerns the degree to which a medium conveys others' presence and social, emotional, and psychological cues. Integrating real-time video, voice, and social elements, live streaming has high social presence, letting consumers watch demonstrations and interact in a manner akin to face-to-face shopping. Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020) found that social presence—enhanced by transparency and interactivity—is key to building consumer trust.

2. Streamer Characteristics Research

Streamer characteristics are the personal traits and abilities streamers demonstrate during live streams, divided into three dimensions (Ohanian, 1990; Lou & Yuan, 2019): professionalism (mastery of product knowledge and the ability to explain functions, performance, materials, and usage and answer questions accurately), credibility (honesty, reliability, and sincerity reflected in authentic product descriptions and genuine interaction), and interaction ability (communicating effectively, responding promptly, and enlivening the atmosphere).

Lou and Yuan (2019) showed that influencers' professional knowledge, content value, and credibility positively affect brand attitudes and purchase intention; Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found authenticity and interactivity important to fans' intentions; Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020) confirmed professionalism, credibility, and interaction skills as key to trust; and Liu and Chen (2022) found streamer authenticity raises intention, partially mediated by consumer trust.

3. Platform Interaction Features Research

Platform interaction features are functions designed to promote interaction among users, platforms, and streamers, divided into three dimensions (Chen & Lin, 2018): real-time interactivity (instant communication and feedback via bullet comments, gift tipping, voice connections, and voting), community atmosphere (a sense of belonging and group interaction through emotional connection, collective participation, shared topics, and norms), and interface usability (the simplicity, clarity, and convenience of the interface).

Sun et al. (2019) found real-time interaction features raise trust by enhancing information richness and social interactivity; Hilvert-Bruce et al. (2018) found community belonging motivates participation and affects purchase; Rose et al. (2012) linked interactivity, personalization, and

information quality to emotional experience and intention; and Flavián et al. (2006) confirmed usability's positive effect on satisfaction and trust.

4. Consumer Trust and Purchase Intention

Trust strongly influences purchase decisions under high information asymmetry and perceived risk (Kim et al., 2008). Gefen et al. (2003) showed that trust in e-commerce sites significantly affects purchase intention, and Kim et al. (2008) confirmed that trust promotes intention by reducing perceived risk. In live streaming, Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020) and Lu et al. (2016) found that trust directly raises purchase intention. When consumers trust streamers' information and the platform's transaction guarantees, they are more likely to form purchase intentions.

5. Research Gaps

Several gaps remain. First, research is fragmented, examining streamer or platform factors separately rather than within one integrated framework. Second, explanations of how these effects operate through consumer trust remain insufficient. Third, variable operationalization lacks refined multi-dimensional measurement. This study addresses these gaps with an integrated framework examining streamer characteristics and platform interaction features jointly, with consumer trust as the mediating mechanism.

Research Framework

Based on S-O-R theory and trust theory, this study constructs an integrated research framework (Figure 1). Streamer characteristics and platform interaction features serve as external stimuli (S), consumer trust as the mediating internal psychological state (O), and purchase intention as the behavioral response (R).

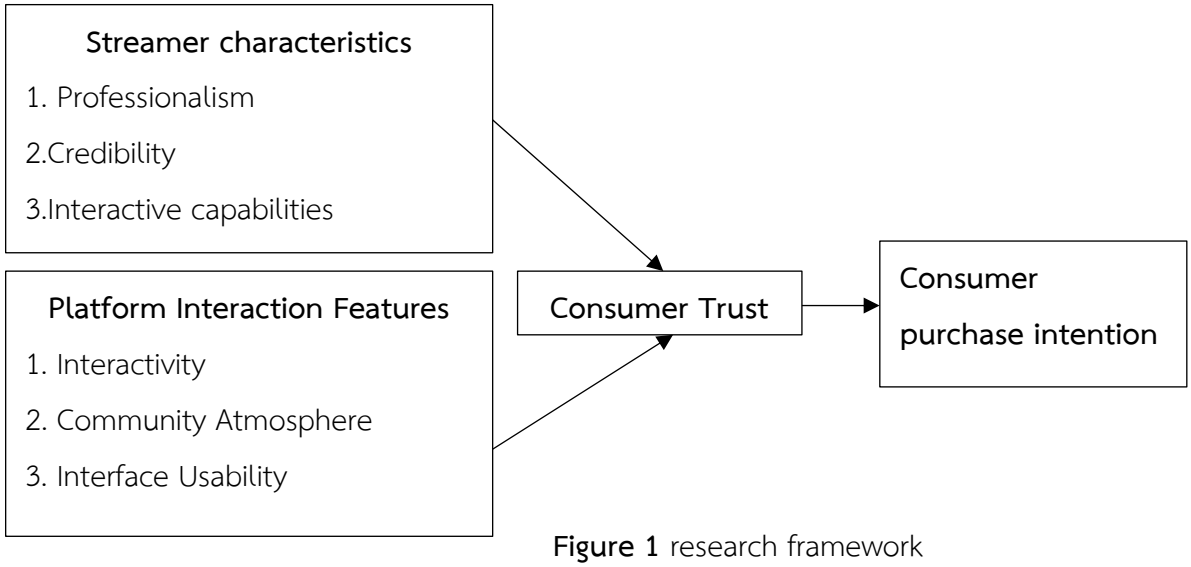


Figure 1 research framework

Materials and methods

1. Population and Sample

The study targets consumers aged 18–60 who have made at least one live-streaming purchase on platforms such as Douyin, Taobao Live, or Kuaishou within the past 12 months. This range represents the primary user demographic with the capability and purchasing power for live-streaming shopping, and the recency requirement ensures perceptions reflect current platform conditions.

A non-probability approach combining convenience and quota sampling was used, targeting 500 respondents per Hair et al.'s (2010) 10:1 ratio for SEM. Quotas were set by gender (about 60% female, 40% male), age (18–25: 30%; 26–35: 50%; 36+: 20%), and purchase frequency. The questionnaire was distributed via Wenjuanxing (March–September 2024) and promoted on WeChat, Weibo, and Xiaohongshu. Of 586 questionnaires collected, 486 were valid after data cleaning (excluding sub-3-minute, failed attention-check, patterned, and incomplete responses), an effective rate of 82.9%.

2. Measurement Scale Design

All constructs used established scales adapted to live streaming. Streamer characteristics drew on Ohanian (1990) and Lou and Yuan (2019): professionalism, trustworthiness, and interactivity (5 items each). Platform features drew on Chen and Lin (2018): real-time interactivity, community atmosphere, and interface usability (5 items each). Consumer trust used 5 items from McKnight et al. (2002) capturing interpersonal and institutional trust; purchase intention used 5 items from Pavlou (2003). All items used a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). A pilot test with 50 consumers refined item wording.

3. Data Analysis Methods

SPSS 26.0 was used for descriptive statistics, reliability analysis (Cronbach's α), correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis. AMOS 26.0 was used for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess measurement model validity and structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the research hypotheses. Model fit was evaluated using multiple indices, including χ^2/df, RMSEA, CFI, TLI, and IFI. The Bootstrap method (5,000 resamples, 95% CI) proposed by Preacher and Hayes (2008) was employed to test mediation effects, providing more robust evidence than traditional Baron and Kenny (1986) approaches.

Results

1. Sample Characteristics

The sample was broadly representative. Females were 59.3% (n=288) and males 40.7% (n=198). By age, 26–35 formed the core at 54.8%, with 18–25 at 29.2%, 36–40 at 10.7%, and 41+ at 5.3%. Most held a bachelor's degree (56.8%), followed by junior college and master's or above (17.7% each) and high school or below (7.8%). The middle-income group (RMB 5,001–8,000) was largest at 32.1%, followed by RMB 3,001–5,000 (23.5%), 8,001–12,000 (19.3%), below 3,000 (14.0%), and above 12,000 (11.1%).

Engagement was high: 73.7% watched live-streaming shopping at least weekly. Platform usage was led by Taobao Live (37.4%), Douyin (33.7%), Kuaishou (16.0%), JD Live (8.6%), and others (4.3%). Main categories were beauty/skincare (39.9%) and clothing/accessories (28.0%), with most spending RMB 100–500 per session (66.6%).

2. Reliability and Validity

All constructs demonstrated excellent reliability. Cronbach's α values ranged from 0.874 (real-time interactivity) to 0.912 (consumer trust), all exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Composite Reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.878 to 0.914, also exceeding 0.70. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.592 to 0.678, exceeding the 0.50 threshold and confirming convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was established by ensuring that the square root of each construct's AVE exceeded its correlations with other constructs. The confirmatory factor analysis showed acceptable model fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.146$, RMSEA = 0.049 (<0.08), CFI = 0.946 (>0.90), TLI = 0.938 (>0.90), and IFI = 0.947 (>0.90), meeting the recommended thresholds (Hair et al., 2019).

3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis revealed that all three dimensions of streamer characteristics (professionalism, trustworthiness, interactivity) were significantly positively correlated with both consumer trust and purchase intention ($r = 0.398$-0.524, $p < 0.001$), representing moderate correlations. Trustworthiness had the strongest correlation with purchase intention ($r = 0.524$). The three dimensions of platform interactivity were also significantly positively correlated with consumer trust and purchase intention ($r = 0.298$-0.498, $p < 0.001$). Consumer trust and purchase intention exhibited a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.642$, $p < 0.001$). All correlation coefficients were below 0.7, suggesting no severe multicollinearity, which was further supported by VIF values (<2) in subsequent regression analyses.

4. Direct Effects Testing

Multiple regression analysis with gender, age, education level, and monthly income as control variables revealed significant findings. The control variables had no significant effects ($p > 0.05$). All dimensions of streamer characteristics and platform interactivity had significant positive effects on purchase intention. Among streamer characteristics, trustworthiness had the strongest effect (β=0.224, $p<0.001$), followed by professionalism (β=0.186, $p<0.001$) and interactivity (β=0.168, $p<0.001$). Among platform factors, community atmosphere had the strongest effect (β=0.156, $p<0.001$), followed by real-time interactivity (β=0.142, $p<0.01$) and interface usability (β=0.124, $p<0.01$). The model explained 47.2% of the variance in purchase intention (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.472$, $F = 34.268$, $p < 0.001$). These results support hypotheses H1 and H4, as shown on table 1.

Table 1. Regression Results of Direct Effects on Purchase Intention

Variable	β	SE	t-value	VIF
Professionalism	0.186***	0.046	4.052	1.468
Trustworthiness	0.224***	0.042	5.314	1.586
Interactivity	0.168***	0.048	3.476	1.724
Real-time interactivity	0.142**	0.052	2.746	1.892
Community atmosphere	0.156***	0.044	3.568	1.756
Interface usability	0.124**	0.048	2.574	1.648

*Note. *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05 (two-tailed). SE = Standard Error; VIF = Variance Inflation Factor.*
$R^2 = 0.486$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.472$, $F(6, 479) = 34.268$, $p < .001$.

5. Antecedents of Consumer Trust

Regression analysis of consumer trust showed that all dimensions of streamer characteristics and platform interactivity significantly influenced it. Trustworthiness had the strongest effect (β=0.286, $p<0.001$), followed by professionalism (β=0.212, $p<0.001$), interactivity (β=0.194, $p<0.001$), community atmosphere (β=0.178, $p<0.001$), real-time interactivity (β=0.162, $p<0.001$), and interface usability (β=0.146, $p<0.001$). The model explained 51.6% of the variance in consumer trust (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.516$, $F = 40.486$, $p < 0.001$). These results support hypotheses H2 and H5.

6. Mediation Effects Testing

The Bootstrap analysis (5,000 resamples, 95% CI) confirmed that consumer trust significantly

mediated all pathways. All indirect effects were significant, as their 95% confidence intervals did not include zero. Trustworthiness exhibited the strongest indirect effect (0.168, 95% CI [0.108, 0.234]), followed by professionalism (0.124, 95% CI [0.072, 0.182]) and interactivity (0.114, 95% CI [0.066, 0.168]). Platform factors also showed significant indirect effects: community atmosphere (0.104, 95% CI [0.056, 0.158]), real-time interactivity (0.095, 95% CI [0.051, 0.144]), and interface usability (0.086, 95% CI [0.045, 0.132]), as shown on table 2.

Table 2. Mediation Effect Results (Bootstrap)

Pathway	Indirect Effect	SE	95% CI
Professionalism ⟶ Trust ⟶ PI	0.124	0.028	[0.072, 0.182]
Trustworthiness ⟶ Trust ⟶ PI	0.168	0.032	[0.108, 0.234]
Interactivity ⟶ Trust ⟶ PI	0.114	0.026	[0.066, 0.168]
Real-time interactivity ⟶ Trust ⟶ PI	0.095	0.024	[0.051, 0.144]
Community atmosphere ⟶ Trust ⟶ PI	0.104	0.026	[0.056, 0.158]
Interface usability ⟶ Trust ⟶ PI	0.086	0.022	[0.045, 0.132]

*Note. PI = Purchase Intention. Bootstrap N = 5,000 resamples. Indirect effects are significant when 95% confidence intervals exclude zero. *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.*

Mediation proportions ranged from 40.0% to 42.9% of total effects (professionalism 40.0%, trustworthiness 42.9%, interactivity 40.4%, real-time interactivity 40.1%, community atmosphere 40.0%, interface usability 41.0%), indicating partial mediation and supporting H3 and H6.

7. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 3. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Content	Result
H1	Streamer characteristics ⟶ Purchase intention (+)	Supported
H2	Streamer characteristics ⟶ Consumer trust (+)	Supported
H3	Consumer trust mediates streamer ⟶ purchase intention	Supported (Partial)
H4	Platform interactivity ⟶ Purchase intention (+)	Supported
H5	Platform interactivity ⟶ Consumer trust (+)	Supported
H6	Consumer trust mediates platform ⟶ purchase intention	Supported (Partial)

Discussion and Conclusion

1. Theoretical Contributions

First, this study extends the S-O-R framework by identifying streamer characteristics and platform interaction features as key stimuli that shape consumers' internal state trust and ultimately purchase intention. Empirically validating this logic in live commerce enriches the application boundary of S-O-R theory in digital marketing. It provides a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms of consumer behavior.

Second, it contributes to trust theory by positioning trust as a central mediator between stimuli and responses. Rather than treating trust as a general antecedent, it shows how trust forms through specific streamer cues and platform features unique to live streaming. That trust mediates about 40–43% of the total effect deepens understanding of how trust operates in real-time, high-uncertainty purchasing.

Third, it extends opinion leadership theory, showing that streamers as digital opinion leaders influence behavior through interactive and relational cues, not only expertise. That trustworthiness has the strongest effect (β=0.224) extends opinion leadership from traditional media to live-streaming contexts.

Fourth, building on social presence theory, it shows that streamer interaction and real-time engagement enhance perceived authenticity and closeness, strengthening trust. The effect of community atmosphere (β=0.156) highlights how social presence shapes consumer decisions in live commerce.

Fifth, the study situates its findings within the emerging landscape of AI-generated virtual streamers. As platforms such as Douyin and Taobao Live deploy AI avatars that broadcast continuously, the primacy of trustworthiness here (β=0.224) raises a key question: can AI-generated streamers cultivate genuine trust, or does trust depend on human authenticity cues? Social presence theory (Short et al., 1976) implies that perceived "realness" is central to trust, so AI avatars may weaken social presence and the trust-building pathway documented here—with implications for the social connectivity and emotional support that underpin a higher-quality digital consumer journey. This points to a frontier at the intersection of AI ethics, social presence, and consumer psychology for future research.

2. Practical Implications

1. Streamer-Centric Strategies: Building Emotional Security

The findings underscore that trustworthiness is the most critical determinant of purchase intention (β = 0.224). For streamers, this implies that building long-term consumer trust is not merely a sales tactic but a means of enhancing the consumer's psychological well-being by reducing perceived risk and anxiety.

- Authenticity over Advocacy: Streamers should prioritize accuracy and consistency, giving evidence-based information to avoid "buyer's remorse."
- Professionalism as Cognitive Support: For search-type products, streamers should act as "knowledge hubs," providing systematic insights that reduce cognitive load and decision stress.
- Empathetic Interaction: Enhancing interaction quality through timely, responsive feedback fosters a sense of social inclusion, fulfilling consumers' need for social connectivity in the digital space. (Wongkitrungrueng A., Assarut N., 2020).

2. Platform-Centric Strategies: Fostering Social Well-being

The analysis reveals that community atmosphere has the strongest platform-level effect (β = 0.156), suggesting that the social environment significantly contributes to a user's digital quality of life.

- Cultivating Digital Communities: Platforms should foster "social anchors" of belonging and peer interaction that turn shopping into a positive social experience.
- Reliability of Interaction: Ensuring the stability of real-time features (e.g., live chats, co-streaming) is essential to maintaining "communication flow," preventing user frustration, and supporting a seamless digital journey.
- Usability as a Standard of Care: While interface usability showed a relatively lower effect (β = 0.124), it remains the foundation of a frictionless experience. Reducing operational complexity directly correlates with lower user stress and higher overall platform satisfaction.

3. Brand Management: Differentiated Engagement for Consumer Satisfaction

Brand managers should adopt a "Human-Centric" approach to streamer selection based on product nature to optimize the consumer journey:

- Match-up Hypothesis: For experiential products, pair brands with credible, empathetic streamers; for search-type products, prefer highly professional streamers for functional

clarity.

- Socio-Technical Alignment: Brands must work closely with platforms to ensure that product content is not intrusive but integrated into the platform's unique community culture, thereby respecting the consumer's digital space and enhancing their overall brand experience.

Conclusion

This study systematically examined how streamer characteristics and platform interactivity influence consumers' purchase intentions through the mediating role of consumer trust in livestreaming e-commerce. Based on S-O-R theory and trust theory, an integrated research model was developed and empirically tested with 486 valid samples from major Chinese live-streaming platforms, including Douyin, Taobao Live, and Kuaishou.

The key findings indicate that: (1) trustworthiness is the most critical determinant of purchase intention (β=0.224, the largest of all six predictors), confirming that a streamer's honesty, reliability, and sincerity are the most decisive factor in converting viewers into buyers under real-time, high-risk decisions; other streamer factors (professionalism, β=0.186; interactivity, β=0.168) also contribute. (2) Platform interactivity matters for conversion, with community atmosphere strongest (β=0.156); (3) Consumer trust serves as a crucial partial mediator, accounting for approximately 40%-43% of total effects, demonstrating its central function in reducing uncertainty and supporting decision-making; (4) Synergistic effects exist between streamer and platform factors, suggesting that optimal outcomes occur when both elements work together effectively.

By integrating a dual-factor framework of streamer and platform features, the study validates and extends an S-O-R-based consumer behavior model for live commerce, offering guidance for streamers, platforms, and brand managers. Future research should pursue longitudinal designs, differentiated trust mechanisms, emerging technology contexts, and cross-cultural comparisons, to further advance understanding of consumer behavior in live-streaming e-commerce.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations suggest future directions. First, the convenience sample was concentrated in first-tier cities (over 80%) and the 26–35 group (54.8%), limiting generalizability to lower-tier or rural markets; stratified sampling could broaden coverage.

Second, the cross-sectional design cannot capture causality or the dynamic evolution of

trust and intention; longitudinal or multi-wave data could trace consumers from exposure to purchase.

Third, other variables (price, promotions, brand reputation, consumer traits) were not considered, and trust was treated as unidimensional; future work could distinguish interpersonal and institutional trust to test distinct mediating effects.

Fourth, as AI-generated virtual streamers, AR, and VR environments develop, future studies could explore how they reshape consumer experiences, and cross-cultural comparisons could test the model's universality.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, recommendations are proposed, prioritized by predictor strength:

1. As trustworthiness had the strongest effect (β = 0.224), platforms and brands should recruit and train streamers who give honest, accurate, evidence-based information and establish credibility-monitoring that penalizes misleading claims.

2. Since consumer trust mediated 40–43% of the total effects, streamers and platforms should invest in trust-building practices—professional product knowledge, responsive interaction, and transparent transaction and after-sales guarantees—to convert viewing into purchasing while reducing perceived risk.

3. As community atmosphere was the strongest platform driver (β = 0.156), platforms should strengthen community-building features fostering belonging and peer interaction while keeping real-time interactivity stable and interfaces simple and usable.

4. Brand managers should apply a match-up approach, pairing experiential products with credible, empathetic streamers and search-type products with highly professional streamers, and align content with each platform’s community culture to enhance the overall consumer journey.

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