

# Consumer Reactions to Live-Streaming Influencers' Communication Behaviors on Douyin

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**Abstract.** In recent years, the popularity of online live-streaming commerce is favored by consumers. Live-streaming commerce have good prospect and great development potential, so it is important to know consumers' concerns. Using content analysis of audience comments on 5 Douyin videos, this research studies, from the perspective of consumers, how the influencer's communication behavior affects consumers' reactions. Findings show that consumers are concerned with 4 key aspects: appearance, personal style, product quality and credibility. Especially for appearance, comments show that audience usually tend to care more about female influencers' appearance rather than that of male influencers and most of their comments about female influencers' appearance were negative, while their comments about male influencers were more positive. This research studies a new form of consumption that has sprung up in China in recent years, helping to know more about Chinese consumers' views on online consumption, as well as online consumption culture.

**Keywords:** Douyin; Live-streaming; E-commerce; Influencers; Consumer behavior.

## 1. Introduction

In the past few years, people may not imagine that they can have an excellent shopping experience by clicking the product link in one's live-streaming studio, but just within this 2 years, live-streaming commerce became one of the most popular forms of online marketing in China. According to Analysis on The Development Status and Prospects of China's Live-streaming Industry published by Zhiyan Consulting Institute (2022), until December 2021, the number of live-streaming users in China reached 703.37 million and increased 86.52 million compared with the number in December 2020, accounting for 68.2% of Chinese Internet users. At the same time, because of the outbreak of COVID-19 and policy restrictions in China, the real economy suffered deep blows while e-commerce reached a new climax of development. More and more businessmen, brands, and offline retailers, country men who market their own products, or even the CEO of company chose live-streaming to sell their products. At the same time, in order to repair and promote people's consumption, a lot of stars, famous host began to started their live-streaming, attracting fans and selling product through their existing influence.

With the improvement of live-streaming commerce rules, maturity of the system, and the increase of public acceptance, live-streaming commerce has become an important part of consumers' shopping life, and those who engaged in live-streaming commerce have been identified as a formal occupation: internet marketer. Report from the research institute Insight and Info (2021), in "double 11" (11, November, the biggest Internet shopping festival in China) pre-sale night, the total number of consumers who watched Li Jiaqi's and Weiya's (the most famous two influencers in the e-commerce industry) is up to several hundred million, and the turnover of the two live-streaming in one day was close to 19 billion yuan. According to Market Prospect and Investment research report of China's e-commerce live streaming industry from 2021-2025, published by Chinese Business Industry Research Institute (2020), the size of live-streaming commerce in China reached 1201.2 billion yuan in 2021 and this report predicted that the total size will achieve about 1507.3 billion in 2022.

While plenty of research examines the production side, not much is known about the consumption side – so it is important to know what audiences are thinking. Through the analysis of audience comments from relevant Douyin (known as Tik Tok overseas) videos, this research analyzes how the audiences of live-streaming shows react to this content and how these shows shape their view of the products and intention to purchase.

## 2. Literature Review

In the academic field of China, there has already been a large amount of research on Internet celebrities. With the continuous changes of the Internet era, the boundary of the internet celebrities has also undergone corresponding changes according to the content carrying mode, the internet celebrities can be divided into three stages of development - internet celebrities 1.0(text), internet celebrities 2.0(text), and internet celebrities 3.0(broadband), including the whole process from the forum blog to the picture text, and then combine with the video bullet screen (Zhang et al, 2017). Under the empowerment of 5g technology, virtual reality (VR) technology and Internet of Things technology, Internet celebrities has gradually changed from mass Internet celebrities to micro-influencers. The foundation of this transformation is the difference between knowledge and aesthetics, which has created a high-strength connection between Internet celebrities and fans. At the same time, the Internet celebrities' economy has evolved from paying attention to popularity in the early stage to paying attention to "selling goods". However, this evolution requires conditions, that is, only by changing from focus marketing to product sales, can the new Internet celebrities' economy be gradually formed (Zhu & Zeng, 2019). An important reason why the new Internet celebrities' economy can establish new links among manufacturers, sellers and consumers is the prevalence of participatory culture (Jenkins & Ito, 2015). Its final impact largely depends on the characteristics of fan consumption, such as inducement, integration and personalization (Sun & Wang, 2019).

Yi et al (2021) have suggested that the two advantages of live-streaming commerce are: (1) it is highly interactive, and consumers have more sense of communication and participation; (2) the price is affordable. Live-streaming commerce can achieve the lowest price in the whole network, the products' cost performance is high, and the conversion cost of consumers is low and the purchase motivation of shopping through live-streaming is mainly reflected in three aspects: seeking truth, seeking honesty and imitating or following the crowd. At the same time, Liu et al (2020) also have suggested that the three core categories of consumers' purchase intention (cognitive dimension, emotional dimension and intention dimension) has a significant impact on consumers' online shopping behavior. The real-time, interactive and face-to-face characteristics of live-streaming show, coupled with the atmosphere of the live-streaming show in terms of environment, function, layout and communication, will attract consumers (Gong et al, 2019), make consumers have a sense of empathy and immersion (Feng & Lu, 2020). Liu et al (2020) have argued that Internet celebrities has the characteristics of information source, which act on the inner feelings of the audience, enhance their attention of products and enhance the purchase intention.

Li (2021) takes Weiya and Li Jiaqi as examples to analyze the language characteristics of the influencers' speech community and found that their content topics can be divided into 3 categories (product introduction, lottery and promotion) and there is not only an unequal power relationship between the influencer and the audience, but also that the influencer will create a sense of closeness with the audience.

In order to understand the audience, it is not enough to only know about influencers, we also need to know more about the audience reactions to these live-streams. From the perspective of consumers, this study will research the factors which influence consumers' reactions or responses to live-streaming commerce and discuss consumers' views on live-streaming commerce.

## 3. Research Method

According to live e-commerce annual data report published by research institute Guoji (2022), in 2021, there were more than 75 million live-streaming commerce videos on Douyin & Kwai, a year-on-year increase of 100%, so the more popular platform of the two is chosen to conduct this research on, Douyin. 5 beauty influencers were selected of different genders who have their own live shows on Douyin for selling products based on their number of followers. Then selected one of the videos they posted in the last month or two months about the live stream or the product which being sold during the live stream (see Table 1 and Fig. 1).

**Table 1.** Basic information and data of influencers and videos

Name	Gender	Followers	Product	Published date	Likes	Comments
Jing Huizhi	male	0.91m	cleanser	04/25/2022	9.5k	556
Sha Xingyu	male	2.49m	live stream	04/12/2022	6.4k	312
Liu Qiaoqiao	female	4.80m	mudpack	03/05/2022	11.0k	1910
Chimu Gangxian	female	5.53m	eye shadow	04/30/2022	0.31k	69
Sam Chak	male	13.40m	skin oil	04/28/2022	19.2k	521



**Fig. 1** Screenshots from the 5 videos selected for analysis

For the videos above with 500+ comments, selected the top 500 comments to include in the data. If videos had less than 500 comments, all comments were included. The total number of comments was 1881.

For the data analysis, read and analyzed the comments (including replies to comments) of each video one by one, writing down and summarizing some characteristics about the comments. Finally, put all of these characteristics together and get the final conclusion.

## 4. Findings

Though the analysis, it can be concluded the following 4 points that the audience talked about most:

### 4.1 Appearance

Audiences usually pay attention to the influencers' appearance. To be more specific, people tend to care more about female influencers' appearance rather than male influencers. Most of their comments about female influencers' appearance were negative, while their comments about male influencers were more positive. Sometimes, the appearance of female influencers has even become the best publicity means for the products they recommend, in the comment area of the third video, there are such comments: "if this influencer recommends products about neck lines, I will not buy it," or "you can remove the neck lines first and then come out to recommend products to us," but the appearance of male influencers is rarely related to the products they recommend. By observing the comments of male influencers, the researcher finds that in the first and second videos, we rarely see comments on the appearance of influencers. With the increase of fans, in the fifth video, comments on the appearance of the influencer began to increase, but more praise, most of them praise bloggers such as "your skin is such white!" or "you are so charming." However, by observing the comments of female influencers, especially the comment area of the third influencer, there are a lot of negative comments on the appearance of the influencer, most of which are about the influencer's neck lines

and some about the influencer's skin, such as “your skin is not good at all.” Regarding to the fourth influencer, almost half of the comments were about the influencer's appearance, and most of them were about the influencer's figure changes, such as “*please tell me how to lose weight,*” or “*oh my god, Long time no see, you've lost such a lot of weight!*” The audience will always pay more attention to the appearance of female influencers rather than products. Every detail, whether face or body, will be magnified by the audience.

#### 4.2 Personal style

Influencer's personal style (such as their accent, intonation, curated image) will affect some audiences' watching experience and purchase intention. In the comments of the first video, there are many comments about the influencer's personal style, some about the way the influencer speaks, accent, or pronunciation, such as: "His Putonghua pronunciation really makes me uncomfortable," "please speak clearly," or "I can't understand what he said without subtitles." At the same time, there are also criticisms on the evaluation methods of the influencer, such as “You waste too much facial cleanser.” these comments are all negative. But in the second video, almost half of the people expressed their love for the live broadcasting style of influencers and showed their trust and support to influencers, such as: “I think the you are sincere and interesting. Sometimes I watch the live broadcast just like watching crosstalk, it's really funny,” or “I like watching the videos of your very much and I feel very relieved, and I only buy products from you.” It can be seen that the influencer's style will have an impact on the audience's information reception, viewing feeling and purchase intention to a certain extent.

#### 4.3 Product quality

With the increase of followers, audience tend to care more about the product's quality, effect, use feeling and their personal needs rather than cheap price. At the same time, with the increase of followers, in the comments of the first and second videos, only a few people discuss the quality of the product itself, and there are few replies to these comments. However, with the increase in the number of fans, the focus of audience attention has changed from live-streaming information to the product itself, and the number of comments and replies on product quality and competitive product comparison has also greatly increased. In the third video and the fifth video, the comments of the product itself exceeded almost half of the total, such as: “*this texture is too creamy,*” “*How about this versus Kiehl's,*” or “*I have bought this before, its cleaning power is very poor.*” These comments show that when dealing with big influencers, the audience obviously has higher vigilance. Compared with lower prices, consumers prefer to spend their money to buy what they need.

#### 4.4 Credibility

When the audience cannot distinguish whether a product is good or if it is suitable for themselves, and cannot make the decision, they will use a more rational approach to ensure their purchase intention rather than impulse spending. The most common way is asking some influencers that they trust for help. Except the second video, there are comment which audience @ influencers that they trust for help, such as: “@Huamei how about this product?” With the increase of fans, the number of such comments increased slightly, but it is still only a small part of the total comments. No matter how many followers they have, those influencers who be @ by audience must be considered as very professional and honest, or maybe have their own attractive personal style. Therefore, it is also an important part of this consumption system for influencers to enhance their professional knowledge, enhance their links with the audience and improve their credibility. But beyond influencers, the audience who have used this product will also share their experience in the comment area, and communicate and interact with other consumers. In this way, consumers themselves are also trying to establish and demonstrate their credibility through the comments.

## 5. Discussion

Through analyzing comment of audience, this research studies some characteristics of influencers and live-streaming commerce that consumers care about. For the whole industry and for academic knowledge, this research can help them better understand consumer psychology, make more accurate and correct sales strategies, select suitable influencer to promote their products, and achieve better sales. For influencers, this research can show them how audiences respond to their content and help improve their video, quality of live-streaming, so that they can attract more audience and improve sales of their live-streaming commerce. At the same time, this research can urge influencers to improve the quality of selected products, especially for someone with a lot of followers, and create criteria/standards of the industry, improve consumers' acceptance and trust.

At the same time, this study also illustrates the characteristics of Chinese Internet culture, especially some gender views on men and women. In Chinese traditional culture, women are often be regarded as "have no talent is virtue", so the task of a woman in her whole life is to do all kinds of housework and grow a good appearance. This has also become the standard to evaluate a woman in a long history. In today's Internet, we can still see the shadow of these evaluation standards. As the researcher mentioned in this research, researcher find that my findings indicate that these standards apply online too, where women are judged by their appearance. This study may serve as a good inspiration to inspire more researchers to study Chinese culture and also undertake cross-cultural studies.

This study also has some limitations. First, because of the methods used, the researcher can only draw conclusions about audience reactions, not about their purchase intention, thoughts or perceptions; to understand these aspects, future research could use surveys or interviews. Second, the number of videos and comments analyzed in this study is relatively limited. In future studies, to improve the universality, accuracy, and rigor of the research, it is necessary to increase the amount of data by looking at more videos and comments. At the same time, these results are only based on the content of beauty and skin care. We don't know whether we can get the same answer in other area or products of live-streaming commerce. In the future study, we may be able to get more accurate conclusions by studying the live broadcast of more types of products and platforms.

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