

The Power of Persuasion Behind the Screen: A Preliminary Exploration of Consumer Psychological Influence in Live Commerce

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Abstract

In a modern era with full of technologies nowadays, live commerce has swept across Asia, especially in markets such as China, Malaysia, and Indonesia, emerging as a dominant force in new-age retail. Consumers have shifted from the classic ways such as traditional TV shopping to real-time livestream purchases, transitioning from rational comparison to emotional decision-making, and from brand loyalty to streamer trust. This paper centers on communication psychology, examining the socio-cultural foundation and platform mechanics behind the rise of live commerce. It proposes a conceptual framework based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, analyzing how livestreaming stimulates consumer desire, builds brand trust, and fosters repeat purchasing through media interactivity, social presence, and persona construction. Without field surveys or questionnaires, the study relies on structured observation, literature synthesis, and representative case reasoning to establish a pathway model of psychological influence under digital communication environments.

Keywords

Live Commerce, Consumer Psychology, Streamer Influence, Communication Mechanism, Brand Cognition, Media Interactivity

1. Introduction

The rise of live commerce is not a coincidence. In today's fragmented information landscape and attention economy, traditional advertising, static images, and even pre-recorded videos are increasingly ineffective at penetrating the psychological defenses of consumers. At the same time, the widespread use of mobile devices and the algorithmic precision of content delivery platforms have created a fertile ground for the explosion of live-streamed shopping experiences. From Taobao Live to Douyin (TikTok China) and TikTok Shop, consumers are becoming accustomed to making purchase decisions in highly immersive and interactive real-time contexts.

However, most current studies on live commerce remain focused on surface-level outcomes such as conversion rates, product categories, or influencer marketing [1]. They often neglect the deeper, structural questions: Why is live commerce so effective at driving impulsive purchases? How does it psychologically disarm a consumer? Why do viewers feel connected, even emotionally dependent, on a streamer they've never met? And most importantly, how does this shift the foundation of brand recognition and trust [2]?

This paper seeks to address these questions through a theoretical lens. By constructing a psychological influence pathway model grounded in communication theory, we aim to explore how livestreaming transforms not just the buying process, but the entire cognitive-emotional framework of consumer behavior. Instead of field research or empirical data, the paper will synthesize existing academic and industry literature with high-level case analysis to form a theoretical foundation that can guide future empirical inquiries.

In doing so, we hope to contribute a more human-centered and psychologically realistic understanding of live commerce's appeal and persuasive power.

2. Literature Review

Live commerce has become so normal these days that we barely stop to think about what makes it work. People scroll through a platform, land on a livestream, and before they know it, they've spent money they didn't plan to spend. This isn't just a trend. It's a shift in how people respond to influence, especially in a digital space. And it's not because the deals are always better, or the products more unique—it's because the entire experience feels different. It hits people not just with information, but with emotion, connection, and sometimes pressure [3].

If we try to explain it in simple terms, live commerce works because it makes people feel something. It creates a moment. That moment is shaped by the person on screen, the mood of the chat, the limited-time offer flashing in the corner, and the general sense that "something is happening now." Whereby these feelings, sometimes, might be temptation to make it hard for stepping away, even harder to pause and think critically. And that's exactly the point.

You're not supposed to overthink. You're supposed to feel like you're part of something real, something shared-and make a decision right there.

Let's talk about the streamer. That person isn't just selling a product. They're hosting an experience. Audiences often start to feel like they know the host while they've never met. They hear their voice every week, see them laugh, watch them answer comments live. Over time, it becomes less like watching an ad and more like hearing advice from someone familiar. And when someone you feel connected to recommends something, you don't question it the same way you would with a normal seller. That kind of emotional shortcut is powerful [4].

There's also the urgency. Most livestreams don't give you time to think. The countdown clock is ticking, the product is almost sold out, and the host keeps reminding you that if you don't act now, you'll regret it. It's not subtle. But it works. Because even when people know it's a sales tactic, they still feel it. The fear of missing out isn't just theoretical. It's a real sensation-like the chance is slipping away while you hesitate. So you click.

You won't even feel alone that just using your phone or computer as there's just the crowd that it doesn't feel that way. There's a fast-moving chat, floating hearts, questions flying in, people saying they bought two or three already. It creates a kind of shared space, almost like a party. That energy matters. It makes the whole thing feel more trustworthy. If this many people are watching, if they're all reacting, then maybe it really is worth it. That's what your brain starts to tell you [5].

All of these things-the connection to the host, the urgency, the energy of the chat-work together. They don't function in isolation. One gets your attention, another pulls you in emotionally, and a third pushes you to act. By the time you're checking out, you don't always know exactly why. You just feel like it made sense at the time.

What's interesting is that a lot of people still think the live commerce was just a merely a tool of e-commerce. They focus on metrics, such as how many people clicked, how many converted into direct messages, or what kinds of deals or promotions works the best to tempt the audiences. That's fine, but it misses the point. The real action happens inside people's heads. It's emotional. It's social. It's instinctive. People buy not just because they need something, but because the livestream creates a moment where buying feels like the natural thing to do [6].

This chapter isn't about listing every theory or study out there. It's about making sense of a real human experience. The experience of being pulled into a livestream, feeling engaged, feeling close to someone on screen, and then making a decision that, five minutes earlier, you didn't plan to make. It's not about being tricked. It's about how humans respond to energy, connection, and pressure.

In the next chapter, it will be mentioning about how does these all fits together. Not through data charts, but through a framework that shows how the pieces connect: how what we see and hear online turns into feelings, and how those feelings lead to action. Because once we understand that, we start to understand why live commerce doesn't just work-it works in a way that feels personal.

3. Theoretical Framework

To make sense of why live commerce feels so persuasive, we need more than just surface observations-we need a way to connect the dots. What starts as a casual swipe through a platform somehow turns into a purchase. What begins as entertainment ends in action. This doesn't happen randomly. There's a psychological structure beneath the surface, and in this chapter, I'll try to lay it out-not as a rigid academic model, but as a way of understanding how attention, emotion, and behavior get pulled into alignment in real time.

A good starting point is something called the Stimulus-Organism-Response model, or S-O-R for short. It's not new. It was originally used to explain how people react to their physical environments-like how lighting or music might affect someone in a store. But over time, people started applying it to digital spaces too, because whether we're walking through a shop or scrolling through a screen, our minds still go through similar processes. We see something. We feel something. Then we do something.

In the world of live commerce, the "stimulus" is everything thrown at the viewer: the streamer's voice and energy, the layout of the screen, the comment section buzzing with reactions, the countdown timers, the product demonstrations. These things don't just exist separately-they all mix together and create an atmosphere. That atmosphere isn't just visual or verbal. It reaches into your mindset. That's where the "organism" part comes in [7].

The "organism" is what happens inside the viewer: the emotional reactions, the rising excitement, the feeling of being seen or spoken to, the sense of urgency. It might also include a quiet internal voice saying, "This feels like a good deal," or "I trust this person." These aren't always conscious thoughts. Sometimes they're just gut feelings. But those feelings are what tip the scale. They're the bridge between stimulus and response [8].

And finally, there's the "response"-what the person actually does. Maybe they click. Maybe they add to cart. Maybe they don't buy anything at all, but they come back next time. The important thing is that their behavior was shaped by a whole chain of small, psychological shifts. It didn't start with the product. It started with how the experience made them feel.

What's powerful about this model is that it helps explain why live commerce is so different from normal online shopping. On a typical e-commerce site, the experience is mostly rational: look at specs, compare prices, read reviews. But live commerce bypasses that rational layer. It wraps the product in emotion. The viewer doesn't just see an item—they see a person they trust using it, talking about it, making it feel necessary. The decision becomes less about logic and more about connection, mood, and timing.

Let's also acknowledge something that isn't talked about enough: people don't always buy because they need something. Often, they buy because they were in the right emotional state at the right moment. Live commerce is good at creating that moment. It's good at taking someone who had no intention to spend, and giving them just enough excitement, pressure, and warmth to make them say yes [9].

Now, this framework isn't meant to explain everything. Not every livestream works the same way. Not every viewer responds to the same triggers. But what it does offer is a way to see the flow: from external stimulation to internal feeling to outward behavior. Once we see that flow clearly, we can start to ask better questions. What kinds of stimulus are most effective? What emotional states lead to loyalty, not just one-time purchases? How do trust and familiarity grow over time in a virtual space?

That's the value of building a framework—not to box things in, but to make patterns visible. In live commerce, the pattern is psychological, not just commercial. And once we start seeing shopping as a human reaction, not just a transaction, we begin to understand why this format is not just popular—it's persuasive in a way that feels deeply personal.

4. The Pathway of Influence

Let's be honest. Most people don't go into a livestream planning to buy something. They go in to take a look, to kill time, to see what the fuss is about. But somehow, many of them end up making a purchase—sometimes more than one, sometimes more than they can really justify. What's happening in between is not just persuasion; it's a full emotional journey. And once we slow it down and really look at the steps, we begin to see how live commerce quietly moves people from "just watching" to "can't resist."

The journey usually starts with attention. The viewer sees a thumbnail, a title, maybe a familiar face, and clicks. The stream loads. Within seconds, the environment begins to speak—not just through words, but through rhythm, tone, visuals, energy. The music might be upbeat. The chat is flying. The host is smiling, talking fast, calling out names, creating the feeling that something exciting is happening. This is the hook. Not the product. The energy.

Once a person is inside, the next step is connection. The host wasn't like a reporter or emcees to read their script but talk directly to the viewers. They are talking with the viewer by joking, tease or say something like, "You guys know I never recommend something unless I use it myself." That line-spoken with just the right amount of sincerity and starts to build trust with trick of a light. Not just in the product, but in the person. And trust, in live commerce, is everything. It's the currency before the transaction.

As this connection builds, another emotion starts creeping in: familiarity. Maybe this isn't the first time the viewer has seen this host. Maybe they watched another stream last week. Or maybe they see the host as someone they know such as families, a funny friend, or maybe a co-worker that always give them the good recommendations whereby they feel relax when they watched the live reels. Familiarity makes people relax. And when people are relaxed, they let their guard down. The "critical buyer" turns into a listener. That's when persuasion becomes easier.

Then comes social proof. It doesn't matter whether it's real or manufactured—when the chat is filled with people saying, "bought it," "this works great," or "my second order already," it becomes harder to doubt. Many people don't want to regret it afterwards by be the only one who missing out as they think that might be a good item if they missed out or they became someone who out of the cast. The fear of missing out starts to mix with curiosity and a slight pressure. The viewer might not even be convinced that they need the item—but they don't want to feel left behind.

And then comes the final push: urgency. A clock appears on the screen. "Only 5 minutes left." The host says, "This is the last batch tonight." You hear someone in the comments saying it just sold out yesterday. Your logical brain starts to fade. The emotional side takes over. Suddenly, waiting seems risky. Thinking too long feels like losing. And so, before the clock hits zero, the button is tapped.

From the outside, it looks impulsive. From the inside, it feels justified. Because the stream didn't just sell a product—it built a moment, brick by brick. Each brick had a purpose: to disarm doubt, to create closeness, to heighten desire, and finally, to compress time so that action feels like the only logical next step.

It's important to say: this isn't about manipulation. Not exactly. It's about understanding how humans respond to attention, emotion, and timing. And to take a grasp of their preference or other opinions. It's the same reason people cheer louder in live concerts than in recordings, or why we laugh more when watching movies with others than alone. The live element changes how we feel, and feelings change how we act.

So if we map this pathway, it looks something like this:

Attention → Connection → Familiarity → Social Proof → Urgency → Action

The strength of the live commerce lies in its ability to move people along without having them to realize as each steps prepares the ground for the next.

In traditional e-commerce, people make decisions. In live commerce, people experience decisions. And that difference is what gives this format its quiet power.

5. Implications and Future Reflection

What live commerce reveals about modern consumer behavior is more than a trend. It's a window into how people respond to digital intimacy, emotional rhythm, and a sense of urgency packaged as entertainment whereby live commerce not just only a short live videos but also another communication that make their life more enjoyable. The discounts lies something much more profound whereby behind the lights, the humor, to gain their attention and a redefinition of how trust is built, how decisions are made, and how consumption fits into people's everyday emotional lives.

In the middle of the live reels, the product may not be the protagonist anymore but the elements that boost the quality of that live to holds the value. What matters more is how that value is delivered. A lipstick is no longer just about the color or formula. It becomes about the way the host applies it, the way they talk about it, the way the viewers cheer in the chat when it sells out. The product itself becomes part of a social experience. This shift means that traditional marketing strategies where only focused purely on features, functions, or price points, are becoming less effective as audience tend to more attractive to the storyline of the live or the skills that how the host was spoken.. Brands that ignore the emotional environment around the product risk being tuned out, no matter how good their offer is.

Another implication is that the relationship between consumers and sellers is changing. In live commerce, the brand is no longer the main speaker. The host is. And often, the host isn't even an employee of the brand-they are a third-party individual who has built their own identity, voice, and following. This introduces a new dynamic. Trust is no longer anchored in logos or years of reputation. It's anchored in personality, relatability, and perceived honesty. That makes the entire landscape more fragile but also more flexible. A single host can make or break a campaign. In a blink of an eye, the connection between the host and the viewer can shift their loyalty from a brand's to another brand.

This setting also calls into question sustainability, not just economically but also psychologically. Will customers eventually get numb from being exposed to emotional hooks, scarcity, and urgency all the time? Will these approaches that are effective today continue be effective tomorrow? It is a mystic of it. There's a risk that live commerce becomes a kind of psychological treadmill, where brands and hosts need to run faster and louder just to stay in the same place. That's not a criticism, but it is a real concern. Emotional intensity cannot be scaled indefinitely.

At the same time, live commerce opens new possibilities for long-term brand building if used wisely. A kind of bond could be form if they not just only deliver promotions but is a value, stories, or any shared moments they can be shared. Where the audience could give their trust and a kind of a string of emotions leads them in one piece and unity. One that doesn't depend on the lowest price or the flashiest deal. In this sense, live commerce is not just about sales. It's about presence. A brand that shows up often, authentically, and with respect for the viewer's intelligence can build something deeper than conversion. It can build loyalty.

Lastly, what this entire phenomenon tells us about human nature is something worth pausing on. People don't just want information. They want connection. They don't just want products. They want stories they can believe in. The screen is not a barrier-it's a bridge. And in that space between seller and buyer, between stream and viewer, something very old is happening in a very new way. A kind of digital trust is being formed. A trust that feels personal, even if it isn't face to face. A trust that moves products, but more importantly, moves people [10].

The future of live commerce will depend not only on technology or platforms, but on whether we continue to understand and respect the emotional journeys of those on the other side of the screen. The brands and hosts who succeed will be those who recognize that buying is never just about the object. It's about the moment, the mood, and the timing to build in it.

6. Conclusion

When we first looked into why live commerce feels so powerful, the answer seemed simple. It sells fast, it feels fun, and people buy. However, after dissecting its internal operations, it is evident that livestreaming encompasses much more than just sales strategies as it speaks to something more profound-something about focus, feeling, and the silent yearning humans have to connect, even in the digital age.

This is not just about marketing. It's about human behavior in a world that's changing fast. In the middle of everyday noise, livestreams create small, concentrated moments. A host talks. A crowd responds. A product sells. But in between those actions, there's trust being built. It's the kind that develops fast, emotionally, and frequently without our awareness-not the kind that results from years of brand loyalty. It's not only the goods or the cost that inspires that trust. It's the nonchalant way someone says, "This is what I use myself," the timing of the jokes, and the tone of the voice. It works because of its presence rather than its gloss.

And that's where the real shift has happened. People don't just want to be informed. They want to be spoken to. They want to feel seen. Livestreaming, when done right, gives them that. Of course, this model has its limits. Emotional urgency can wear thin. Viewers may grow more skeptical over time. And as more brands jump in, the novelty may fade. But that doesn't erase the lessons it leaves behind. What live commerce teaches us is simple, but easy to forget: people still buy with their feelings. And in an age where attention is currency, the most persuasive thing isn't a perfect pitch—it's a moment that feels real.

If there's one thing to take away from all this, it's that digital selling is no longer just transactional. It's relational. And in those few seconds where someone chooses to stay, listen, or click "buy," what they're really responding to is a sense of being understood.

That's not just business. That's communication at its most human.

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