

THE IMPACT OF INFLUENCER LIVESTREAMING TOWARDS THE CHINESE YOUTH CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT:

With the advent of the digital age, influencer live-streaming commerce has gradually become a new consumption model in China, exerting a profound impact on the purchasing behavior of young consumers. This study aims to explore the specific effects of influencer live-streaming on the consumption behavior of Chinese youth, utilizing Grounded Theory, the Consumer Decision-Making Process Model, and the 4C Marketing Theory as analytical frameworks. Through methods such as literature review and in-depth interviews, this research identifies the key factors influencing young consumers' behavior and analyzes the roles these factors play at various stages of the consumer decision-making process. The results indicate that influencer live-streaming effectively drives changes in consumption behavior by enhancing consumers' awareness, information search, evaluation, and purchase decision-making processes. Furthermore, based on the 4C Marketing Theory, this study proposes marketing strategies targeting young consumers to meet their needs, reduce costs, improve convenience, and strengthen communication. In conclusion, this research not only provides theoretical support for understanding the impact of influencer live-streaming commerce on youth consumption behavior but also offers practical recommendations for businesses to develop effective marketing strategies.

KEYWORDS: Influencer Live-Streaming Commerce, Youth Consumption Behavior, Grounded Theory, Consumer Decision-Making Process, 4C Marketing Theory

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, with the rapid development of computer and internet technology, the digital economy has shown immense potential and has had a profound impact on global socio-economic development [1]. Entering the 21st century, with the rapid advancement of new[2] technologies such as big data, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence, the digital economy has gained widespread attention globally. Developed countries have formulated digital economy strategies to promote industrial digital transformation. China has also placed significant emphasis on the development of the digital economy, introducing a series of policies since the proposal of "Digital China" in 2015, which have driven rapid advancements in fields such as e-commerce and smart manufacturing. Notably, the "14th Five-Year Plan" and the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China have positioned the digital economy as a core force for promoting high-quality socio-economic development [2].

Under the impetus of the digital economy, e-commerce models have continuously innovated, with live-streaming commerce emerging rapidly as a new e-commerce model [3]. Through live-streaming platforms, influencers showcase products in real-time and interact with viewers, offering a more intuitive and immersive shopping experience. This new sales model has transcended the temporal and spatial limitations of traditional e-commerce and significantly improved the efficiency of consumer decision-making. According to data from the Ministry of Commerce, in the first half of 2023, major e-commerce platforms hosted over 110 million live-streaming sessions, with more than 70 million products showcased and over 2.7 million active influencers [4]. These figures highlight the significant influence of live-streaming commerce in the Chinese market.

As the primary users of the internet, young people have shown a high level of acceptance and participation in emerging shopping methods [5]. By watching influencer live streams, young consumers can obtain product information instantly and deepen their understanding of products through interaction with the influencers, thereby influencing their purchasing decisions. The immediacy, interactivity, and entertainment value of live-streaming commerce make impulse buying behavior more prevalent among this group, posing new challenges to traditional consumer behavior theories.



However, despite the great potential of influencer live-streaming in boosting sales and brand exposure, its deeper impact on consumer behavior, particularly among the youth, remains under-researched. This study aims to explore how influencer live-streaming commerce influences the consumption behavior of Chinese youth. Specifically, the research will analyze the key factors affecting young consumers' purchasing decisions and propose marketing strategies that align with this consumption trend.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

(a) Overview of Influencer Live-Streaming Commerce

As a rapidly emerging e-commerce model in recent years, influencer live-streaming commerce has significantly altered traditional shopping experiences through real-time interaction and visual presentation, becoming a formidable force in the market. In this model, influencers leverage their personal charisma and expertise to attract a large number of fans and consumers, converting their attention into actual purchases [6]. Major e-commerce platforms such as Taobao, Kuaishou, and Douyin have taken prominent positions in this sector, particularly driven by top influencers whose market performance has been outstanding.

Data shows that in 2020, the top 1,000 live-streaming influencers across all platforms generated a total sales volume of 255.7 billion RMB, with the top 20 influencers alone accounting for 106.44 billion RMB, representing 41.7% of the total sales generated by the top 1,000 influencers [7]. This demonstrates the immense influence of top influencers in the market. The combined sales volume of Viya and Li Jiaqi on the Taobao platform reached 52.951 billion RMB, highlighting Taobao's dominant position in influencer live-streaming commerce. Meanwhile, platforms like Kuaishou and Douyin have gradually emerged with differentiated content strategies and user group targeting. Influencers such as Xin Youzhi on Kuaishou and Luo Yonghao on Douyin have also achieved sales of tens of billions of RMB, further proving the diversified development landscape across multiple platforms.

The outbreak of the pandemic further accelerated the popularity of live-streaming commerce. During periods of home isolation, online shopping became the primary consumption method, and live-streaming commerce met consumers' shopping needs through its immediacy and interactivity. By 2023, the market size of China's live-streaming e-commerce reached 4.9 trillion RMB, with a year-on-year growth rate of 35.2%. Although the growth rate has slowed compared to the early stages of the industry, it still signals strong growth momentum [8]. It is expected that by 2026, the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of China's live-streaming e-commerce market will reach 18.0%, and the industry will gradually enter a phase of refined development, with live-streaming commerce continuing to serve as a crucial growth engine for the e-commerce market [9].

(b) Consumption Behavior of Chinese Youth

Chinese young consumers, particularly those born in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, have become the primary consumer group in influencer live-streaming commerce, and their consumption behavior largely defines the characteristics of this market. According to statistics, young people under the age of 35 account for 69% of total consumption, with an annual growth rate of 11% in their consumption capacity.

As of June 2023, the number of short video users reached 1.03 billion, accounting for 95.1% of the total internet users, providing a vast market space for live-streaming e-commerce [10]. In the same year, the number of live-streaming e-commerce users reached 530 million, accounting for 59.5% of online shoppers, indicating that live-streaming commerce has become a significant shopping channel for young consumers.

The consumption behavior of young consumers is characterized by a strong internet influence [11]. Their consumption habits have shifted from traditional offline shopping to online shopping, with a focus on instant gratification and personalized experiences. Driven by the influencer economy, this group has become a key audience for influencer live-streaming commerce. Influencers build strong interactive relationships with their followers by creating engaging and valuable content, enhancing brand trust and prompting impulse purchases among young consumers.

These young consumers have high demands for convenience and instant gratification. They actively participate in the interactive nature of influencer live-streaming commerce and are easily influenced by promotional activities such as limited-time discounts and flash sales in live streams. However, as their consumption psychology matures, young consumers are becoming more rational in their decision-making, especially when purchasing high-value or large items. They tend to conduct more thorough comparisons and evaluations, focusing not only on price but also on product quality, brand reputation, and after-sales service. Therefore, understanding the consumption habits and psychology of young consumers is crucial for developing effective live-streaming commerce strategies

(c) Relevant Theories

To better understand the impact of influencer live-streaming commerce on Chinese young consumers, this study will be based on three theoretical frameworks: Grounded Theory, the Consumer Decision-Making Process Model, and the 4C Marketing Theory. Grounded Theory provides a method for building theory from data by systematically collecting and analyzing qualitative data on consumer behavior, revealing the complex psychological processes from initial exposure to live streams to final purchase decisions [12]. Researchers can use Grounded Theory to deeply explore the key influencing factors in influencer live-streaming commerce and construct a theoretical model that reflects real-world conditions.



The Consumer Decision-Making Process Model divides consumer purchasing behavior into five stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior [13]. In the context of live-streaming commerce, influencers' recommendations and live-stream content significantly impact consumer decision-making at each stage. For instance, product demonstrations and consumer reviews in live streams can help viewers recognize needs and complete information searches, while limited-time offers and discounts can accelerate viewers' purchase decisions. Understanding this model can help businesses optimize live-stream content, improve product display strategies, and increase sales conversion rates.

The 4C Marketing Theory provides a consumer-oriented marketing strategy framework that emphasizes meeting consumer needs, reducing purchasing costs, improving convenience, and enhancing communication to achieve market goals [14]. In influencer live-streaming commerce, brands need to precisely position their products to meet the needs of specific consumer groups; reduce consumers' purchasing costs through promotional activities and additional services; improve purchasing convenience through easy shopping links and real-time interaction; and strengthen communication through the two-way interaction between influencers and viewers, thereby increasing customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. This theory provides a theoretical basis for businesses to formulate more effective marketing strategies in live-streaming commerce.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

(a) Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research method to collect data through in-depth interviews, aiming to explore the impact of influencer live-streaming commerce on the consumption behavior of Chinese youth. First, relevant literature on influencer live-streaming commerce and consumer behavior was reviewed to establish a theoretical foundation and understand the achievements and gaps in existing research. The literature includes academic papers, market research reports, and industry white papers, with selection criteria based on relevance, authority, and timeliness.

The primary data for this study was collected through in-depth interviews with young consumers aged 18 to 35 who have experience with influencer live-streaming commerce. The selection of interviewees considered sample diversity and representativeness, covering consumers from different occupations and educational backgrounds. Semi-structured interview outlines were used to ensure flexibility and focus in the interviews. The interview content mainly involved the factors influencing influencer live-streaming commerce and their specific effects on consumers' purchasing behavior.

Data analysis was conducted using Grounded Theory. First, open coding was performed to identify key concepts and themes from the interview transcripts. Then, axial coding was used to categorize these concepts into higher-level categories and establish relationships between them. Finally, selective coding was employed to form a theoretical model, revealing the core influencing factors and mechanisms of influencer live-streaming commerce on youth consumption behavior. The research results will integrate these influencing factors with the Consumer Decision-Making Process Model to analyze their roles in the stages of need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase evaluation, ultimately proposing marketing strategy recommendations based on the 4C Marketing Theory

(b) Research Subjects

The research subjects of this study are young consumers aged 18 to 35, who are the main consumer group in live-streaming commerce, with high internet usage frequency and purchasing power. To ensure sample diversity and representativeness, the subjects include consumers of different genders, occupations, educational levels, and consumption backgrounds, ensuring that the research results have broad applicability.

A total of 21 qualified young consumers were selected for in-depth interviews. The interview content covered their habits of watching influencer live streams, reactions to product recommendations, interactive experiences, and how these factors influenced their purchasing decisions (Table 1),

Table 1. Basic Information of Interview Subjects analyzed by author

No.	Gender	Age	Occupation	Education	Purchase Frequency (per month)
1	Male	23	Student	Undergraduate	5
2	Female	28	Marketing Manager	Master's	6
3	Male	31	Software Engineer	Undergraduate	4
4	Female	22	Administrative Assistant	College	8
5	Male	25	Freelancer	Undergraduate	5
6	Female	35	Teacher	Master's	7



No.	Gender	Age	Occupation	Education	Purchase Frequency (per month)
7	Male	27	Bank Employee	Undergraduate	3
8	Female	21	Student	College	9
9	Male	30	Project Manager	Undergraduate	6
10	Female	24	Advertising Planner	Undergraduate	7
11	Male	26	Accountant	Undergraduate	4
12	Female	29	HR Manager	Master's	5
13	Male	32	Restaurant Manager	College	6
14	Female	20	Student	Undergraduate	8
15	Male	34	Sales Representative	Undergraduate	3
16	Female	25	Graphic Designer	Undergraduate	5
17	Female	31	PR Manager	Master's	6
18	Female	23	Journalist	Undergraduate	7
19	Male	28	Data Analyst	Master's	4
20	Female	22	Student	College	8
21	Female	33	Project Manager	Undergraduate	7

RESULTS

(a) Identification of Influencing Factors

Through the analysis of interview data using Grounded Theory, this study identified eight key factors influencing the purchasing behavior of young consumers. These factors include influencer impact, interactivity of live streaming, promotional methods, group conformity, word-of-mouth (WOM) evaluations, perceived value, perceived trust, and online purchase convenience.

Influencer Impact is the primary factor that attracts consumers' attention to products. The popularity, expertise, and personal charm of influencers determine their influence on social media. High-profile influencers can more easily attract a large audience to their live streams, enhance product exposure, and increase audience trust and purchase intention through their professionalism.

Interactivity of Live Streaming significantly enhances consumers' information acquisition and engagement through instant feedback and efficient interaction. The frequency of interactions between influencers and viewers during live streaming, the timeliness of responses, and the entertainment value of interactive content enable viewers to gain a deeper understanding of the products, increasing their interest in making a purchase.

When evaluating and selecting products, promotional methods play a crucial role. Limited-time discounts, gifts, and lottery draws not only increase the attractiveness of the products but also create a sense of urgency that drives consumers to make purchasing decisions.

Group Conformity is also prominent in the consumer decision-making process. When consumers observe the purchasing behavior of other viewers in the live stream, they are easily influenced by the herd mentality, making them more likely to purchase widely accepted products. This group effect further reinforces consumers' purchase intentions during live streams.

Word-of-Mouth (WOM) Evaluations are key factors that influence post-purchase behavior. Consumer feedback and evaluations after purchase, disseminated through social media and e-commerce platforms, have a significant impact on the decisions of other potential consumers. Positive WOM evaluations can enhance the credibility and attractiveness of products, while negative evaluations may weaken consumer trust.

Perceived Value is reflected in the appeal of a product's features and added value to consumers. Detailed demonstrations in live streams allow consumers to perceive the actual utility and added value of products more clearly, thereby increasing their confidence in making a purchase.

In addition, Perceived Trust plays a decisive role in consumers' final purchase decisions. During live streaming, consumers develop a sense of trust in the products and the influencer through observation of the influencer's behavior and language, which reduces the perceived risk and prompts them to make a purchase.

Finally, Online Purchase Convenience is a key factor in converting consumers' purchase intentions into actual buying behavior. Convenient ordering processes and diverse payment options enable consumers to quickly complete their purchase decisions, thereby increasing overall conversion rates.



Through the systematic analysis of these influencing factors, this study provides important theoretical support for understanding the impact of influencer live-streaming commerce on young consumers' purchasing behavior and offers practical references for businesses to develop more effective marketing strategies.

(b) Specific Roles in the Consumer Decision-Making Process

In the model of influencer live-streaming commerce, different key factors play distinct roles at various stages of the consumer decision-making process. First, in the awareness stage, consumers begin to recognize their needs and pay attention to related products, where the impact of influencers is particularly important. High-profile and charismatic influencers can effectively attract viewers to the live stream and quickly enhance brand exposure and consumer interest by showcasing the unique selling points and use cases of the products. This initial awareness lays the foundation for consumers' subsequent purchasing behavior.

Next, in the information search stage, consumers actively seek more information about the products to make more informed purchasing decisions. At this stage, the interactivity of live streaming and perceived value play crucial roles. High interactivity during live streams can enhance consumers' understanding and trust in the products through instant feedback, live Q&A sessions, and viewer interactions. Furthermore, detailed demonstrations of product functions and quality by influencers increase consumers' perceived value, encouraging them to search for more information and deepen their interest in the products.

In the evaluation stage, consumers compare and evaluate different product options to select the one that best meets their needs. At this stage, promotional methods and group conformity become decisive factors. Limited-time discounts, gifts, and other promotional strategies significantly increase product attractiveness. Moreover, when consumers observe the purchasing behavior of other viewers, they tend to be influenced by the herd mentality, making them more inclined to choose widely accepted products. This group effect not only accelerates the decision-making process but also significantly increases purchase conversion rates.

In the purchase decision stage, consumers make their final purchasing decision, where perceived trust and online purchase convenience are critical. The professional conduct and sincere expression of influencers during the live stream enhance consumers' trust in the products, reducing their perceived risk and making them more confident in making a purchase decision. Additionally, a convenient online purchase process and diverse payment options further simplify the buying steps, enabling consumers to quickly and easily complete their purchase, thereby improving the overall effectiveness of live-streaming sales.

Finally, in the post-purchase behavior stage, consumers' post-purchase experiences and evaluations are fed back to other potential consumers through social media and e-commerce platforms, forming a process of WOM dissemination. Positive post-purchase experiences often translate into favorable WOM evaluations, which further enhance the market competitiveness of the product and attract more consumers to join the purchasing chain in influencer live-streaming commerce. Conversely, negative experiences may weaken the reputation of both the product and the influencer, affecting future sales (see table 2).

Table 2. Correspondence table between influencing factors and decision stages analyzed by author

Decision Stage	Key Influencing Factors	
Awareness Stage	Influencer Impact	
Information Search Stage	Interactivity, Perceived Value	
Evaluation Stage	Promotional Methods, Group Conformity	
Purchase Decision Stage	Perceived Trust, Online Purchase Convenience	
Post-Purchase Behavior Stage	Word-of-Mouth Evaluations	

In summary, the various influencing factors in influencer live-streaming commerce play specific roles in different stages of the consumer decision-making process, collectively impacting the entire process of consumer awareness, information search, evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. These findings provide important insights for businesses to develop more targeted marketing strategies, helping them achieve better market outcomes in influencer live-streaming commerce.

(c) 4C Marketing Strategies

Based on the eight key factors identified in the consumer decision-making process model and their specific roles at different stages, this section classifies and elaborates on these strategies according to the 4C Marketing Theory to formulate more targeted and effective marketing strategies. The 4C Marketing Theory includes Consumer Needs, Cost, Convenience, and Communication. The following are detailed strategies and classifications for each dimension:

Consumer Needs

Meeting consumer needs is central to developing effective marketing strategies. Businesses need to design and implement marketing activities based on the specific needs of their target consumers. First, collaborating with influencers to create customized content is an effective strategy. By selecting influencers whose popularity aligns with the product positioning and target audience and co-developing content with them, businesses can maximize the influencer's impact and credibility. Such customized content should focus on the product's core selling points,



such as unique features and use cases, and be designed to attract attention through engaging short videos or live-streaming programs, thereby enhancing brand awareness and attractiveness. Additionally, conducting product comparison reviews is also an effective strategy. Detailed demonstrations of the actual performance and key features of products during live streams can help consumers understand the unique selling points of the products, increasing their confidence in making a purchase. Using high-definition cameras and professional live-streaming teams to ensure content quality and accuracy can further enhance consumer trust in the products. Finally, establishing long-term partnerships with influencers and building the influencer's personal brand can also effectively enhance the perceived trust of the products. By providing regular product training to ensure influencers can accurately convey product information and leveraging the influencer's social media influence to expand product promotion, businesses can maintain and enhance brand image in the long term. By comprehensively utilizing these strategies, businesses can not only more precisely meet consumer needs but also enhance their market competitiveness.

Cost

Cost is a critical factor in influencing consumer purchase decisions. To effectively attract consumers and increase sales conversion rates, businesses can optimize this aspect through a series of cost management and promotional strategies. First, businesses can issue discount coupons or promo codes on live-streaming platforms. This strategy not only immediately attracts viewers to purchase during the live stream but also encourages viewers to search for more product information and make purchasing decisions. By clearly communicating promotional information and using on-screen pop-ups to remind viewers, businesses can effectively increase participation in promotional activities. Additionally, setting up purchase incentive activities is an effective cost management strategy. For example, businesses can launch limited-time group buying activities during the live stream and stimulate viewers' purchase desire by showing the number of group purchases and remaining stock in real time. Encouraging viewers to invite friends to participate in group buying can expand the activity's impact, while group buying incentives make it easier for consumers to make purchasing decisions when they see others buying. These strategies can effectively control costs while increasing purchase motivation and improving sales conversion rates, thereby boosting business performance.

Convenience

Convenience plays an important role in enhancing consumer purchase decisions. Businesses can significantly improve the consumer shopping experience by enhancing convenience in various ways. First, during live streams, setting up interactive games such as quizzes with prizes and raffles can effectively attract audience participation and increase their interest and loyalty to the brand. These engaging interactions not only increase audience engagement but also enhance their understanding of product information. Moreover, to further optimize the shopping experience, businesses should simplify the online ordering process, ensure diverse payment options, and provide one-click purchase features. Reducing the steps and time required for consumers to complete the purchase process can significantly improve the user experience. Especially during live streams, immediate interaction and promotional activities can encourage viewers to place orders quickly when they see a product they like. By implementing these convenience strategies, businesses can not only improve purchase conversion rates but also strengthen consumer satisfaction and loyalty to the brand.

Communication

Effective communication is a key factor in enhancing the relationship between the brand and consumers, significantly increasing consumer brand loyalty and satisfaction. Businesses should establish deep connections with consumers through multiple channels and encourage them to share their purchasing experiences and provide feedback. Specifically, businesses can invite consumers to share their usage experiences and provide feedback via email, SMS, or social media, offering coupons or points as rewards to incentivize them to participate in reviews. Establishing a dedicated after-sales service team to promptly respond to consumer questions and feedback is another important measure to enhance consumer satisfaction. By actively inviting consumers to share their usage experiences and provide positive reviews, businesses can further enhance brand credibility and attractiveness. Additionally, businesses should utilize social media and e-commerce platforms' review systems to actively collect and showcase consumers' positive feedback, strengthening the trust of other potential consumers. This two-way communication strategy can effectively promote positive feedback and WOM dissemination among consumers while building a stronger relationship between the brand and consumers, thus driving the brand's long-term development.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the factors influencing youth consumption behavior in the context of influencer live-streaming commerce and proposed feasible marketing strategies based on these factors. Through in-depth analysis of interview data, eight key influencing factors were identified: influencer impact, interactivity of live streaming, promotional methods, group conformity, word-of-mouth (WOM) evaluations, perceived value, perceived trust, and online purchase convenience. These factors play different roles in the consumer decision-making process, from enhancing brand awareness and facilitating information search to influencing product evaluation and driving final purchase decisions. Specifically, influencer impact is crucial in the awareness stage, live streaming interactivity and perceived value are important in the information search stage, promotional methods and group conformity play a role in the



evaluation stage, and perceived trust and purchase convenience directly affect purchase decisions. Post-purchase WOM evaluations have a long-term impact on the brand's and product's reputation.

Based on these findings, this study formulated targeted marketing strategies according to the 4C Marketing Theory (Consumer Needs, Cost, Convenience, and Communication). In terms of meeting consumer needs, businesses can enhance product attractiveness and market competitiveness through customized content creation, product comparison reviews, and influencer personal brand building. In cost management, businesses can effectively control costs and attract more consumers through discount coupon issuance and group buying incentive activities. In terms of convenience, optimizing the online ordering process and adding interactive games can significantly improve the consumer shopping experience. At the communication level, businesses should encourage consumers to share their experiences and provide quality after-sales service to enhance brand loyalty and positive WOM.

Future research could explore the differences in user behavior and marketing effectiveness across different live-streaming platforms, helping businesses choose the most suitable platforms for marketing. Additionally, cross-cultural research could reveal the application effects of influencer live-streaming commerce in different countries and cultural contexts, aiding businesses in formulating more globally competitive marketing strategies. With the advancement of technology, the impact of new technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) on live-streaming commerce is also worthy of further study to optimize the consumer shopping experience. Finally, evaluating the long-term effects of influencer live-streaming commerce, particularly its impact on brand loyalty and repurchase rates, will provide important references for businesses' long-term strategies.

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