

An Analysis of the Motivations for Impulsive Buying in Live-Streamed Online Retail

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ABSTRACT: Driven by digital e-commerce and nationwide mobile internet development, live-stream retail has become a dominant online shopping channel with huge transaction volume. As an interactive real-time retail format that distinguishes itself from static traditional online stores, it reconstructs the whole consumption decision chain of ordinary consumers and reshapes the boundary between entertainment and commodity trading in digital scenarios. Supported by real-time two-way audience interaction, immersive multi-angle product demonstration, exclusive live-only discounts and lively broadcast atmosphere, live streaming reshapes consumers' traditional offline and online purchasing decision-making logic. Unlike conventional e-commerce pages only equipped with static pictures and text, interactive live broadcast scenes continuously interfere with users' rational cost-benefit judgment and trigger numerous unplanned impulsive purchases. This paper systematically sorts out and analyzes four core driving factors of unplanned purchase behavior in live-stream scenarios: immersive live environment, streamer emotional influence, platform scarcity marketing and consumers' inherent psychological traits shaped by social culture. It fully summarizes audiences' complete psychological change path from casual browsing to blind consumption, and puts forward differentiated targeted suggestions for individual consumers, live-stream operation platforms and industrial supervision regulators respectively. The research conclusions provide solid operable theoretical and practical references for standardizing chaotic live marketing and guiding rational public consumption habits, and also effectively enrich the application boundary of classic consumer behavior and behavioral economics theories within the emerging digital retail track.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid rise of short video platforms and real-time live streaming integrates product display, sales explanation, real-time consultation and order payment into one continuous scene, greatly shortening users' whole consumption process. The one-stop consumption mode breaks the split shopping links of traditional online shopping such as independent searching, multi-platform comparison and separated payment links, and drastically cuts down the time cost required for consumers to complete a whole shopping decision cycle. Traditional online shopping requires consumers to take the initiative to search goods and conduct multi-store price comparison, which reserves sufficient buffer time for rational thinking and effectively restrains impulsive purchasing willingness. In contrast, live stream rooms only provide passive information input and leave no independent screening space for viewers, making audiences passively accept the sales information arranged by streamers and platforms without active information screening behavior.

Live streaming sales have become core growth business for all major internet platforms. Industry data shows over 60% orders generated in live rooms are unplanned impulsive purchases. Professional streamers, celebrities and offline store operators all participate in live sales, expanding the coverage of live shopping and covering consumer groups of all ages ranging from student groups to middle-aged and elderly buyers. Most commodities recommended in live rooms are non-essential products such as cosmetics, fashion apparel and small home appliances, whose sales rely more on emotional stimulation rather than rigid daily living demands. Such non-rigid goods feature low decision-making threshold and high emotional susceptibility, so they are far more likely to trigger impulsive purchase intentions under the multi-dimensional stimulation of live broadcast atmosphere.

Existing consumer behavior studies confirm that situational atmosphere and human interaction significantly interfere with individual consumption decisions, yet few papers integrate multi-dimensional live-

stream influencing factors into a complete systematic analytical framework. Most existing literature only conducts single-factor research on live shopping incentives, lacking integrated research combining scene, people, marketing and individual internal psychology. Many scholars explore the general rules of impulsive consumption in live commerce, and Chen (2024) systematically sorts out its overall formation path from a macro perspective. This paper dismantles the multi-layer formation mechanism of unplanned purchase behavior layer by layer to make up for the single-factor analysis deficiency of previous research. Studying such internal consumption logic helps enrich the application of behavioral economics in digital retail and supports long-term standardized development of the live-stream industry, meanwhile laying a theoretical foundation for subsequent large-scale empirical questionnaire research and quantitative regression analysis related to live impulsive consumption.

II. LIVESTREAM SHOPPING ENVIRONMENT: IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE IMPAIRS RATIONAL DECISION-MAKING

Live-stream shopping features three core attributes: high audience participation, fast product iteration and continuous emotional stimulation, all of which inherently weaken consumers' independent rational judgment capacity. These unique environmental characteristics jointly construct a closed perceptual field that isolates users from objective cost-benefit thinking, and continuously suppresses the activation of rational cognitive mechanisms during the whole browsing process.

Static commodity pictures on shopping websites can only show fixed product angles, while live streaming supports real-time interactive trial demonstration with real-time audience feedback. Streamers adjust display angles and demonstrate product functions based on viewers' comments to deliver vivid three-dimensional product information, cutting users' information acquisition cost but greatly shortening their independent evaluation cycle. Wang (2023) states that frequent product switching and interactive comment atmosphere in short-video live rooms significantly reduce users' rational evaluation capacity. Rolling real-time comments and order pop-ups deliver continuous positive buying feedback and form a strong group purchase atmosphere, triggering typical herd mentality of "group buying frenzy" (Long & Xu, 2026). Visible mass purchasing signals on the screen eliminate part of users' information asymmetry, and amplify the psychological tendency of following public purchasing choices to avoid missing preferential opportunities.

Affected by universal FOMO psychology prevalent among internet users, viewers tend to blindly follow other buyers without checking whether products match their personal practical demands. Each product only stays on screen for 3 to 8 minutes on average, leaving users no sufficient time for cross-store price comparison, parameter contrast and demand matching judgment. Such extremely tight product replacement rhythm compresses the limited time for rational analysis, which acts as a critical environmental inducement for mass unplanned orders.

Continuous multi-dimensional audio-visual stimulation keeps viewers in a long-term emotionally excited state. Upbeat background music, hosts' passionate speaking tone and interactive red envelope activities jointly build a closed entertainment space separated from daily trivial pressure and work anxiety. In such relaxed mental states, rational judgment can hardly restrain shopping desire, which creates sufficient external objective conditions for the occurrence of unplanned orders. When users shift their initial browsing purpose from targeted shopping to casual entertainment, the inhibitory effect of rational thinking on consumption desire will drop sharply, greatly lifting the probability of impulsive payment behavior.

III. STREAMERS' PERSONAL INFLUENCE: EMOTIONAL TRUST WEAKENS CONSUMER VIGILANCE

Streamers act as the core medium connecting commodities and consumers in live broadcast scenarios, and their accumulated audience trust and emotional recognition serve as a major human inducement of impulsive buying behavior. The close emotional bond built between streamers and audiences is an exclusive advantage of live retail that static graphic e-commerce pages cannot replicate, and it constitutes the core human factor driving unplanned transactions.

High-quality long-term streamers gain stable audience trust via sincere objective product evaluation and transparent after-sales commitments without exaggerated propaganda. Casual daily chatting, targeted audience Q&A and on-camera real product testing shorten psychological distance between both sides and build deep emotional identity with loyal fans. Once stable trust is formed, consumers will largely ignore potential product quality and functional risks, and directly regard streamers' commodity recommendations as reliable

unified shopping standards. This psychological trust transfer effect enables consumers to transfer their favorable impression of streamers to all goods they recommend in live rooms.

Anchor charisma is a core driving factor of impulsive purchase intention, and Zhao (2023) explains how personal charm builds emotional trust to lower consumers' risk vigilance towards commodities. Professional vertical streamers with industry expertise accurately capture mass consumer pain points and implicitly guide audiences to generate instant purchasing willingness through scene-based product experience. Many loyal fans buy goods merely to offer emotional support to their favorite streamers, completely ignoring the actual practical value of purchased products to themselves. This kind of affective consumption based on identity belonging has no direct correlation with the functional utility of commodities themselves.

Celebrity anchors gain initial trust through long-term accumulated public fame and audience popularity, while vertical industry KOLs win professional recognition via detailed multi-brand product comparison analysis. Though their trust-building paths differ significantly, both groups can effectively eliminate consumers' inherent psychological defense against shopping risks and accelerate the completion of unplanned transactions. Different trust formation modes will produce differentiated stimulation intensity for audiences of different age groups and consumption levels.

IV. PLATFORM MARKETING STRATEGIES: SCARCITY AND URGENCY CREATED BY TIME-LIMITED AND QUANTITY-RESTRICTED PROMOTIONS

All mainstream live e-commerce platforms design systematic scarcity marketing mechanisms based on classic loss aversion theory in behavioral economics to create continuous urgent shopping pressure for users. Loss aversion theory points out that individuals feel stronger psychological pain from loss than pleasure from equivalent gain, which can fully explain users' panic buying behavior facing limited-time and limited-quantity live benefits.

Live rooms widely adopt countdown flash sales, limited total stock and live-exclusive discounts to highlight the unique temporality of platform preferential policies. Scarcity promotion is the most mainstream marketing tool in live streaming, and Li (2024) analyzes how limited-time discounts trigger audiences' intense emotional consumption responses. Driven by FOMO psychology, consumers abandon comprehensive rational cost analysis and finish payments rapidly under dual pressure of real-time time countdown and continuous stock shortage reminders. Platforms deliberately strengthen the exclusive attribute of live-only discounts to form obvious information gaps between live rooms and ordinary commodity detail pages.

Platforms launch tiered full-reduction rules, free matching gifts and stackable multi-layer coupons to lift users' single-session average consumption amount. Many users add unnecessary irrelevant goods to shopping carts just to meet the minimum consumption threshold for enjoying full-reduction benefits. These layered promotional mechanisms continuously lower users' psychological decision barriers and amplify their inner desire for instant shopping gratification. All marketing rules deliberately compress users' independent thinking time, disrupt pre-planned shopping plans and greatly boost the overall volume of impulsive orders. Multi-level preferential overlays dilute consumers' sensitivity to the unit price of single commodities and further weaken rational cost measurement consciousness.

V. CONSUMERS' INHERENT PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAITS: EMOTIONAL CONSUMPTION AND PURSUIT OF NOVELTY

Various external live-stream environmental and marketing stimuli are merely superficial inducing factors; consumers' inherent internal psychological needs formed by social culture fundamentally cause impulsive buying behavior. All external sales stimulation can only exert a significant influence on shopping decisions on the premise of matching users' inherent psychological demands.

Young people aged 18–35 form the absolute core live-stream audience and treat live watching as daily leisure entertainment rather than pre-planned targeted shopping. Liu (2023) explores young groups' unique internal psychological drivers and corresponding rational consumption guidance measures. Most users browse live streams in fragmented spare time such as after work and before rest without clear preset shopping lists, and their self-control capacity weakens sharply under relaxed leisure moods, making them extremely vulnerable to all kinds of sales inducements broadcast in live rooms. The leisure mental state greatly reduces the activation degree of individuals' long-term self-control cognitive mechanism.

Trending viral goods recommended by streamers satisfy young people's innate curiosity and daily social interaction demands among peers. Many consumers buy popular internet commodities to keep up with mainstream fashion trends and acquire shared communication topics for daily social interaction, which belongs to typical herd-driven emotional consumption. Shopping also acts as an effective release channel for accumulated long-term work and life pressure, and temporary psychological satisfaction brought by payment behavior remarkably raises the occurrence possibility of unplanned purchases. Such widespread internal emotional motivation exists extensively among young consumer groups, and becomes the essential internal prerequisite for all external live marketing stimuli to take effect. The dual demands of emotional relief and social identity constitute the permanent inner source of young people's frequent impulse shopping behavior

VI. CONCLUSION

Unplanned purchase behavior in live-stream e-commerce stems from four interrelated and mutually interactive factors: immersive live broadcast atmosphere, emotional influence carried by streamers, scarcity marketing adopted by platforms, and the inherent psychological traits of consumers. The four dimensions form a complete closed psychological driving chain from external environmental stimulation to individual internal demand feedback, and jointly promote the mass emergence of unplanned online transactions. Fully enclosed multi-sensory live broadcast scenes weaken the capacity of users to conduct independent rational thinking. Long-term trust built between viewers and streamers lowers the awareness of users regarding potential commodity risks. Various time-limited preferential policies create a widespread sense of purchasing urgency among audiences. The demands for entertainment and social interaction among young demographic groups ultimately generate large volumes of unplanned orders.

Moderate impulsive consumption can effectively activate retail commodity circulation and inject lasting vitality into the whole digital retail industry chain. However, excessive blind shopping without demand support brings a series of tangible adverse consequences, including piles of idle unused goods, serious social resource waste and sustained heavy personal financial burdens. Individual consumers ought to abide by a shopping principle centered on practical daily needs and strengthen self-discipline while watching live streams. Cultivating stable rational shopping awareness among users is the most fundamental long-term measure to curb excessive impulsive consumption phenomena.

Live-stream platforms should formulate unified standardized norms for promotional language and launch long-term dynamic real-time supervision mechanisms to limit exaggerated and false marketing rhetoric. Rational consumption reminder pop-ups popped up before payment pages can effectively cut down the quantity of unnecessary unplanned orders. Industrial regulators need to issue targeted standardized management standards to restrain over-reliance on single scarcity marketing and false commodity publicity in live rooms. Zhang (2024) summarizes the combined influence of live sales models and consumer psychology on the total volume of unplanned transactions. Joint coordinated collaboration among individual consumers, live-stream operation platforms and industrial supervision departments is indispensable for building a healthy, standardized and sustainable online consumption ecosystem for live commerce.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This paper adopts qualitative theoretical analysis as the core research method to systematically sort out the multi-layer driving factors of unplanned purchases in live streaming, two obvious research limitations restrict the depth and universality of the obtained research conclusions. The qualitative theoretical analysis adopted in this paper can clarify the internal logical correlation between each influencing variable, but cannot quantify the specific influence coefficient and contribution proportion of each factor through objective data statistics. First, the analysis only relies on existing mature consumer behavior theories and observable industrial phenomena, without supporting first-hand empirical data such as large-scale consumer questionnaires and standardized in-depth one-on-one interviews. No quantitative statistical test is carried out to verify the correlation strength and respective contribution weight of the four major influencing factors on impulsive purchasing intention, lacking objective data support to enhance the persuasiveness of research results. Second, the research analysis mainly focuses on young consumer groups while ignoring the differentiated consumption psychology and decision logic of middle-aged and elderly live audiences, which reduces the external validity and universal applicability of the research conclusions covering all age groups of online shoppers. The unique impulse generation logic of middle-aged and elderly groups under live broadcast scenarios remains to be supplemented and verified by follow-up targeted research.

For follow-up research directions, subsequent scholars can collect large-scale standardized first-hand questionnaire sample data, and use multiple regression statistical methods to quantify the specific influence

degree of live broadcast atmosphere, streamer charm and platform marketing on impulsive consumption intention. Researchers can also carry out horizontal comparative analysis across different age brackets, gender groups and diversified commodity categories such as daily necessities, fast fashion and luxury goods. In addition, targeted empirical research can be launched to explore how external industrial supervision policies and internal platform constraint rules adjust users' excessive impulsive purchasing behaviors, so as to put forward more accurate targeted governance suggestions for live-stream industry regulation and public rational consumption guidance. Follow-up studies can also further compare the significant difference of impulsive buying willingness between new short-term viewers and long-term loyal fans of the same streamer, so as to supplement the differentiated influence law of streamer trust on different audience groups. Horizontal comparative research on loyal fans and temporary casual audiences can further enrich and refine the theoretical framework of streamer emotional influence mechanism.

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