

The Effect of Opinion Leaders Characteristics in Livestreaming on Customers' Purchase Intention in China

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ABSTRACT

Advancements in technology have reshaped consumer purchasing behavior in e-commerce, with live streaming commerce in China increasingly driven by opinion leaders. This study examines their influence on purchase intention, focusing on platforms like Taobao Live, Douyin, and Kuaishou. Findings reveal that opinion leaders enhance perceived product value and reduce adoption barriers. Their fame boosts purchase intention among consumers favoring recognized figures, while professionalism strengthens trust in their recommendations. Community engagement via social media further amplifies this effect. As live streaming transforms e-commerce, consumers must discern credible influencers amid abundant marketing messages. This research offers practical insights for digital marketing professionals in China's evolving market.

KEYWORDS

Live streaming; E-commerce; Opinion leaders; Purchase intention; Influencer marketing

1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The rapid rise of digital technologies and online platforms has transformed consumer behavior in e-commerce over the past two decades, with China emerging as a leader in livestreaming commerce—a fusion of retail and interactive media (Wu & Yang, 2020). As the world's largest market for technological innovation, China's consumers readily adopt new platforms like Taobao Live and Douyin, where opinion leaders play a pivotal role. These influencers build trust but can also mislead consumers through exaggerated promotions, raising concerns about ethics and legality in a flourishing e-commerce landscape.

While prior research has explored opinion leaders' influence in traditional markets and social media, livestreaming commerce—an interactive, real-time platform—remains underexplored (Wu & Yang, 2020). This study investigates how opinion leaders shape purchase intention in China's livestreaming context, focusing on the mediating role of perceived value. By examining their impact on consumer emotions and product perceptions, this research clarifies the unique dynamics of livestreaming commerce, offering new insights into an evolving digital market.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent studies explore how opinion leaders (Key Opinion Leaders or KOLs) influence consumer decisions in Chinese e-commerce, emphasizing perceived value, perceived risk, and purchase intention. Trust, credibility, and emotional appeal enable KOLs to mitigate online purchasing risks (Vargo & Lusch, 2020). Research highlights that perceived value—encompassing functional benefits

and emotional validation—drives purchase intention, with KOLs enhancing both dimensions through effective communication.

Interactivity in livestreaming, such as Q&A sessions and polls, boosts engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty (Zhang & Li, 2022). These features strengthen emotional bonds between influencers and followers, fostering long-term relationships essential for digital marketplaces. Authenticity and consistent interaction further build trust, cultivating a loyal audience. The literature underscores KOLs' pivotal role in shaping behavior in platforms like Taobao Live and Douyin, suggesting businesses prioritize interactive strategies and credible influencers to maximize value and sales. This evolving field calls for adaptive marketing approaches addressing authenticity and consumer concerns.

3. STUDY CONTENT AND METHODS

3.1. Study Contents

This study examines how opinion leader characteristics in China's livestreaming commerce influence customer purchase intention, with perceived value as a mediator. It focuses on three objectives:

- 1) Influence of Opinion Leader Characteristics: Popularity, professionalism, and interactivity shape purchase intention. Popularity (recognition and following) builds trust and credibility, making consumers receptive to recommendations. Professionalism (expertise and knowledge) enhances trust and reduces perceived risks by providing reliable information. Interactivity (real-time engagement) fosters community and emotional bonds, boosting perceived value and impulsive buying.
- 2) Influence of Perceived Value: Perceived value, comprising functional (quality, utility) and social (status, identity) dimensions, drives purchase intention. Opinion leaders enhance functional value through demonstrations and social value by creating community and validation.
- 3) Mediating Role of Perceived Value: Perceived value bridges opinion leader characteristics and purchase intention. Consumer traits (e.g., age, preferences) influence value perception, which aligns with influencer credibility to increase buying intent.

3.2. Study Methods

A mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative techniques is employed. A survey targets 500 Chinese livestreaming commerce users (e.g., Douyin, Taobao Live), representing diverse ages, genders, and incomes. Variables include perceived value, risk, purchase intention, and trust in influencers, measured via Likert scales (Chen & Shen, 2021). The survey assesses online shopping habits and influencer perceptions to ensure generalizable findings.

3.3. Study Design

3.3.1. Influence of opinion leader characteristics on purchase intention

People who serve as opinion leaders play a vital role in influencing customer buying habits especially during livestream commercial sessions. The ability of influencers to direct purchase choices depends mostly on their three essential factors which include popularity alongside professionalism and interactivity. The three identified characteristics create straightforward pathways that affect how consumers intend to buy products. These three factors are therefore the independent variables.

(1) Popularity

People following the opinions of leaders at different levels consider popularity as the acknowledgment and admiration which others display toward their professional and social sphere. Consumer behavior response to opinion leaders heavily depends on the degree of popularity they

possess. Popular opinion leaders enhance trust in their advisory actions because their behavior serves as a socially validated example that guides consumer purchasing decisions. Endorsed by popular figures who serve as trend indicators their expressions gain credibility since they lead large following communities. Social validation from these consumers leads people to adopt their suggestions which raises the likelihood of buying products.

H1a: The popularity of opinion leaders positively influences customer purchase intentions

(2) Professionalism

Expertise and field-specific knowledge define how professional an opinion leader seems to be. Consumer trust and product recognition increase as opinion leaders maintain strong professional abilities since their authoritative presence makes them perceived as credible. This notion is supported by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Kitchen et al., 2014). People use two pathways for processing persuasive information when they engage in deeper thinking or superficial evaluations. Professionally delivered content uses the central route to processing because consumers engage with information from credible experts deeply. Consumers tend to purchase because the persuasive power of opinion leaders with high professionalism combines factual and trustworthy arguments.

H1b: The professionalism of opinion leaders positively influences customers' purchase intentions

(3) Interactivity

Interactivity refers to the level of engagement and real-time communication between opinion leaders and their audience. The combination of strong audience interaction enables social presence and trust to boost purchase intentions. This notion is supported by the Social Presence Theory (Yeboah et al., 2023). According to this theory the establishment of human connections through immediate communication stands as crucial for effective communication. The active exchange between opinion leaders and their followers creates social presence that develops trust and enhances relationship quality. As the relationship quality is enhanced, the consumers' purchase intentions are influenced positively.

H1c: The interactivity of opinion leaders positively influences customers' purchase intentions

3.3.2. The mediating role of perceived value

The connection between opinion leader characteristics and purchase intention depends strongly on customer-perceived value as an essential middle element. The consumer makes their assessment of product advantages versus expenses. The two components of perceived value are functional value and social value.

(1) Functional Value

Functional value refers to the practical benefits of a product, such as its quality, performance, and utility. People usually base their buying choices on functional attributes because such practical aspects determine how well the product serves their requirements. Product functional value perception gets improved through detailed explanations and effective demonstrations which opinion leaders provide to show practical benefits. Users' perceived product value increases when opinion leaders demonstrate the practical functions during real usage scenarios using their expertise combined with clear explanations.

The typical opinion leader in fitness presents how performance-enhancing supplements work through ingredient explanations combined with performance demonstrations. When manufacturers show how their products function these demonstrations give consumers a deeper knowledge of product features and enable them to determine how the offerings suit their individual requirements. Customer understanding of product function becomes more effective thus they develop different perceptions of value which leads to purchase decisions.

H2a: The popularity of opinion leaders positively enhances consumers' perceived functional value

H2b: The professionalism of opinion leaders positively enhances consumers' perceived functional value

H2c: The interactivity of opinion leaders positively enhances consumers' perceived functional value

(2) Social Value

Social value refers to the psychological and social benefits of a product, such as status, identity, and emotional satisfaction. Community and a sense of belonging emerge from opinion leaders when they work to improve social value. This dimension of value is increasingly significant in the context of influencer marketing, where opinion leaders play a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions. When consumers purchase products endorsed by Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), they often do so with the belief that these products will elevate their social status or enhance their identity within their peer groups. Therefore, social value becomes a motivating force that drives purchasing decisions, as individuals seek to align their consumer choices with their social aspirations and the lifestyles portrayed by influencers.

Moreover, the credibility of opinion leaders is crucial in establishing social value. Consumers are more likely to trust and follow the recommendations of influencers who have built a reputation for authenticity and expertise. When KOLs communicate genuine experiences and offer balanced views on products, they enhance their social credibility, which in turn amplifies the perceived social value of the products they endorse. As consumers increasingly rely on social proof, the endorsement of a product by a reputable influencer can significantly sway purchasing decisions, making it essential for brands to carefully select influencers who resonate with their target audience. This relationship underscores the importance of cultivating trust and transparency in influencer marketing, ensuring that the perceived social value effectively translates into increased purchase intentions.

H2d: The popularity of opinion leaders positively enhances consumers' perceived social value

H2e: The professionalism of opinion leaders positively enhances consumers' perceived social value

H2f: The interactivity of opinion leaders positively enhances consumers' perceived social value

3.3.3. Impact of Perceived Value on Purchase Intention

Perceived value including both functional and social, positively influences customers' purchase intentions.

H3a: Perceived functional value positively influences customers' purchase intentions

H3b: Perceived social value positively influences consumers' purchase intentions

3.4. Conceptual Framework

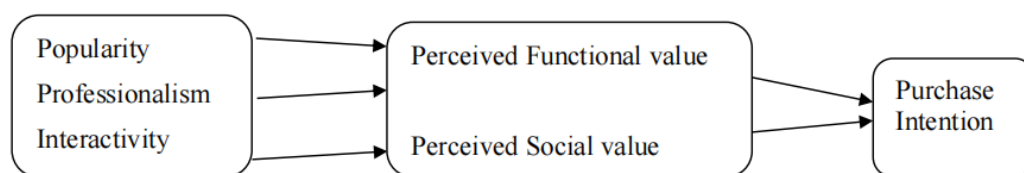


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Stimulus: Popularity, professionalism, interactivity (independent variables).

Organism: Perceived functional and social value (mediator).

Response: Purchase intention (dependent variable).

Grounded in the Theory of Consumer Value, opinion leaders enhance value through information, emotional bonds, and social identity.

3.5. Hypothesized Relationships

The theoretical model makes the following hypotheses

3.5.1. Direct effects

- (1) Customers' purchase intention is directly positively affected by three key opinion leader characteristics which include popularity, professionalism and interactivity.
- (2) Perceived functional and social value directly positively affects purchase intention

3.5.2. Mediating Effects

Perceived value mediates the relationship between opinion leader influence and purchase intention.

- (1) Popularity of an opinion leader positively affects both perceived functional and social value which results in an increased purchase intention
- (2) Professionalism of an opinion leader positively affects perceived functional and social value which results in an increased purchase intention
- (3) Interactivity of an opinion leader directly positively affects perceived functional and social value which results in an increased purchase intention.

4. DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLING

The data collection seeks to obtain valid and reliable measurements which will enable testing of hypotheses and answering research questions.

4.1. Target Population

The research participants are Chinese consumers whose activities include habitual use of Taobao Live along with Douyin (TikTok) and Kuaishou streaming platforms. Active users of livestream shopping platforms play a central role in online purchasing and look to KOLs who lead their purchase choices.

Inclusion Criteria:

- (1) The study includes participants who reach the age of 18 and above.
- (2) People who have bought products through livestream platforms within the previous six months should participate in the research.
- (3) Every participant needs to track at least one opinion leader who broadcasts on livestream.

4.2. Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process involves the following steps

(1) Questionnaire Distribution:

The researchers distribute the questionnaire through online platforms that include WeChat and QQ platforms as well as livestream platform communities. Chinese people widely use these platforms which offer access to target participants.

(2) Informed Consent:

Before starting the study participants receive a consent document which defines the research goals along with their freedom to participate and their responses' secure treatment. Proceeding with the questionnaire requires participants to strike agreement with the mentioned terms.

(3) Data Collection Period:

Data collection span extend throughout four weeks to secure sufficient information. Periodic alerts are sent to participants in order to motivate their involvement.

4.3. Correlation Matrix

The provided correlation matrix delivers significant information about how the variables Popularity (Pop), Professionalism (Prof), Interactivity (Int), Social Value (SV), Functional Value (FV), and Purchase Intention (CPI) are interconnected. All measured correlations exist at a strong level of significance in 0.01 (2-tailed) tests which demonstrate robust interconnection between variables. The strength of correlation relationships lies between moderate and strong level (0.45 to 0.72). The results indicate that the study variables maintain mutual relationships which shape their behavior within the research framework.

The variable Popularity (Pop) demonstrates the strongest connection among all variables and functions as the key component. Popularity shows the highest correlation with Interactivity (Int) and Functional Value (FV) since their relationship measures at $r=0.722$ and $r=0.716$. Commercial success of products links to Social Value ($r=0.684$) and Purchase Intention ($r=0.606$) values firmly establishing its essential role in consumer behavioral patterns. Professionalism (Prof) provides strong evidence of statistical associations between itself and Popularity ($r=0.696$) and Purchase Intention ($r=0.559$). The survey results show Interactivity ($r=0.722$) together with ($r=0.537$) has the strongest correlations which verifies how interaction and consumer involvement drive purchasing decisions.

Social Value (SV) exhibits moderate relationships with Functional Value (FV) (0.560) while linking to Purchase Intention (CPI) at 0.516 and FV also connects to CPI at 0.528. The results indicate Social Value together with Functional Value function as crucial elements that affect Purchase Intention although they might help explain the connection between independent variables (Pop, Prof, and Int) towards the dependent variable (PI). The high correlation values between independent variables demonstrate overlapping factors or direct effects between Pop and Prof ($r=0.696$) as well as Pop and Int ($r=0.722$) and Prof and Int ($r=0.512$). The results indicate no multicollinearity problems because the correlations remain below 0.8, which is typical for identifying this issue.

The identified research findings create meaningful business implications for organizations. The high correlations between Popularity and other elements indicate that focusing on increasing opinion leader popularity can create positive effects on Interactivity and Functional Value and Social Value before leading to Purchase Intention. Professionalism together with Interactivity forms a strong connection which influences Purchase Intention at the same pace as other factors in the study. The relationship between Functional Value and Social Value and Purchase Intention stands at a moderate level yet indicates these elements function as intermediary mechanisms for consumer behavior change through Popularity and Professionalism and Interactivity.

Table 1. Correlation Matrix

	Pop	Prof	Int	SV	FV	CPI
Pop	1	.696**	.722**	.684**	.716**	.606**
Prof		1	.512**	.451**	.484**	.559**
Int			1	.521**	.505**	.537**
SV				1	.560**	.516**
FV					1	.528**
CPI						1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Consumer purchase intention (CPI) receives direct and indirect influence from opinion leader interactivity (Int) through the mediating factors of functional value (FV) and perceived social value (SV) according to the Hayes Process Macro model. The direct impact (Effect=0.2260, $p<0.001$) demonstrates the natural power of interactive opinion leaders together with the comprehensive influence shown through indirect effects (Total Indirect Effect=0.1884, $p<0.001$) regarding perceived value as a mediating factor.

All variable relationships are positive hence mediation is complementary (“Statistical Mediation Analysis Using the Sobel Test and Hayes SPSS Process Macro by Soleman Abu-Bader, Tiffanie Victoria Jones : SSRN,” n.d.).

Table 2. All Variable Relations

Relationship Structural Path	p-value	Decision
Pop->SV->CPI + Pop->FV->CPI (mediating)	$p<0.001$	Acceptable
Pop->CPI (direct)	$p<0.001$	Acceptable
Prof->SV->CPI + Prof->FV->CPI (mediating)	$p<0.001$	Acceptable
Prof->CPI (direct)	$p<0.001$	Acceptable
Int->SV->CPI + Int->FV->CPI (mediating)	$p<0.001$	Acceptable
Int->CPI (direct)	$p<0.001$	Acceptable

95% confidence interval, 5000 bootstrap samples

Table 3. Summary of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Decision	Reason
H1a: The popularity of opinion leaders positively influences customer purchase intentions	Valid	Direct effect of Pop on CPI significant
H1b: The professionalism of opinion leaders positively influences customers' purchase intentions	Valid	Direct effect of Prof on CPI significant
H1c: The interactivity of opinion leaders positively influences customers' purchase intentions	Valid	Direct Effect of Int on CPI significant
H2a: The popularity of opinion leaders positively enhances consumers' perceived functional value	Valid	Mediating pathway of Pop through FV is positive
H2b: The professionalism of opinion leaders positively enhances consumers' perceived functional value	Valid	Mediating pathway of Prof through FV is positive
H2c: The interactivity of opinion leaders positively enhances consumers' perceived functional value	Valid	Mediating pathway of Int through FV is positive
H2d: The popularity of opinion leaders positively enhances consumers' perceived social value	Valid	Mediating pathway of Pop through SV is positive
H2e: The professionalism of opinion leaders positively enhances consumers' perceived social value	Valid	Mediating pathway of Prof through SV is positive
H2f: The interactivity of opinion leaders positively enhances consumers' perceived social value	Valid	Mediating pathway of Int through SV is positive
H3a: Perceived functional value positively influences customers' purchase intentions	Valid	All mediating pathways through FV to PI are positive
H3b: Perceived social value positively influences consumers' purchase intentions	Valid	All mediating pathways of SV to PI are positive

4.4. Qualitative Data Analysis

To conduct the qualitative research, open-ended questions were incorporated into the survey to collect detailed consumer feedback regarding their experiences with opinion leaders, product values, and livestream shopping practices. These responses were analyzed thematically to uncover insights into how opinion leaders influence consumer behavior and perceptions. The problem addressed by this qualitative research was to explore the underlying motivations and attitudes that drive consumer trust, engagement, and purchase intentions in the context of livestream shopping, which was not fully captured by the quantitative data.

4.5. Collection and Analysis Methodology

The qualitative data collection involved analyzing consumer responses to open-ended questions related to their interactions with opinion leaders during livestream shopping events. Each participant's response was examined and categorized into common themes to understand how opinion leaders affect consumer perceptions of product value and social influence. The themes that emerged from the qualitative responses were then cross-referenced with the quantitative data, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of how opinion leader characteristics (such as popularity and professionalism) correlate with purchase intentions.

The responses were coded and categorized into key themes: technological interactivity, professional competence, product value perception, social influence, and consumer trust. For example, many participants emphasized how real-time interactions with opinion leaders during livestreams made the shopping experience more enjoyable and trustworthy. One participant commented, "The way they answer questions and comments on livestreams makes me feel heard and respected." This sentiment was prevalent across many responses and reinforced the quantitative finding that higher levels of interactivity and trust positively correlate with purchase intentions.

5. RESULTS AND STATISTICS

The qualitative analysis revealed several important trends. Consumers highly appreciated opinion leaders who combined technological interactivity with professional expertise, suggesting that these two factors are central to creating a positive shopping experience. Responses indicated that consumers perceived products endorsed by opinion leaders as higher quality and more reliable. This aligns with the quantitative data, which showed a strong positive correlation between the Functional Value and Popularity of opinion leaders ($r = 0.716$), further supporting the idea that opinion leaders effectively communicate product value and functionality.

Moreover, many respondents highlighted the sense of community and social acceptance they gained through livestream shopping, which corresponds to the moderate correlation between Social Value and Purchase Intention ($r = 0.516$) observed in the quantitative data. One participant explained, "Purchasing products recommended by opinion leaders makes me feel like part of an exclusive group." This illustrates how social value, communicated through livestream platforms, can directly impact consumer behavior.

However, the qualitative feedback also revealed some limitations, particularly around the emotional and psychological effects of livestream shopping. Several consumers expressed feelings of stress or pressure, especially when dealing with time-limited offers and quick purchase deadlines. One respondent shared, "I feel like I'm rushed into buying something because of the countdown and limited time offers." This theme of impulsive buying was also reflected in the quantitative data, where a strong relationship was found between Interactivity and Purchase Intention ($r = 0.722$), suggesting that while interactivity can drive purchasing behavior, it may also create a sense of urgency that impacts decision-making.

Additionally, some consumers raised concerns about stock availability and the authenticity of opinion leaders' product recommendations. These issues were noted as potential barriers to consumer trust. One participant mentioned, "I sometimes wonder if the opinion leader is recommending products because they genuinely like them or because they are getting paid." This concern was reflected in the qualitative results, where a segment of participants questioned the transparency of opinion leader endorsements. This feedback highlights the need for greater transparency in the livestream shopping process, a point that could be addressed to improve consumer trust.

6. FINDINGS

The incredible prosperity of live-streaming commerce has greatly changed the realm of online shopping, especially in countries like China, where firms such as Taobao Live, Douyin as well as Kuaishou are the ones that have popularized the new cross-point of entertainment, marketing, and e-commerce (Wu & Yang, 2020). It is the main point of this study that opinion leaders the influencers and live-streaming hosts sufficiently or in the best way of all the aspects, really, have a significant role in the decision making process of the consumers. Through the utilization of their reputation and legitimacy, these figures, in turn, produce a trust-based setting in which buyers feel more secure about already having been involved in the purchase process and thus receive a first-personal firsthand guarantee of the purchase to be performed on the spot.

Moreover, the research emphasizes the ubiquity of perceived risk and perceived value in the well-informed choice of buying. The opinion leaders alter the customers' perceptions by presenting real-time tutorials and answering to the questions of the viewers, thus they reduce the risks and at the same time they raise the perceived value of the products. However, as these influencers are highly efficient in commanding the attention of the consumers, there are still challenges that the customers have to meet like the identification of trustworthy opinion leaders and the avoidance of hidden marketing activities that can deteriorate their trust.

Additionally, the results imply that consumers should acquire critical abilities to test how trustworthy are influencers, to evaluate the value dependence of products, and to take wise decisions when buying. This point of view is indispensable as it engenders consumers being confronted with several promotional means and time-bound offers while being present in live events (Gao, Y., & Zhang, W., 2021).

7. CONCLUSIONS

The study, in its conclusions, declares that live streaming commerce is a tribrid child of social media, entertainment, and e-commerce that is reshaping the consumer behavior landscape. Indirectly, therefore, the trust, provided by the trustees' experts, in the company, counters the tendency of consumers to trust

The optional combination of live broadcasting with shopping enables the creation of a lively and ever-changing space where a dialogue between the customer, the creator of the item, and the other person in-between the two of them takes place directly. However, these interactions are quite complicated as well, especially when it comes to the legitimacy of product recommendations.

One aspect which is very clear is the usage of the opinion initiators can be a really great asset of the consumer company connection through the promotion of sales. On the other hand, the reliability is a fundamental factor out of which the sharing of an influencer idea should immediately be above the follower mass. Not only content creators but, platforms as well need to manage a system that ensures interaction between users and their audiences in a transparent and responsible manner.

For the buyers themselves, they should make it a point to be more selective in their purchase habits and give preference to trustworthy sources that are more interested in helping them make an informed

decision than receiving a commission. Buyers should be encouraged to discuss the product and make independent decisions on their own. This will enable them to select only quality ones and they will also avoid being manipulated by psychological marketing tactics.

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