

Livestream shopping in the U.S.: An exploratory study

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Background. Livestreaming, the simultaneous broadcast and consumption of digital media in real-time, is one of the newest commerce trends based on interactive real-time virtual shopping events (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017). Unlike one-way communication between sellers and buyers in traditional e-commerce, livestreaming is designed for real-time interactions between livestreamers (hereafter streamers) and viewers, creating emotional value and an immersive shopping experience (Wohn et al., 2018). Livestreaming shopping has gained popularity globally with notable disparities across regions. For example, whereas China experienced estimated revenues of \$625 billion in 2023 (Statista, 2023b), the growth of livestream commerce in the U.S. lags behind with its estimated revenues reaching \$25 billion (Statista, 2023a).

Literature Review. The present study addresses two gaps in the current literature. First, extant literature has mainly focused on the motives of streamers and viewers to use livestreaming services and the effects of such services on purchase intent (e.g., Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020). However, research focusing on real-time interactivity, a prominent feature of livestreaming commerce, remains scarce (Liao et al., 2023). Second, existing research primarily focuses on livestreaming in Asian countries, arguably due to fast-growing livestreaming in Asia. Little is known about livestreaming in the U.S. context. Thus, this study aims to explore the characteristics of livestreaming shopping that facilitate relationship-building between streamers and viewers in the U.S. context. The theory of parasocial interaction (Labrecque, 2014) guided the conceptual development of relationship building in livestreaming in which viewers likely have an illusionary experience of a reciprocal personal relationship with streamers. One research question for the study has been raised: *What are the livestreaming characteristics currently available on U.S. livestreaming segments?*

Method. A content analysis of U.S. livestreaming shopping was conducted. Shows from Amazon Live on fashion and beauty were randomly selected and recorded during a 3-week period in January of 2023. Then, a coding guide for livestreaming was developed using established coding guides for television apparel shopping (Kim & Lennon, 2000) and online apparel shopping contexts (Kim et al., 2018). Ten livestreaming segments were used to revise and refine a coding guide for the study. During the refinement process, new variables were added after discussion such as product presentation modes and streamers' privatization strategies. The developed coding guide included 13 dimensions (streamer demographics to personalization strategies). After the coding guide was established, a single coder performed the coding in this study.

Results and Discussion. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data. A total of 42 Amazon livestreaming shows were content analyzed. The length of a single segment ranged from 16 minutes and 16 seconds to 101 minutes and 23 seconds. Most featured women's apparel (90.5%). Streamers were all female and most were married with children (81.6%). Over half of streamers were full-time micro-influencers (i.e., 10K-100K followers on Instagram). Streamers presented themselves as peers (54.8%), celebrities (33.6%), or product experts (11.9%). On average, 19.3 items and 11.7 brands were presented within one 50-minute-04-second-length video, thus, individual items get less than 2.6 minutes in the show. Unlike television shopping shows or apparel websites that rely on one-way transmission of product-related information, the live chat feature and interactive presentations were used to present product-related information. Live chat communication allowed one-on-one suggestions such as size suggestions (26.2%). In addition to traditional product presentations (e.g., hanger or flat presentation), interactive presentations (78.6%) were commonly used (e.g., real-time try-on demonstrations and photo-inserting) to assist viewers in visualizing the products.

Streamers used both product-focused and social-focused promotions to enhance interactive and immersive shopping experiences. The most common product-focused promotional strategies were affordability (81.0%) and quality (76.2%). For social-focused, the most common strategy was item popularity (64.3%), followed by upscale tastes (31.0%). For the shows using urgency marketing (52.4%), item scarcity (55.6%), and limited accessibility to promotion codes (38.1%) were used to generate urgency.

The key dimension that uniquely characterizes livestreaming, namely personalization strategy, emerged from the content analysis results. Personalization strategy captures a distinctive feature that constitutes interactive relationship building between streamers and viewers in livestream commerce. Personalization strategy was manifested in personal stories shared by streamers (Whitmer, 2019) including purchase experience (92.9%), occupation (90.5%), residence city (73.8%), family members (38.1%), personal struggles (19.0%), work life (19.0%), and age (7.4%). Mean time spent on audience interaction was 8 minutes 32 seconds, which includes random talk and time spent dealing with viewers' questions/requests related to purchasing. Size and color were the most common questions during the show (54.8%). The average time spent explaining functional product attributes was 9 minutes and 52 seconds.

Conclusions and Implications. The present study explored the characteristics of livestream apparel shopping in the U.S. context by content analyzing Amazon livestream shows. One of the major findings includes livestreaming features that promote parasocial relationships between streamers and viewers. The average time spent on audience interaction was about one minute less than the time spent explaining functional product attributes, suggesting that a core characteristic of livestream shopping is real-time bilateral communication. Personalization strategies were found to distinguish livestreaming shopping from other retail channels. Hence, streamers can utilize live chats to communicate about product attributes and they can share personal stories to build relationships with viewers. Findings of this study provide a snapshot of current livestream shows targeting U.S. consumers. The implications are as follows. First, this study provides theoretical contributions to the literature by exploring parasocial relationships and

personalization in livestreaming shopping. As well, it brings practical implications for building interactive and personalized shopping experiences in livestream commerce.

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