

What triggers you to buy?

Exploring the consumer trust and purchasing intention in livestreaming shopping

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1. Introduction

Livestreaming shopping has become extraordinarily popular in recent years in China. In this new form of online shopping, consumers buy products during a live video stream broadcasted by sellers. Although livestreaming shopping was already gaining ground in the last few years, it experienced explosive growth during COVID-19. Individuals' desire for socialization turned online during the lockdown and quarantine (Greenwald, 2020). Thus, in 2020, the total scale of China's livestreaming e-Commerce industry reached US\$136 billion, and the profit is expected to grow continuously in the future (Matrone, 2020). Although livestreaming shopping has remained an understudied area in the marketing literature, research on livestreaming shopping could extend the understanding of consumer trust and purchase intention, as it provides a new arena to explore these subjects.

Livestreaming shopping originated from traditional shopping websites such as Taobao in China. Later, it expanded to social media platforms, such as Twitch, Facebook, TikTok, etc. (Kharif & Townsend, 2020), creating profitable business opportunities for corporate and individual entrepreneurs (Kestenbaum, 2020). Livestreaming sellers include individuals, online influencers, and even celebrities, selling fashion clothes, cosmetics, food, household utilities, among others. In general, a livestreaming seller will broadcast several hours a day. The time for each product's demonstration varies from 5-15 minutes and depends on the viewer number, which can range to the millions for top sellers such as Li Jiaqi. If the livestreaming viewer number is large, the seller will shorten the demonstration time and extend the time for responding to consumers' questions and requests (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Livestreaming selling on Taobao.com

Most research has attributed the success of livestreaming shopping to its social presence (Sun et al., 2019), while a little includes parasocial interaction (PSI) (Ko & Chen, 2020). PSI refers to the viewers engaging in a one-sided intimate relationship with media figures and obtaining closeness and intimacy through such self-established interactions (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Social presence refers to the users' awareness of others' presence in an online context, which also can result in a sense of intimacy similar to that in interpersonal interactions (Rice, 1993; Tu, 2002), contributing to feelings of closeness and human warmth (Tu & McIsaac, 2002). Due to such emotional satisfaction, previous research in marketing demonstrates that PSI and social presence can shape consumer trust and lead to purchase intentions (Hess et al., 2009; Pavlou et al., 2007; Lim & Kim, 2011; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Prior research on livestreaming shopping also has noted similar mechanisms that PSI and social presence can respectively influence consumer trust in livestreaming sellers through their emotional satisfaction (Guo et al., 2021; Hu & Chaudhry, 2020; Ko & Chen, 2020). For instance, Hu and Chaudhry (2020) argue that consumers emotionally attach to the sellers if the interpersonal interactions appear to be friendly, and Guo et al. (2021) further address that friendly interactions include mutual understanding, reciprocal favors, and relationship harmony.

However, current research on consumer trust in livestreaming shopping appears to be fragmented rather than systematic, as a holistic theoretical framework applied to the livestreaming context has not been established yet. This is because PSI and social presence are often separately discussed, while these two factors co-exist in the livestreaming context. Similar to TV shopping, consumers watch livestreaming sellers' broadcasting videos where PSI encounters are created. But interacting with sellers in real-time enhances the sense of social presence, differing livestreaming shopping from TV shopping. For a consumer, livestreaming is a context where both PSI and social presence can be experienced. Therefore, studying livestreaming shopping needs to include both PSI and social presence, as the interaction of the two factors may play a role among consumers when establishing their trust.

Apart from consumer trust, another body of livestreaming shopping research focuses on purchase intention among consumers (Cai et al., 2018; Park & Lin, 2020; Sun et al., 2019; Xiang et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2020). To a large extent, livestreaming purchase intention is examined based on the perceived purchase values, in which utilitarian value and hedonic value are essential triggers for consumers to buy (Cai et al., 2018; Park & Lin, 2020). Meanwhile, other studies attribute livestreaming purchase intention to impulsive buying (Cheng, 2020; Xu et al., 2020). In a way, impulsive buying can be seen as satisfying a certain

emotional need through unplanned purchasing (Widagdo & Roz, 2021; Zheng et al., 2019), which might be in line with the concept of the perceived hedonic value (Cinjarevic et al., 2011). However, several topics deserve further investigation.

For one thing, the mechanism through which PSI and social presence in the livestreaming context shape the perceived purchase values remains unclear. Admittedly, livestreaming is a unique shopping context. Although it is a form of online shopping, products are displayed and explained with extensive live audio and video information, making it more similar to offline shopping. Besides, it is argued that the perceived utilitarian value links closely to the embedded shopping contexts (Sarkar, 2011). Hence, it means that the perceived utilitarian value may have a different meaning in the livestreaming context. For another, it is important to take the Chinese consumers' perspective into account as well. Currently, consumerism is pervasively promoted in Chinese society to stimulate domestic economic growth, but this country traditionally praises the less-spending and money-saving lifestyle (Backaler, 2010). Therefore, hedonism in consumption in China might be different from other countries.

As mentioned above, this research aims to bridge several gaps in the existing research on consumer trust and purchase intention in the context of livestreaming shopping. First, this research intends to provide a relatively holistic contextual structure by including both PSI and social presence under which the formation of consumer trust and purchase intention are discussed. Second, this research aims to connect consumer trust and purchase intention, as the mechanism that transmits "trust in sellers" to "purchase from the trusted sellers" remains unclear. Notably, in order to further explore purchase intention, this research will examine how the livestreaming shopping context shapes the perceived purchase values. Last, this research examines livestreaming shopping in the Chinese context, as livestreaming shopping is most popular and developed in China (Matrone, 2020). Hence, to obtain a good understanding of how consumer trust and purchase intention are established in livestreaming shopping, it is necessary to understand the experience of the consumers, for which a qualitative approach may be most appropriate. So far, however, prior research has mainly relied on consumer surveys to generalize the pattern (Cheng, 2020; Ko & Chen, 2020; Xiang et al., 2020), while more in-depth exploration of the consumer perspective is still lacking. Thus, the following research question and sub-RQs are central to this study:

RQ: How are consumer trust and the perceived purchase values (utilitarian and hedonic value) formed and developed through parasocial interaction (PSI) and social

presence in a livestreaming shopping context from the Chinese consumers' perceptions?

Sub RQ-1: How do Chinese consumers develop their emotional closeness and trust through PSI with livestreaming sellers?

Sub RQ-2: How do the experiences of PSI shape Chinese consumers' perceived utilitarian value and hedonic value of purchase?

Sub RQ-3: How do Chinese consumers develop their emotional closeness and trust through social presence in livestreaming shopping?

Sub RQ-4: How do the experiences of social presence shape Chinese consumer's perceived utilitarian value and hedonic value of purchase?

This research is the first attempt to explore consumer insights in a livestreaming context by addressing PSI and social presence's co-existence and unfold the underlying mechanisms which influence consumer trust and the perceived purchase values. By examining the consumers' perceptions, this research intends to provide consumers with more reflexivity in their attitudes and behaviors shaped by the livestreaming shopping context. Also, investigating consumers' insights can benefit future livestreaming sellers and business operators to perform with better efficiency.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Parasocial Interaction (PSI)

Horton and Wohl (1956) introduced the term parasocial interaction to describe an illusory-intimate relationship experienced by viewers responding to media figures, such as presenters, actors, or celebrities. Such interaction is “one-sided, nondialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible of mutual development” (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 215). Although parasocial relationships lack reciprocity, viewers feel that they “know” such a persona in a similar way as their chosen friends (p. 216). Thus, prior research on PSI emphasizes its one-sided, self-established, and pseudo-intimate nature (Giles, 2002) and the viewers’ fulfilled emotional needs through such relationships (Rubin & Step, 2000; Lim & Kim, 2011).

PSI has various effects on the attitudes and behaviors of viewers. First, it results in a “bond of intimacy,” which instantiates when viewers experience being “included” in a conversation (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 219). In particular, when a TV media figure bodily and verbally addresses the viewers, the intimate and connected feeling to the media figures intensifies (Stern, Russell, & Russell, 2007). Second, long-term exposure to the media figures strengthens viewers’ intention to maintain parasocial relationships, as well as viewers’ tendency to watch the medium content more often (Giles, 2002; Rubin & Step, 2000). Third, with repeated parasocial encounters, a viewer’s beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors may start to align with those of the media figure (Dibble et al., 2016). For instance, Rubin and Step (2000) find that PSI with a talk radio host affects listeners’ attitudes on societal issues and voting choices. Similarly, Lim and Kim (2011) discovered that PSI with TV shopping hosts increases elderly consumers’ perceptions that TV shopping is useful and convenient, resulting in their (re)purchases.

2.1.1. *PSI in the online context*

Compared to PSI in traditional media, viewers/users achieve a higher level of emotional closeness and intimacy through online PSI (Jin, Ryu, & Muqaddam, 2020; Kassing & Sanderson, 2009), as viewers perceive their parasocial relationships with online media figures as direct and real experiences (Welbourne & Grant, 2016). This is because the bidirectional nature of the Internet blurs boundaries for viewers to approach online media figures now (Tsiotsou, 2015). For instance, viewers can not only watch YouTubers’ videos

that simulate face-to-face interaction but also can send YouTubers comments and messages to directly approach them (Ferchaud et al., 2018). Sometimes, online celebrities interact with their followers by replying to them on social media. The possibility to interact with media figures shortens viewers' psychological social distance in the online context (Chung & Cho, 2017; Shan et al., 2020). Further, the interactivity facilitates the perception of "realness" from online PSI (Kurtin et al., 2018), resulting in a "heightened sense of closeness and familiarity created by two-way interaction with celebrities" (Click, Lee, & Holladay, 2013, p. 365). Nonetheless, the interaction between viewers and online celebrities is still parasocial, as most viewers' interaction with online celebrities is still one-sided rather than reciprocal. Meanwhile, the perceived "heightened sense of closeness" can effectively affect viewers' values, beliefs, and behaviors (Sakib et al., 2020; Xu & Pratt, 2018), which is commonly and strategically employed for influencers endorsement business on social media (Hu, Zhang, & Wang, 2017; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

2.1.2 PSI in the livestreaming shopping context

In an online commerce context, PSI has an effect on marketing and branding outcomes because viewers are likely to transfer their attitudes to beloved media figures toward the brands and products they endorse (Knoll et al., 2015; Yuan et al., 2019). Some argue from Heider's balance theory (1967) that humans are inclined to like what their beloved ones like, and that this effect will be stronger if the closeness and emotional attachment go deeper (Hess, 2000). Followers' attention will naturally go to the lifestyle and products that online celebrities like, and they will gradually adopt these (Blight et al., 2017). In other words, the emotional attachment may be expanded from celebrities to the brands and products endorsed by celebrities (Jin, 2018). Such perceived intimate relationships result in increased perceived trustworthiness, which translates into higher acceptance of persuasions (Phua, 2016). Therefore, the emotional attachment in PSI may positively affect consumer trust, engagement, and even brand loyalty in online commerce (Labrecque, 2014).

Previous studies on livestreaming shopping also indicate that PSI is a significant factor influencing consumer purchase intention (Ko & Chen, 2020; Xu et al., 2020), but there is a lack of a mechanism explaining why PSI in livestreaming leads to purchase intentions. Based on the previous literature, consumer trust may serve as a mediator in this mechanism (Guo et al., 2021; Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020). For example, Guo et al. (2021) reveal that consumer trust in products is affected by trust in sellers, and the trust in sellers is likely associated with the degree to which consumers identify themselves with sellers' aesthetics

and style (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020). Nonetheless, prior research has not clarified how consumer trust is formed and shaped by PSI in the livestreaming context. Livestreaming provides instant, short-term, and real-time broadcasted videos. It might be different from the traditional media contexts where a long-term and repetitive PSI encounter is necessary. Therefore, this research will first explore how PSI occurs and leads to consumer trust in livestreaming.

2.2. Social Presence

Social presence refers to the level of awareness of another person in an interaction and the consequent appreciation of an interpersonal relationship (Walther, 1992). In media research, social presence is seen as an inherent quality of communication medium where the medium can transmit social cues and salience of interpersonal interactions for users (Rice, 1993; Tu, 2002). It is argued that effective communication and interaction between any two parties mediated by technology set the precondition for social presence (Caspi & Blau, 2008). Hence, intimacy and immediacy are the keys for users to experience the social presence (Tu & McIsaac, 2002).

In online commerce, business operators gain their social presence to consumers by initiating fast, personal, and warm interactions and communication in an online mediated environment (Animesh et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2014). Through technological infrastructures such as virtual agents (Hess et al., 2009), personalized greetings (Pavlou et al., 2007), or chat (Qiu & Benbasat, 2005), online business operators keep consumers interested and engaged by conveying a sense of human warmth and sociability (Gefen & Straub, 2004; Hassanein et al., 2009). More importantly, social presence is found to be influential in shaping consumers' online purchase attitudes, decisions, and behaviors (Lu et al., 2016; Thorson & Rodgers, 2006), as consumers can gather information from online comments, reviews, and ratings to support their purchase decisions and reduce uncertainty (Amblee & Bui, 2011; Lu et al., 2016; Nadeem et al., 2020).

2.2.1. Social presence in the livestreaming shopping context

The social presence is ever stronger due to the technological infrastructure set in the livestreaming context (Sun et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021), because livestreaming allows immediate response in its interactivity and interactions. According to Sun et al.'s (2019) study, about 47% of purchase intention can be explained by the livestreaming immersive presence. This study confirms that social presence is a significant factor influencing purchase

attitudes and intentions, and immediacy and intimacy in interaction account for this immersive social presence. The immediacy in interaction may be evident in the livestreaming context, as consumers can constantly communicate with sellers and other consumers in real-time. On the other hand, with regards to intimacy in livestreaming social presence, scholars have different explanations, including a sense of participating in an event (Guan et al., 2019), being accompanied by others (Ko & Chen, 2020), being guided in shopping and selecting products (Sun et al., 2019).

Nonetheless, previous research cannot fully explain how social presence forms consumers' purchase intention, as each product is displayed only within several minutes during a livestreaming broadcasting period. Thus, the mechanism accounting for seeing a displayed product and acting on purchasing the product remains unclear, which this research aims to explore.

2.3. The Perceived Utilitarian and Hedonic Value

Consumers evaluate products' value before purchase, and the perceived utilitarian value and hedonic value account for purchase intentions (Barbin et al., 1994). On the one hand, the utilitarian value might depend on whether a particular consumption need stimulating the purchase is accomplished. (Barbin et al., 1994; Hanzae & Rezaeyeh, 2013), resulting in a rational and task-related buying behavior (Ryu et al., 2010). As it "resulted from some type of conscious pursuit of an intended consequence" (Babin et al., 1994, p. 645), utilitarian value encompasses dimensions including efficient, task-specific, and economical aspects of products or services (Overby & Lee, 2006; Rintamäki et al., 2006).

On the other hand, a product's hedonic value can be another trigger for purchase, where consumers expect a degree of emotional satisfaction and experiential enjoyment after buying (Bridges & Florsheim, 2008). In general, consumers can receive pleasure, such as heightened fantasy, even escapism, through shopping (Bridges & Florsheim, 2008). Thus, hedonic value is defined as "more subjective and personal than its utilitarian counterpart and resulting in more from fun and playfulness than from task completion" (Babin et al., 1994, p. 646), reflecting shopping's entertainment and emotional potential (Overby & Lee, 2006).

2.3.1. The perceived utilitarian value in livestreaming shopping

Previous research indicates that the level of a product's perceived utilitarian value triggers consumer purchase intention (Guan et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2020), especially the perceived product quality has a positive impact on consumers' (re)purchase in

livestreaming shopping (Chen, Lu, & Zheng, 2020). Furthermore, interactivity in the livestreaming context is significant to constructing consumers' perception of a product's utilitarian value, because consumers can ask questions and request displays of the products and receive an instant response from the sellers (Cheng, 2020; Chen, Lu, & Zheng, 2020).

It is argued that a product's perceived utilitarian value is closely associated with the provided information in livestreaming (Cheng, 2020; Sun et al., 2019; Wongkitrungrueng et al., 2020). Products presentations stimulate sales because more visual- and audio-wise product information is gained (Sun et al., 2019). Besides, the quality of the product information also increases the perceived utilitarian value (Sun et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2020). Consumers obtain information relevant to personal concerns and needs, so they will perceive the product is useful and worth buying (Cai et al., 2018; Hu & Chaudhry, 2020).

Nonetheless, in the livestreaming context, the perceived utilitarian value might seem to conflict with its traditional definition. First, livestreaming shopping may not be task-related consumption. A seller's daily livestreaming broadcasting agenda cannot cater to each consumer, as the promoted products are different on the daily broadcasting agenda. Then, it would be rather difficult for a consumer to complete a task-related purchase if the needed products are not included in the broadcasting schedule. In this sense, prior research attributes livestreaming shopping intention to impulse buying (Cheng, 2020). However, previous research indicates that the perceived utilitarian value accounts for livestreaming purchase intentions as well (Cai et al., 2018; Chen, Lu, & Zheng, 2020). Then, it is likely that not all livestreaming purchases result from impulse buying, because utilitarian value's definition addresses the conscious and rational pursuit in the purchase. It might be possible that the perceived utilitarian value is gradually established through interactions and interactivity, where PSI and social presence serve as a mechanism in forming a product's perceived utilitarian value.

2.3.2. The perceived hedonic value in livestreaming shopping

In livestreaming shopping, prior studies address more to the hedonic pleasure of watching rather than buying, explaining the hedonic motivation for consumer engagement (Hu & Chaudhry, 2020; Kang et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2020). For example, consumers may feel entertained, excited, and engaged by watching a livestreaming seller with a unique attractiveness or broadcasting style (Xu et al., 2020), which can potentially mediate sales by attracting substantial viewers first (Kang et al., 2021; Park & Lin, 2020). Thus, livestreaming sellers strategically maintain the relational bond with consumers to keep them engaged and

interested (Hu & Chaudhry, 2020).

Meanwhile, a deeper explanation of livestreaming shopping's hedonic pleasure from a Chinese perspective is yet missing. Most research focuses on the general hedonic pleasure gained from livestreaming buying, such as, the feeling of being in a group (Ko & Chen, 2020), or joining in a community activity (Wang & Li, 2020). Also, Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020) note that consumers can experience excitement and enjoyment in a livestreaming flash sale. Other studies attribute livestreaming shopping to impulse buying (Cheng, 2020), there needs a deeper exploration of the hedonic value explaining Chinese consumers' perspective. In particular, Chinese consumers obtained hedonic pleasure when making a purchase decision and the fulfilled emotional satisfaction afterward, which are the questions this research will explore.

2.4. PSI and social presence as determinants of the perceived purchase values

To recap, in livestreaming shopping platforms, consumers can develop PSI with the livestreaming sellers and experience social presence through a high level of interactivity, influencing their perceived utilitarian and hedonic value of purchase.

First, this research is the first attempt to combine PSI and social presence in one framework, because PSI and social presence are co-existing in the livestreaming context. Indeed, through live-time broadcasting of products, livestreaming can result in a strong sense of social presence (Sun et al., 2019), contributing to livestreaming PSI (Ko & Chen, 2020). Nonetheless, most previous research has only focused on social presence in analyzing livestreaming consumer trust and purchase intention (Cheng, 2020; Lu et al., 2016; Sun et al., 2019).

Second, the current research proposes a reconceptualization of the perceived utilitarian and hedonic values specifically to livestreaming shopping. In livestreaming, this specific context might influence the perceived values; that is, how a product is perceived as useful and pleasurable to buy might be contextually constructed and interpreted. Therefore, this research intends to examine whether the traditional definition of the perceived utilitarian value is applicable to the livestreaming context and what aspects of the definition need to be adjusted.

Third, unique consumer culture emerged in contemporary China results in unique Chinese consumer psychological traits and behavioral patterns. On the one hand, Chinese consumers appear to be both "brand-conscious" and "price-sensitive" at the same time (Zhu, 2013). It means that Chinese consumers would pay a premium in well-known or luxury

brands. Despite so, the price remains as Chinese consumers' first concern. This is probably due to the contemporary consumerism in China, where China is now profoundly committing its economy and society to consumerism. While consumerism was still highly condemned only half-century ago, and money-saving was praised, China is now increasingly implementing policies designed to get its citizen-consumers to consume more (Backaler, 2010). On the other hand, due to the baby formula scandal in 2008, Chinese consumers' distrust in domestic brands and products started to spread from food to others. Even today, Chinese consumers still lack trust in the domestic product quality (Huang, 2018).

Meanwhile, low consumer trust may also lead consumers willing to pay more on the well-known brands as a source for a trustworthy quality of the products (Taylor, 2014). Currently, international brands also launch their livestreaming marketing strategies in China, competing with Chinese domestic brands. Hence, Chinese livestreaming platforms provide the exact arena for exploring Chinese consumers' attitudes and purchase behaviors.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Due to the exploratory nature of this research, an inductive approach by qualitative methods suited the best. First, the RQ focused on Chinese consumer trust and purchase intention formed in the livestreaming shopping context. Second, Chinese consumers' trust and purchase intention were shaped not only by the uniqueness of the livestreaming context but also by the contemporary consumerism culture in China. Third, qualitative methods stressed the societal attitudes, behaviors, practices that were set in a specific cultural or phenomenal context (Maxwell, 2005) and understood the phenomenon "from the interior" (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 3). Therefore, answering the RQ required nuanced details from the consumer perspective on how consumer trust and perceived values came to form, and a qualitative approach suited the best.

Moreover, interview was suitable for this research, as it inquired into people's feelings, thoughts, beliefs, values, and experiences that constructed reality (Maxwell, 2005). In this research, consumer trust and purchase intention cannot be examined without inquiring into consumers' livestreaming shopping experiences. Hence, to answer the RQ was to provide insights on consumers' values and beliefs from their experiences, and the interview was the most appropriate method.

Semi-structured interviews were employed based on the available body of literature, as semi-structured interviews provided the necessary amount of focus but still left room for additional themes to emerge (Boeije, 2010). However, little research on livestreaming had employed qualitative interviews so far. A predetermined interview guide was designed based on the theoretical framework (see Appendix A).

3.2. Sampling

The data was collected through purposive snowball sampling. Snowball sampling referred to the respondents who were recruited and asked more respondents to be introduced and recruited into the study based on the initial respondents' network (Boeije, 2010). This sampling method helped reach the targeted respondent groups who were experienced livestreaming consumers and recruit other respondents efficiently. However, results from snowball sampling might be hard to be generalized to a bigger scale (Boeije, 2010). Further, the access to respondents was through a celebrity livestreaming seller, Weiya's WeChat

group, where her followers shared and exchanged information. The researcher joined the WeChat group, where 5 initial respondents were recruited in March 2021. Based on the initial respondents' social network, 20 more respondents were recruited. The interviews were conducted from April until June 2021 via WeChat voice call. The interviews lasted 40 to 60 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Chinese, and transcripts were in Chinese.

Of the 25 respondents, 20 were female and 5 were male, and their livestreaming shopping experiences ranged from 1 year to 3 years. The respondents' age ranged from 20 to 48, and respondents' frequently used livestreaming platforms were Taobao.Live and TikTok. Further, frequent livestreaming consumers shop 3-4 times every week (4), while some livestreaming consumers shop less frequently as 1-2 times every month (6) (See Appendix B).

3.3. Operationalization

The same interview guide was employed so that all the interviews could cover the same designed topics and themes. Due to the nature of the semi-structured interview, probes were used to further explain some specific terms or individual interpretations so that each interview yielded diverse results.

Beforehand, a consent form (see Appendix C) was prepared. Respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any time during the conversations, and the interviews would be recorded. Besides, the respondents were told that all the collected data would only use for this research, and respondents' names shall be anonymous. Then, respondents orally gave their consent.

The interviews were structured in three themes. First, three questions focused on the respondents' general livestreaming watching and shopping habits. Second, 11 questions in total were raised based on consumers' livestreaming PSI experience with specific sellers through which consumer trust (4 questions) and the perceived purchase values (7 questions) were established. Third, 10 questions focused on consumers' social presence experience in livestreaming shopping, where consumer trust (5 questions) and the perceived purchase values (5 questions) were formed. Some respondents were concerned about questions that involved releasing personal information, such as their monthly expenditure on livestreaming shopping that might reveal personal earnings. Circumstances as such, the researcher reminded the respondents' right not to answer it if they felt uncomfortable. The researcher kept notes during the conversation to gain correctness of the transcriptions (Mikecz, 2012).

3.4. Data Analysis

The analysis undertaken here borrowed insights from a thematic analysis approach, referring to a method of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns and themes within data (Boeije, 2010). Employing the thematic analysis, the researcher aimed to find meanings from the repetitive patterns and present the overarching topics of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Due to the inductive nature of the qualitative research approach, thematic analysis was often adopted for analyzing data in an inductive but systematic way (Ritchie et al., 2014).

Furthermore, Atlas.ti was used for the process of data analysis. After familiarizing the data set, the text was deconstructed for segmentation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Meaningful and relevant data segments were named as a code tagged and named in Atlas.ti, completing the initial codes. 102 codes emerged after open coding. For example, respondents gave “boredom”, “entertainment”, etc. when asked why they watched livestreaming shopping. Similar codes were grouped in broader categories in the process of axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), where categories and subcategories were open to expansion until all codes were categorized and no new categories emerged (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, in the category of “professional/expertise”, “know well in products”, “seller’s personal branding” emerged, then “professional selling team” emerged and was included in the category. Then, it was the integration and refinement of existing categories in selective coding, which was to answer RQ and sub-RQs (Boeije, 2010). The definitions of the dominant categories were developed through the consecutive refinement of the categories and subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this research, “trust in sellers”, “the need to buy” and “the urge to buy” were finalized. The approach required a reverse between steps and questions or altered earlier decisions until no new themes emerged from the data (Maxwell, 2005).

Regarding reliability, a standard interview guide with the same questions helped the conversation remain focused, as it did not bias the findings and contributed to the consistency of the interviews. A reflexive note was conducted during the interviews, which documented the researcher’s reaction and thoughts during the interviews and was used in data analysis. The note helped the researcher to objectively interpret the results (Boeije, 2010). For validity, some main questions were repeatedly raised through different forms of questions to gather valid and representative data, so that the collected data could accurately represent the respondents’ ideas.

4. Results

In this section, the results of the interviews will be discussed according to the most important themes which emerged from the data analysis. The first part will focus on consumer trust and trust-building mechanisms. The second part focuses on purchase intention and how it emerges from the perceived value of the purchase.

4.1. “Gatekeeping” and trust in sellers

The results reveal that a “gatekeeping” mechanism is in place for consumers to establish trust in livestreaming sellers. For consumers, trust in sellers is a four-step process that allows sellers to enter a gate through which trust accumulates step-by-step (see Figure 2). Afterward, consumers project polarized opinions to sellers who are “inside” or “outside” the gate. Trusted sellers are viewed as a credible source of information, and consumers’ continuously watching sellers’ livestreaming is significant to this mechanism. In the following sections, each step of this process will be discussed in detail.

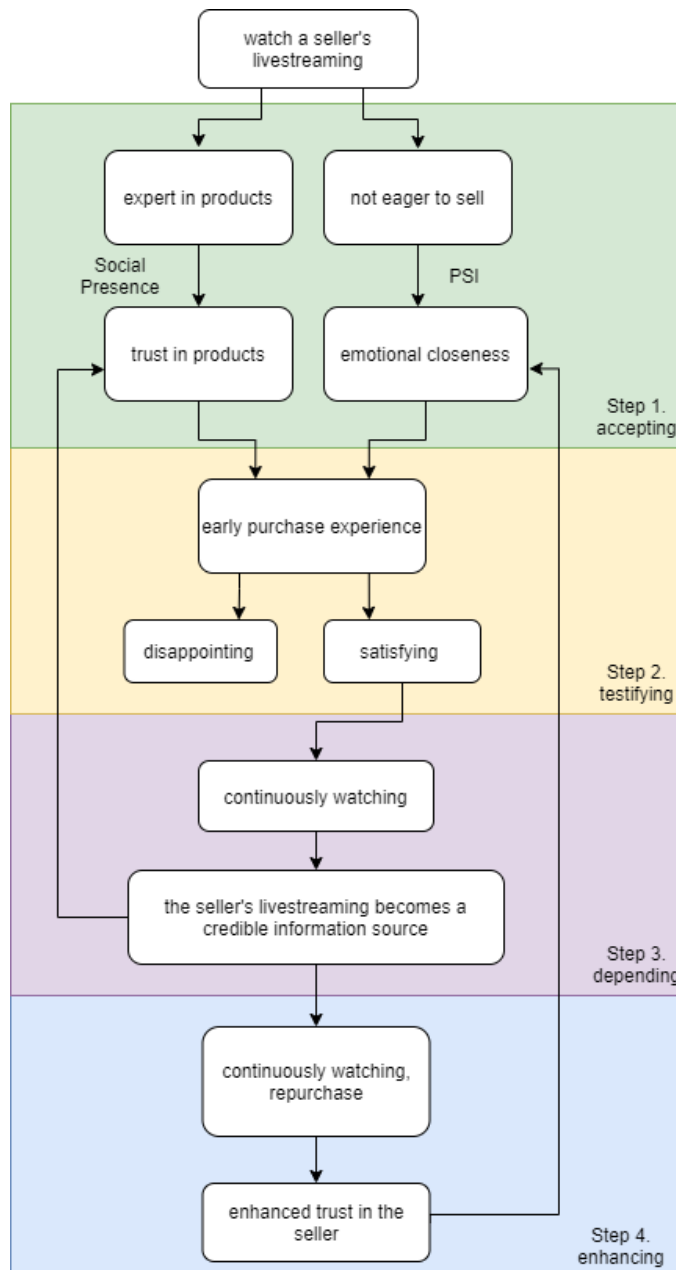


Figure 2. The four-step “gatekeeping” mechanism in trust-building in sellers.

4.1.1. Trustworthiness accepting: a “not for-profit” seller image

The first step in the trust-building process is for consumers to become emotionally attached to the sellers. This is a precondition for consumers to intend to engage in PSI with the sellers. Particularly, the sellers’ self-presented images cannot be perceived as merely for-profit. The beloved and trusted sellers must come across as having a *foxi* attitude to sell and provide expert knowledge in what they sell.

“Foxy” attitude in selling. *“foxi”* (佛系, Buddhist) is an attitude grounded in Buddhist philosophy, which means not being aggressive or even goal-driven in behaviors

(Ou, 2021). In livestreaming, this means that a seller presents a neutral, and particularly, “not eager to sell” attitude. Therefore, “to sell” is not perceived as a seller’s priority when interacting with consumers. Although this might be contradictory to the goal of being a livestreaming seller, consumers’ skepticism increases when they sense a pushy attitude, recognizing this eager-to-sell as “a cover-up trick for poor-quality products” (Respondent F). Nonetheless, a *foxi* attitude also entails selling. Similar to prior research, consumers start to develop trust when they receive mutual understanding and personal suggestions from the sellers (Guo et al., 2021). Especially, sellers suggest “what *not* to buy” based on consumers’ circumstances and concerns instead of telling them “what should buy”. By doing so, a seller is perceived as not just for-profit, but with care and understanding in an intimate and friendly manner.

Moreover, the results show that PSI in livestreaming emerges when sellers show a *foxi* attitude in selling. Such an attitude gives more room for emphasizing a seller’s self-presentation, and showing more personality and characteristics will attract consumers to develop an emotional attachment. In line with previous research, this indicates that PSI is necessary for viewers’ continuously exposing themselves in PSI encounters (Giles, 2002). Without the emotional attachment deriving from PSI, consumers may not continue to watch a seller’s livestreaming. Further, PSI develops faster in livestreaming than in other media contexts, as the real-time broadcasting environment influences consumers’ interpretation through a lens of authenticity and realness.

Sellers sometimes have “car-crash” level mistakes, or just stuttered, and I can see their reactions and awkwardness immediately, as if I see the real side of the backstage. [...]
In fact, the seller is the one broadcasting in front of a crowd; of course, he/she is just showing a ‘screen image’ in livestreaming. But sometimes I keep forgetting that.
(Respondent F)

Interestingly, results show that consumers often have a prototype figure matching the seller’s presented character in livestreaming. For consumers, this prototype is someone they have access to know in their daily life. If the livestreaming seller matches this prototype figure, this match will transfer into feelings of fondness for the seller. In this way, a sense of closeness and intimacy can be generated, leading to emotional attachment established in PSI. For instance, “(Seller) Li Jiaqi is like your gay best friend every girl has in her life” (Respondent R). However, suppose a consumer does not have such a prototype figure in life.

In that case, he/she may not be able to feel close and intimate, and there will be no emotional attachment and thus no interest in maintaining PSI.

Expertise knowledge in products. A seller is perceived as an expert in knowing what he/she sells (Ko & Chen, 2020). Current results further indicate that “expertise” sellers can proactively and precisely give core information about products that is most relevant and efficient to consumers. Social presence in livestreaming is particularly beneficial for conveying such an expert image, as the seller can demonstrate his/her “insider knowledge” of products by explaining and using the products in front of the camera, thus constructing an expert image.

The reason why livestreaming sellers want to construct an expert image is that it increases consumer trust in products, as consumers would believe the products have been selected by experts. In a way, the expert image guarantees consumers trust the products’ qualities. Interestingly, if a seller sells multiple categories of products, this guarantee for trust is projected to the sellers’ fame and popularity, as “(famous sellers’) personal future career is at stake if they dare to sell low-quality products” (Respondent G). This is in line with earlier research that showed that consumer trust in products starts with trust in sellers (Guo et al., 2021), and contradicts earlier claims that this process works the other way around (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020). Either an expert image or sellers’ well-known names can help to transmit the trust from the person to the products.

4.1.2. Trustworthiness testifying: satisfying purchase experience

After the trust is transferred to a product, the second stage is to testify to a seller’s trustworthiness by purchasing from the seller. Results suggest that having an excellent first purchase experience is critical for consumers to “open the gate” for sellers. This entails that the purchased product is the same as it has been described in the livestreaming, and consumers’ expectations have been fulfilled. An early good purchase experience can confirm that both the seller and his/her selling products are trustworthy. However, in a reversed situation, consumers would “close the gate” to the seller by not watching his/her livestreaming, and the trust would be difficult to restore. For example, Respondent E recalled her losing trust in the seller Luo Yonghao after her first purchasing flowers from him: “The blooms were dead, so bad; it was not what he promised in livestreaming. [...] I liked him as a talk show host before, but I don’t think he’s a qualified seller, so I never watched his livestreaming afterwards.”

4.1.3. *Trustworthiness depending: a credible source for information*

After a seller is allowed to enter the gate, the third step for consumers is to gradually start treating a seller's livestreaming as a credible source for information. Current results show that the antecedent for this step is that consumers watch the seller's livestreaming continuously so that the PSI strengthens as well (Dibble et al., 2016). A long-term repetitive watching livestreaming first results in the perception in which livestreaming shopping is convenient. For instance, Respondent T recalls her shopping experience before livestreaming shopping.

Before livestreaming shopping, buying something feels like endless research: reading different product information, comparing different reviews and prices. [...] Somehow, you'll end up not buying anything because you're already exhausted in this research.

In fact, the perceived convenience of livestreaming shopping is because of the received information from specific sellers. In other words, consumers have trusted sellers who have done the products' researching, and consumers collect information from them. Hence, making a purchase decision through livestreaming shopping seems less effort.

I'd like to follow my trusted seller's livestreaming if I want to buy something new, because I'd trust what has been selected for me by this seller (or his/her team). [...] Livestreaming shopping is actually a presentation of products selection." (Respondent L)

Therefore, livestreaming consumers view sellers as a searching function in selecting good products. Consumers would believe that low-quality products have been filtered out by the sellers before livestreaming. For consumers, viewing the trusted sellers as credible sources for information is dependent on the trusted seller's selection instead of self-researching. In the end, this perception of convenience, in its turn, causes a dependency on the trusted sellers' recommendations.

4.1.4. *Trustworthiness enhancing: closing the gate*

The final step consists of consumers enhancing their trust in "inside" sellers while projecting an opposite attitude to "outside" sellers. Similar to the first step, consumers intentionally look for evidence to support a positive image of trusted sellers and even filter

out any evidence against it. Consumers self-correct their cognitive recognitions if they encounter disappointing purchase experiences from the trusted sellers with low-quality products. Thus, consumers would defend the trusted sellers with themselves so that they can remain in the trust. “Low-price” and “personal taste” (e.g., aesthetics or flavors) are the two main reasons for consumers to convince themselves when a disappointing purchase occurs at this stage. For example, Respondent H describes one disappointing snack bought from a trusted seller and how this does not affect her trust. “...I didn’t like it, but it was cheap anyway. [...] and it’s probably just my personal taste because so many others still like it and give it good comments.”

Finally, closing the gate also means consumers would project distrust and skepticism to those sellers outside the gate, showing low interest in watching outsiders’ livestreaming.

4.2. The need, the urge, and the purchase

In this section, two types of triggers accounting for consumer purchase intention in livestreaming shopping are shown: one is “the need”, and the other one is “the urge” (see Table 1). For consumers, a purchase based on the need shows much complexity in categorizing it into either rational or impulsive buying, as consumers find that their boundary of needs becomes blurry in livestreaming shopping. On the other hand, a purchase based on an urge reveals similarities with impulsive buying. However, what causes the urge to buy goes beyond the livestreaming context.

Table 1. Purchase intention triggers and behaviors

Intentions	Triggers	Perceived Values	Purchase Behaviors
The need	Actual needs	Utility: practicality, budget, efforts	A clear timeline of usage before buying
	Potential needs	Utility: practicality, budget, efforts	Blurry timeline of usage before buying
The urge	Experimental Purchase	Hedonism: experimental, exploratory	“Trying out” purchases
	Competitive Purchase	Hedonism: competitive, achievement	Competing in “flash sales” or “hunger sales.”

Assurance Purchase	Hedonism: gain security and reduce stress	“Hoarding for daily necessities” purchases
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4.2.1. Purchase intention based on the need

The “need” to buy is based on consumers’ evaluation of products’ functionality, practicality, and the allowed budget and efforts to buy. To some extent, purchase intentions driven by the need might appear rational and logical, showing similarities with the definition of the perceived utilitarian value (Hanzaee & Rezaeyeh, 2013). However, two types of needs driving livestreaming purchase intentions emerge *actual needs* and *potential needs*. The difference between actual and potential needs is whether consumers plan a schedule for using the products before buying.

Moreover, driven by potential needs, consumers are under the impression that they rationally purchase products with usefulness rather than impulsive buying.

I thought I’m a rational consumer because I only buy what I need. Irrational would be the seller recommends 30 things, and you’d buy them all, right? [...] Somehow, now my house is filled with stuff that I thought I needed but I rarely used. (Respondent S)

Current results indicate that consumers’ potential needs are enlarged in the livestreaming context, resulting in a blurry boundary of their perceived consumption needs. First, due to the social presence in livestreaming, consumers can see products’ actual functionality and practicality, influencing the products’ perceived utilitarian value. Especially, the presented usefulness is embedded in a specific scenario closely related to consumers’ daily reality. To accentuate a product’s usefulness is to create such scenarios as many as possible so that to “excavate your (consumers’) potential needs to the fullest” (Respondent R).

For example, a seller will show you different styles and occasions a promoted dress can fit in. You’ll see a model dressing it for work, for a party, for a date... then you will think this dress is so versatile in styling and very useful. (Respondent D)

In livestreaming, a product’s perceived utilitarian value consists in its presented usefulness. The livestreaming context is able to maximize the presented usefulness through visualization, because consumers *see* the product serves its functionality in these created

specific scenarios, which stimulate consumers' consumption needs. If the stimulated consumption needs keep occurring outside consumers' perceived boundary of needs, the boundary thus becomes blurry, especially a blurry timeline to use the products. As described by respondent J, "I'm not urgently in need of it now, but I can see I'll use it someday".

A second reason why consumer needs are enlarged in livestreaming shopping is that they experience a rapid expansion of new knowledge in product categories and information. This new knowledge inspires consumers' potential needs for consumption as well. For instance, "you wouldn't notice such a need until you find out such a product" (Respondent C). Therefore, the expansion of product knowledge impacts consumers' early experience in livestreaming shopping, as "new information of products and brands keeps rushing into the horizon" (respondent M). Consequently, consumers experience an overwhelming amount of information from the new knowledge expansion. This, in turn, explains why consumers view trusted sellers as a filter and selection when making purchase decisions, as the trusted sellers' recommendations serve as a coping mechanism to decrease the overwhelming information.

Last, another element that explains the enlarging potential needs is the low price, which will fit a consumer's budget range and decrease the conceived risks after buying.

4.2.2. Purchase intention based on the urge

The "urge" to buy stands for consumers satisfying their temporary emotional or mental needs through purchases. Consumers are driven by a sense of strong urge, and buying is the means to release it. Resulting from "the urge", three types of purchase can be distinguished: Experimental Purchase, Competitive Purchase, and Assurance Purchase.

First, Experimental Purchase and Competitive Purchase are based on the urge triggered by the livestreaming context. Experimental Purchase aims to satisfy consumers' curiosity by "trying out" purchases, which is commonly witnessed in livestreaming shopping. Consumers are exposed to massive new products. As a result, the curiosity to explore leads to the attempt to "try-out". Especially in the case of new products with a low price, consumers feel they "cannot resist the temptation, have to buy" (Respondent H) through Experimental Purchase. On the other hand, Competitive Purchase aims to win from a snatch sale or a hunger sale, which the sellers often employ to keep consumers engaged. A sense of winning and accomplishment is gained through getting the limited products while most other consumers cannot. For example, "...that product was out of my budget, [...] but I was nudged to a position that I had to buy. When I completed my purchase, I felt those who didn't get it were losers" (Respondent P). In this sense, both Experimental Purchase and

Competitive Purchase are driven by the urge to gain exploratory, excitement, and playfulness, which is in line with the perceived hedonic value of purchases (Barbin et al., 1994).

In contrast, the urge that drives Assurance Purchase goes beyond the livestreaming context. Assurance Purchase intends to feel secure or release stress by seeing home-stocked possessions. In order to achieve this, consumers buy huge bulks of products and tend to hoard products at home. Hoarded products are daily necessities, such as shampoo, napkins, beauty masks, and so on. To some extent, Assurance Purchase is for the sake of stocking and seeing possessions, which brings consumers secure, safe, and calm feelings.

I have an entire closet filled with beauty masks. But I still buy new ones because I need the closet to be full. [...] A full closet is like a reminder telling me this is what I have, so there's nothing to worry about. I feel safe and sound. (Respondent L)

In Chinese, this behavior is called “*tunhuo*” (囤货, storing goods). Until a few decades ago, this term was never described individual consumer's purchase volume but is commonly used nowadays in China (Luo, Wang, & Liu, 2011). Interestingly, when asked about their *tunhuo* psychology, respondents connect it with secure, safe, less worrisome feelings, showing a quite unique consumer behavioral and psychological trait in China.

Now we use “囤”(to store and hoard) instead of “buying”. Since everyone uses this term, it normalizes this type of purchase behavior in us consumers' mindsets. [...] For me, it's just one thing less to worry about after buying a lot of sun cream. It's to avoid the anxiety that the necessities are running out and for a sense of safeness. (Respondent A)

To understand the source of this behavior, one has to consider the current social conditions in China. On the one hand, contemporary China's economy is booming due to its pervasive domestic consumerism. Chinese consumers are wealthier than decades ago and more willing to spend their wealth to improve life accordingly. On the other hand, apart from its economy, contemporary China also has stressful living conditions. People in big cities are generally stressed to secure other living necessities that are more invisible but critical, such as housing (Shepard, 2016), hospitalization cost (Ma et al., 2021), children's education (Chen, 2018), and so forth. These living necessities cost a significant part of average Chinese

household earnings and savings, creating a sense of not being in control of one’s own life. Therefore, the need to feel in control and empowered is transferred and projected to other visible live necessities, and Assurance Purchase is an outlet to restore the feelings of security and safety.

To conclude, both PSI and social presence are included in the livestreaming context influencing consumer trust and purchase intention (See Figure 3). First, the results indicate that PSI contributes to consumers’ emotional attachment to the sellers, establishing a four-step “gatekeeping” mechanism in consumer trust in the sellers. Consumers would go through trustworthiness accepting, testifying, depending, and enhancing. In this process, PSI does not directly increase a product’s perceived purchase values; it helps to transfer trust in sellers to trust in products.

Second, social presence in livestreaming influences consumers' purchase intention. Social presence and interactivity are significant in highlighting a product’s usefulness based on which products are bought for their usefulness to fulfill needs. On the other hand, the livestreaming context also leads to impulsive buying driven by the urge, through which consumers achieve hedonic pleasure after purchases.

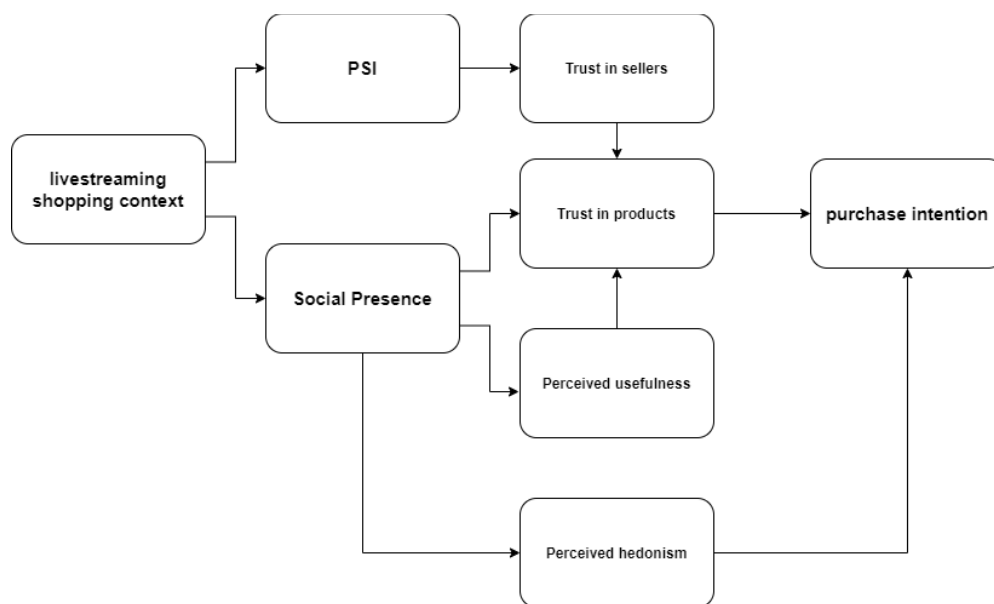


Figure 3. consumer trust and purchase intention influenced by PSI and social presence in livestreaming shopping

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical Implications

5.1.1. *Consumer trust in livestreaming shopping*

First, a four-step “gatekeeping” mechanism of consumers establishing trust in livestreaming sellers has been identified in the research finding, presenting a holistic understanding from trustworthiness accepting to trustworthiness enhancing among consumers. There is a “level-up” accumulating process in this mechanism that allows sellers to enter consumers’ trust systems, where consumers’ emotional attachment is essential in trustworthiness acceptance. In prior research, the emotional attachment might be briefly addressed; for instance, the seller is perceived to be trustworthy due to his/her expertise (Ko & Chen, 2020) or competence (Lu et al., 2016); and sellers need to offer mutual understanding and reciprocal favors (Guo et al., 2021; Hu & Chaudhry, 2020). The research finding shows similarities with previous research findings but further elaborates how the emotional attachment is significant to the perceived trustworthiness in consumers’ perceptions.

Moreover, two new elements of this mechanism are the stage of trustworthiness depending and enhancing, which have not been discussed in prior livestreaming shopping studies. Trustworthiness depending occurs when consumers depend on the trusted sellers’ recommendations as a credible source of information, and it gradually transforms into an enhanced trust or loyalty. This finding extends the existing body of studies on livestreaming consumer trust, as most research focuses on trust-developing and has not extended to topics such as consumer trust enhancement.

However, a deeper explanation of why trustworthiness depending occurs in this mechanism may be found in the field of consumer psychology and persuasive communication. It is argued that advertising is effective to consumers when the advertising message is perceived as having “source credibility” (Fennis & Stroebe, 2020, p. 21), including two dimensions which are expertise and trustworthiness (Belch & Belch, 2004). Particularly, trustworthiness lies in a non-vested interest in delivering the message so that consumers tend to let their guard down and be less critical (Fennis & Stroebe, 2020). This can explain the research finding that sellers with a not-eager-to-sell attitude in livestreaming are perceived as more trustworthy by consumers than others who are perceived as merely for-profit. It also explains when a trusted seller becomes a credible information source,

consumers become more accepting of his/her future recommendations, resulting in enhanced trust and repurchases.

Last, the research finds that consumer trust in products is transferred from trust in sellers. This finding contrasts from Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut's (2020) study in which consumer trust in products contributes to trust in sellers, while this research finding shows that the trust transferred in a reversed way. Nonetheless, this finding is in line with Guo et al.'s (2021) findings that trust in sellers can positively affect trust in products. And the research finding further confirms Guo et al.'s (2021) statement that livestreaming consumer trust is a "transfer relationship" among sellers, products, and the consumer community. Although the current research does not include the consumer community, it suggests that consumer trust in sellers and products can influence each other.

5.1.2. PSI and social presence in the livestreaming context

This research is the first to incorporate both PSI and social presence into one framework for studying livestreaming shopping, and the research findings suggest PSI intensifies faster due to the influence from the social presence, as the real-time interactivity leads consumers to believe what they see as real and authentic. This finding is in line with what Guo et al. (2021) proposed the "swiftly-formed" consumer trust in livestreaming when consumers have friendly interactions with sellers, as such friendliness would be perceived as an authentic quality of the sellers in the livestreaming context. This finding further clarifies the relation between social presence and PSI in the livestreaming context (Kim, 2021; Ko & Chen, 2020).

Furthermore, one significant finding is that PSI is a critical element accounting for consumers' repetitive watching of specific sellers' livestreaming broadcasting and consequently leading to consumer trust. Liu and Kim (2021) suggest that frequently watching livestreaming can result in purchases, and the current research may use PSI to offer a connection. Repetitive watching is a way for viewers to maintain emotional attachment in PSI (Giles, 2002; Rubin & Step, 2000), further leading to consumer trust in sellers. As mentioned before, trust in sellers transfers to trust in products, thus leading to purchase intention.

Besides, the finding also indicates an interesting link as the "prototype figure" accounting for viewers' emotional attachment in PSI, explaining the root of the PSI emotional attachment. Previous research stresses PSI and its emotional effect on viewers, but the elaboration of how the emotional attachment arises in PSI is lacking (Blight et al., 2017; Jin, 2018). The current finding can fill this gap. A prototype figure is someone consumers

(viewers) have access to know in their daily lives that match the sellers (media figure) in PSI. This match will transfer into feelings of closeness, intimacy, and emotional attachment.

5.1.3. *The perceived utilitarian value and impulse buying in livestreaming shopping*

Prior studies offer relatively conflicting findings on livestreaming purchase intentions, and the current research finding may provide some other explanations to resolve the contradiction.

Prior studies find that livestreaming PSI results in impulsive buying (Xiang et al., 2016), or livestreaming social presence leads to impulsive buying (Cheng, 2020; Sun et al., 2020), whereas some scholars argue that livestreaming purchases can be rational and logical because the perceived utilitarian value is essential in purchase decisions (Cai et al., 2018; Chen, Lu, & Zheng, 2020; Lu et al., 2020). This research finding suggests that, for consumers, livestreaming purchase intentions to some extent are attributed to impulsive buying, which are resulted from the social presence in livestreaming rather than PSI.

Furthermore, in line with Cheng's (2020) findings that purchase intention in livestreaming increases due to the stimulation from the social presence, the research finding further suggests that social presence in livestreaming can accentuate a product's presented usefulness, creating a consumption need for consumers to fulfill. It leaves consumers with the impression that their purchase intention is based on the perceived utilitarian value, and thus purchases are seen as rational and logical. In this sense, it explains previous studies arguing the significance of the perceived utilitarian value in livestreaming purchase decisions (Chen, Lu, & Zheng, 2020; Lu et al., 2020).

However, this research finding reveals that purchase for consumption needs can still be impulsive buying, as the livestreaming shopping context blurs consumers' conceived consumption needs boundaries by enlarging their potential needs. Besides, in the field of impulse buying studies, *suggestion impulsive buying* is seeing a product with usefulness and act on buying (Armiri et al., 2012). In this process, the purchase is seen as rational to consumers but is categorized as impulsive buying as well. *Suggestion impulsive buying* offers a more profound explanation where livestreaming social presence impacts presenting a product with great usefulness (Sun et al., 2019), contributing to the perception that products are worthwhile to buy (Cai et al., 2018). Therefore, consumers are under the impression of conducting planned and rational purchases for products' usefulness, while the shopping context is leading them to impulse purchase.

5.1.3. The perceived hedonic value and impulse buying in livestreaming shopping

This research finding also identifies three types of impulsive buying to achieve hedonic pleasure through purchases. These three types of purchases can further categorize Chinese consumers' impulsive buying behaviors in livestreaming shopping, providing consumers' psychological traits to the existing livestreaming shopping studies. In particular, the Experimental purchase and the Competitive Purchase are in line with prior research on livestreaming purchase intention, where the hedonism and the perceived enjoyment, playfulness, and excitement are triggering livestreaming impulse buying (Park & Lin, 2020; Xiang et al., 2016).

However, the research finding also reveals a unique impulse buying that reflects the Chinese consumer's psychological and behavioral traits. As for Assurance Purchase, the intended hedonic pleasure is the feeling of safe, secure, and calm, which extends but differs from the traditional concept of the perceived hedonic value of purchase.

5.2. Managerial implications

This research can provide recommendations for livestreaming business practice. From a business operator side, the research findings suggest livestreaming sellers grasp an in-depth knowledge of the products as they sell. The sellers are perceived as trustworthy as they possess expert knowledge of the products. Hence, it is advisable that sellers choose a niche product category instead of selling multiple product categories.

Moreover, the current finding provides recommendations to livestreaming sellers that it is important to guide consumers to keep watching their livestreaming broadcasting after the trust is built. By doing so, consumer trust in sellers can be enhanced and lead to repurchases. According to Liu and Kim's (2021) findings, consumers' motivation in watching is based on entertainment, socialization, information, and experience. Some sellers can diversify their livestreaming content with the implantation of products selling, such as talk shows, theatrical settings with narratives, or thematic online tutorial classrooms. By doing so, watching livestreaming becomes more engaging and entertaining for consumers.

6. Conclusion

This research investigates consumer trust and purchases intentions in the Chinese livestreaming shopping context by including PSI and social presence into one framework. Through conducting in-depth interviews, this research explores consumer trust and purchase intention from the consumers' perceptions. The findings indicate PSI contributes to consumer trust in sellers, and social presence triggers purchase intentions. Although trust in products is derived from trust in sellers, the trust in products to buy is based on products' perceived usefulness, which is highlighted by the social presence in the livestreaming context. Furthermore, although purchases are based on perceived utilitarian value, this research indicates the impulsive buying in livestreaming shopping appears to be more rational and implicit to recognize in consumers' perceptions. Last, three types of pure impulsive buying behaviors are also identified, among which, Assurance Purchase entails a unique trait witnessed among Chinese consumers. By purchasing and hoarding daily necessities, Chinese consumers tend to project secure and safe in mentality to the possession stored at home through which the pressure and stress can be released.

6.1. Limitations

This research has its limitations. First, the recruited respondents may be biased in projecting trust to some famous sellers. This is because the first five respondents were recruited from the famous seller Weiya's followers' community. These recruited respondents are already long-term followers of famous sellers as Weiya or Li Jiaqi, projecting a relatively strong trust to them. Hence, this could influence respondents' perceptions of trust in these famous sellers and form biased perceptions of less famous ones. The researcher was aware of this and thus included both famous and not famous sellers who respondents trust in interviews.

Moreover, most of the respondents are actively watching livestreaming without actively interacting with sellers. Lack of interaction means respondents' experience interactivity in livestreaming is through observing sellers interacting with other online consumers. The respondents' insufficient initiating interaction might influence their behaviors and the results, where a tendency to depend on receiving livestreaming sellers' recommendations was shown. Lack of interactions with sellers is because of the large viewer number during livestreaming, as respondents' questions may either not be seen by the sellers

or have been raised by other consumers. As a result, gradually, the drive to initiate conversations with sellers is diminishing for respondents. For such respondents, the researcher addressed respondents' interactions experience with sellers who have a smaller viewer number in interviews.

Last, respondents may experience cognitive dissonance when defining their purchase for needs is rational or impulsive. Perhaps, respondents are aware the buying is impulsive, but they use rational and logical reasoning to justify the irrational and impulsive behaviors. In this sense, respondents may have cognitive dissonance during the interview, which may influence the results.

6.2. Directions of Future Research

For future research directions, these approaches are worthwhile to consider. First, the identified “gatekeeping” mechanism can be further testified and modified in order to develop a theoretical framework for studying consumer trust in livestreaming sellers. Through a quantitative approach, future research can design experiments to put these four steps in this mechanism into examinations, especially the third step where trusted sellers become credible information sources. Experiments can be designed specifically for this part to testify whether consumers are projecting different levels of credibility to the same recommendation from different sellers. Besides, future research can also respectively testify each step in this mechanism to reveal factors with different significance.

Second, the motivation to watch livestreaming has not been addressed in this research, but the research finding reveals that watching livestreaming is critical to consumer trust leading to purchase intention. Besides, PSI is an important factor for continuously watching and following livestreaming content, but PSI has not yet been thoroughly researched in the context of livestreaming. Future research may further explore the connection between PSI and the motivation to watch livestreaming.

Last, livestreaming is an interesting context for further studies on impulsive buying, as consumers may engage in a type of impulsive buying that appears to be rational and useful. Consumers find it hard to define it as impulsive, and such confusion was shown in the current results as well. Future studies on such implicit impulsive buying can gain more understanding of consumer psychology, behaviors, and the attributes causing such purchases.

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Appendix A: Interview guide

Introduction:

Hello, my name is Violet and thank you for your participation in this research on livestreaming shopping. This research is to explore the consumer trust and their purchase intentions in livestreaming shopping, and what is the uniqueness of livestreaming context leading to that purchase decision. This interview will ask questions from the aspects of your emotions, interactions, and purchase decision-making process during your livestreaming shopping experiences. I would like to know that in the livestreaming context, how and why do you think your purchased products worth buying.

This interview will take 40-60 minutes, and I'd like to inform you that you have every right to refuse answering question that makes you feel uncomfortable or withdraw from the interview anytime. Your name and personal information shall be anonymous. Your interview will only be used as research data and the data shall only be accessible to the researchers who are relevant to this project. This interview will be audio recorded, and I need you consent for recording. If you want to proceed, may I have your consent?

First, please allow me to explain the context of my research. Livestreaming shopping, as you know, is that you watch the real-time broadcasted video of a livestream seller and place order to buy. And livestreaming broadcasting is the video you watch from a livestream seller before and during buying.

Opening Questions

1. How often do you watch livestreaming broadcasting videos? Which platform do you use?
Why you use this platform?
2. Can you introduce me one of the livestreaming sellers that you follow? Since when did you start to follow him/her?
3. What do you like about him/her? What makes him/her unique compared to other livestreaming sellers?

Parasocial interaction

First topic is about your interaction and impression of this livestreaming seller that you watch a lot.

(Concept 1: closeness, emotional attachment, and trust in PSI)

1. Could you describe your interaction with this livestreaming seller?
2. What is your impression of this seller? Why do you have such an impression?

3. Do you feel you can relate or identify with him/her? Why do you feel this way?
4. What products does he/she sell? Tell me one product that you bought from him/her. What do you like about this product?

Now, let's focus on this seller and the products that you bought from him/her. I'd like to know about your perception of what is valuable and pleasurable when you placed the orders.

(Concept 2: the perceived utilitarian & hedonic value in PSI)

1. Did you know the product's brand before?
2. Can you tell me the function, usefulness, and practicality of the product that you bought? Which of these aspects you valued the most and why?
3. Did you have the need for this product before or during the livestreaming?
 - (If you had this need before watching) how did the livestreaming seller's broadcasting convince you to buy compared to other sellers?
 - (If you did not have this need before watching) how did the livestreaming seller's broadcasting lead you to this need?
4. How did you feel (e.g., excited, fun, calm...) when you placed the order? Why did you feel this?
5. Was your expectation of the product fulfilled afterwards? Looking back, would you buy the same product in the same occasion again and why?
6. How would you evaluate this purchase? (e.g. (ir)rational, random/purposeful) why?
7. What was the pleasure and enjoyment of this livestreaming shopping trip to you?

Social presence

The second topic of this interview is the social presence you experience in livestreaming shopping. Now let's recall a purchase experience that you asked the livestreaming seller to display the products at your request, you asked questions that you concerned most, and the seller responded.

(Concept 1a: interactivity and the social presence with the seller)

1. What kind of request did you raise? How did the seller react?
2. How did this interactivity make you feel?
3. How would you describe your interactions with the seller?

(Concept 1b: interactivity and the social presence with other consumers)

4. Did you pay attention to other consumers during livestreaming?
5. How would you describe your interactions with other consumers? Can you give one example?

(Concept 2: the perceived utilitarian & hedonic value in social presence)

1. What kind of information of the product did you gain through interacting with the livestreaming seller and other consumers? What convinced you to buy?
2. Did you have the need for this product before or during the interactions in livestreaming?
 - (If you had this need before) how did the interactions with this seller convince you to buy?
 - (If you did not have this need before) how did the interactions with this seller lead you to this need?
3. Imagine this product was sold in other scenarios, what was the difference influencing your purchase decision?
 - This product was sold on a shopping website with an online customer service
 - This product was sold in a shopping mall with a salesperson
4. How would you evaluate this purchase after you interacting with the sellers and consumers? (e.g. (ir)rational, random/purposeful) why?
5. What was the pleasure and enjoyment from the interactions in this livestreaming shopping trip to you?

Appendix B: Respondents Information

Name	gender	Age	experience	frequency	following sellers	purchases product categories	occupation	locations	date
Le	Female	42	1 year	weekly (1-2 times/week)	Li Jiaqi, Weiya, Linyilun	cosmetics, household utilities, food and snacks.	teacher	Shenzhen	20th May
Wen	Female	28	1 year	weekly (2-3 times/week)	Li Jiaqi, Weiya	cosmetics and snacks	teacher	Shenzhen	20th May
Long	Female	27	1 year	monthly (3-4 times/month)	Li Jiaqi, Serious Sis Coke	cosmetics, food and snacks.	teacher	Shenzhen	20th May
Yu	Female	29	1 year	monthly (1-2 times/month)	none	food, snacks, household utilities	Nurse	Guizhou	21th May
Li	Female	30	2 years	weekly (1-2 times/week)	Li Jiaqi	cosmetics, household utilities, food and snacks.	teacher	Shenzhen	21th May
Piao	Female	26	2 years	monthly (1-2 times/month)	Li Jiaqi	cosmetics, household utilities, food and snacks.	accountant	Shenzhen	22th May
Jiang	Female	40	2 years	weekly (3-4 times/week)	Li Jiaqi, Weiya, Linyilun	food, snacks, household utilities, cosmetics, overseas shopping	teacher	Shenzhen	31th May
Shen	Female	34	2 years	monthly (1-2 times/month)	Da Xue	clothes, kitchen utilities	make-up artist	Shijiazhuang	1st June
Zhu	Female	27	4 years	weekly (1-2 times/week)	Weiya, Xueli, Li Jiaqi	clothes, cosmetics, snacks	advertising	Shanghai	1st June
Jian	Female	31	1 year	weekly (1-2 times/week)	Xueli, Weiya, Li Jiaqi	cosmetics, food, snacks	Lawyer	Shenzhen	9th June
Meng	Male	48	3 years	monthly (2-3 times/month)	Luo Yonghao	clothes, shoes, household utilities.	Advertising	Shenzhen	9th June
Xu	Female	33	2 years	monthly (1-2 times/month)	none	food. Household utilities, cosmetics, electronics.	Marketing	Shenzhen	9th June
Jiang	Female	20	1.5 years	weekly (1-2 times/week)	Weiya, Li Jiaqi	cosmetics	university student	Chongqing	25th April
Mu	Female	20	1.5 years	weekly (1-2 times/week)	Li Jiaqi	cosmetics	university student	Chongqing	25th April
Wang	Male	36	1 year	monthly (1-2 times/month)	none	clothes, household utilities, snacks	self-employed	Taiyuan	28th April
Xu	Female	32	2 years	monthly (2-3 times/month)	Bro-Niu sells cars	baby clothing, accessories, second-hand car	accounting	Taiyuan	28th April
Zhao	Male	39	2.5 years	monthly (1-2 times/month)	Luo Yonghao	household utilities, clothes	advertising	Shenzhen	2th May
Zhu	Female	35	1 year	monthly (2-3 times/month)	none	household utilities, cosmetics, kitchen utilities, books.	housewife	Shenzhen	2th May
Gu	Female	40	3 years	weekly (3-4 times/week)	Li Jiaqi, Weiya	household utilities, cosmetics, snacks, food	housewife	Guangzhou	20th April
Ma	Female	32	4 years	weekly (3-4 times/week)	Li Jiaqi, Wei ya, Xue Li	cosmetics, snacks, food, baby clothing, toys	editor	Shenzhen	19th April
Hu	Female	29	3 years	weekly (3-4 times/week)	Li Jiaqi, Wei ya	cosmetics, snacks, food, baby clothing, toys	Marketing	Guangzhou	25th April
Meng	Male	43	2 years	monthly (1-2 times/month)	Luo Yonghao	household utilities, clothes	Advertising	Shenzhen	9th June
Xu	Female	33	2 years	monthly (1-2 times/month)	none	seafood, household utilities, food, cosmetics	Marketing	Shenzhen	9th June
Tang	Female	21	1.5 years	monthly (2-3 times/month)	Weiya, Li Jiaqi, Xue Li	cosmetics, snacks	university student	Chongqing	24th April
Liao	Male	22	1 year	monthly (1-2 times/month)	none	food	university student	Su Zhou	6th June
Yang	Female	31	2 years	monthly (2-3 times/month)	Weiya, Li Jiaqi, Xue Li	cosmetics, snacks	teacher	Shenzhen	5th June
Li	Female	42	2 years	monthly (2-3 times/month)	none	household utilities, food, cosmetics	Advertising	Shenzhen	5th June
Gong	Female	28	1 year	monthly (2-3 times/month)	Li Jiaqi, Weiya	cosmetics, snacks, baby clothing, toys	PR manager	Shenzhen	5th June

Appendix C

CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Yuhan Cui,

Admiraliteitskade 40, 3063ED, Rotterdam.

494914yc@eur.nl

+31 648911778

DESCRIPTION

You¹ are invited to participate in a research about Chinese consumer trust and purchase intention in livestreaming shopping. The purpose of the study is to understand the Chinese consumer perception of how they establish trust in sellers and why they purchase.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms,

- the questions of the interview will be related to livestreaming shopping experience
-

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a tape recorder for the interview.

¹ In the case of minors, informed consent must be obtained from the parents or other official carers. They will have to sign this form. Please make sure to adjust this form accordingly.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and stop participating at any point.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

A. As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether I should use your name or other identifying information [as Interviewee A] not in the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified.

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take 40-60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from

the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish— [contact person in the dept., faculty or university]

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name	Signature	Date
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I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

Name	Signature	Date
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This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.