



The Influence of Interactive Rituals in Live-Streaming E-Commerce on Consumers' Psychological and Behavioral Mechanisms

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Abstract. As a new business model that reshapes the traditional logic of e-commerce transactions, live-streaming e-commerce exhibits significant differences in interactive structure, trust generation, and consumption decision-making paths. The underlying driving mechanism of this phenomenon requires a systematic theoretical explanation. This paper introduces Randall Collins' "Interactive Ritual Chain" theory and aims to systematically analyze how interactive rituals in live-streaming e-commerce affect consumers' psychology and behavior. Through theoretical deduction and case analysis, an "elements - psychology - behavior" integrated analysis framework is constructed. The study proposes that the live-streaming scenario successfully initiates the interactive ritual through four elements: "virtual presence", "technical boundaries", "common focus", and "emotional sharing". This ritual significantly stimulates the emotional energy of online viewers, shapes their sense of group belonging, and constructs symbolic identification with the host and the product. These psychological changes directly drive typical consumption behaviors, including impulsive purchases, follow-up purchases, and continuous participation. This research reveals the psychological root of the strong appeal of live-streaming e-commerce, provides a new perspective for understanding its internal mechanism, and has implications for platform optimization of consumption experience and brand marketing strategy formulation.

Keywords: Live-streaming E-commerce, Interactive Ritual Chains, Consumer Psychology, Emotional Energy, Consumption Behavior

1 Introduction

As a disruptive e-commerce model in recent years, live-streaming e-commerce becomes an integral part of the lives of Chinese consumers. It has combined real-time video, instantaneous interaction and transactions online, thereby generating a far more vivid shopping experience than could be achieved in the conventional online shopping, and it has proven to have tremendous commercial value and social impact. The conventional marketing theories cannot be fully used to explain this pattern of mass consumption instigated by real-time interaction.

In order to get a more insight into the psychological and social process of consumer behavior related to the live-streaming e-commerce, this paper presents such a theory of social interaction as the interactive ritual chain, developed by a sociologist Randall Collins. This theory is based on the idea that by implementing successful interactive rituals, key elements help to create a group unity and emotional energy that would influence the behavior of individuals. A live-streaming situation, however, possesses the features of the virtual presence and technical mediation (that is, the interaction is based on live-streaming platforms, equipment, and algorithm mechanisms), though, the theory needs adapting to particular situations.

The majority of the existing studies are on the level of simple application and do not provide the in-depth and systematized study of the whole chain of mechanisms of how interactive rituals systematically affect consumer psychology and consequently, lead them to consumption tendencies. It is on this basis that this paper seeks to develop a system of analysis about the elements psychology behavior to understand how the interactive rituals provoke emotional energy and influence group belonging in live-streaming rooms and eventually motivate normal behaviors like impulsive purchase and herd consumption.

The proposed research does not only inform the advancement of knowledge on this new social and economic phenomenon of live-streaming e-commerce, but also informs theoretically on the limits of working applications of the interactive ritual chain theory in the digital media era, which provides a theoretical framework and practical directives to optimization of interactive design and brand formulation of the effective live-streaming marketing strategies.

2 The Theoretical Core of the Interactive Ritual Chain: Elements and Outcomes

2.1 Core Elements of the Interactive Ceremony

The fundamental theory of analysis in this article is the interactive ritual chain theory. It is a micro sociological theory by Randall Collins who is an American sociologist. The basis of this theory is that the society is established through a sequence of interactive rituals in the multiples of micro-situations, and the most fundamental unit of social life is the ritual [1]. As noted by Deng Xin , the emotional aspect happens to be an insignificant dimension of the interactive ritual chain but offers valuable clues to the explanation of the process of emotional contagion in live streaming rooms [2]. The section below elaborates the main concepts of this model and their use in the study of live-shopping research. Gong Weijiang disclosed that the live interaction rituals can result in extreme polarization of traffic and the implicit power of the host over consumers, which is a life-threatening expansion of the interactive ritual chain theory into the business environment [3].

Collins pointed out that a successful interactive ritual requires four key initiating elements. When these elements are combined and strengthened, specific ritual results will be produced.

Group gathering: two or more individuals meet in the same location. It is the existence of this that leads to the actual process of interaction, where parties are able to affect one another. Boundary setting: The identity and feeling of belongingness to the group is enhanced by the creation of barriers to keep out the so-called outsiders. The boundaries define who is supposed to be included in the ritual hence making sure that there is the shared reality within the group. Common focus: The concentration of attention by participants is based on a common object or activity and the participants all know that they are putting their attention on the same thing by communicating with each other. It is as a result of this shared interest that emotional attachment is made. Emotional sharing: The members exchange experiences of common emotions or share with each other their emotional experiences and by responding to one another, this emotion will perpetually grow and develop an emotional bonding and rhythm merging.

2.2 The Results of Interactive Rituals

With an effective combination of these four elements and creating a feedback loop one successful interactive ritual will yield the following outcomes: Group unity: A sense of strong group identity and belonging. Emotional energy: It is a positive feeling of confidence, passion and strong motivation that is the basic mechanism that drives people to strive to keep on socializing. Group symbols: The group, or group signs (i.e. symbolic signs that find an emotional response), members share a mutual feeling of respect towards such symbols, they can be created in the mere engagement. Moral sense: Upkeeping of group norms and righteous indignation of favoring those who break the norms.

3 Adaptation and Correction of Interactive Ritual Chain in Live-streaming E-commerce Scenarios

The scenario of live-streaming e-commerce differs from the face-to-face interaction described by Collins, but the core mechanism remains the interaction between emotions and symbols. Therefore, when applying this theory, it is necessary to make adaptive corrections based on the characteristics of the live-streaming platform.

In the live-streaming e-commerce scenario, "virtual presence" is achieved through the technology of the live-streaming platform, enabling the interaction between the host and the audience, as well as among the audience themselves, even though they are not physically present together, sharing the interactive situation and realizing remote real-time "co-presence", replacing the physical gathering of a group. Huang Wei et al. conducted an empirical study, confirming that the interactive environment of the live-streaming platform has a significant impact on creating this "presence feeling" [4]. Boundary setting is achieved through mechanisms such as joining fan groups and establishing different membership levels to establish identity boundaries, forming a sense of group belonging [5]. Common focus - the focus is on the host as an individual and the recommended products, and the host shapes the product as a "sacred object" through speech and demonstration, attracting and maintaining the audience's attention

[6]. Emotional sharing - through the emotional mobilization of the host and the real-time interaction among the audience, such as comments and likes, a shared emotional experience and collective excitement are formed. Taking Li Jiaqi's live-streaming room as an example, users express their sense of identification through actions such as liking, commenting, and purchasing [7].

The key role of live-streaming technology lies in enhancing the virtual presence through mechanisms such as multi-sensory immersion and environment construction. This enables the interactive ritual to break through geographical limitations. Although the audience is not physically in the same room, the real-time nature, interaction, and immersion of live streaming create an effect of "remote presence", providing a foundation for the transmission of emotional energy. The audience replaces the nodding, clapping, and cheering in offline activities with symbolic behaviors such as comments, likes, and other actions. When these synchronized behaviors occur, it forms a "rhythm connection" similar to offline interaction, that is, the dispersed audience psychologically feels each other's synchronization [8].

Collins believes that the result of the interactive ritual is mainly group unity and moral sense. However, in commercialized live-streaming e-commerce, the core result of the interactive ritual is the concentration of traffic and the stimulation of consumption behavior. The emotional energy generated by a successful ritual does not directly lead to purchase behavior. It first transforms into an increase in the audience's trust in the host and an enhancement of their sense of belonging to the fan group, and ultimately leads to a desire to purchase the product, thus completing the transformation of "emotional energy" into "commercial value" [9]. Therefore, the interactive ritual chain in live-streaming e-commerce, its final output is more focused on quantifiable commercial indicators, such as sales volume, user stickiness.

4 The Mediating Mechanism through which Interactive Rituals Influence Consumers' Psychology

When the interactive ritual in the live streaming room operates successfully, it will profoundly influence the internal psychological state of consumers through a series of key intermediary variables. These states are the direct cause of their external behaviors.

4.1 Activation of Emotional Energy

Emotional energy is a core concept in Collins' theory, representing a sense of confidence when taking action. In successful live interaction ceremonies, consumers can obtain this positive emotional experience through participation in interactions and emotional resonance [10]. This form of emotional energy differs from short-term emotional fluctuations and functions as a sustained psychological driving force that can continuously drive consumption behavior and maintain frequent interactions. This emotional energy makes consumers feel satisfied and excited about the live experience, thus being more willing to stay, interact, and ultimately generate a purchase intention. For example, elderly live-streaming hosts create a character that evokes sympathy and

establish emotional connections during live product promotion, triggering irrational purchases from the audience [11]. For many consumers, entering the live streaming room and participating in interactions serves to seek emotional companionship and satisfy affective needs.

4.2 Group Belongingness and Social Identity

The sense of group solidarity generated by interactive rituals makes individual viewers feel a strong sense of group belonging. When they gather due to common consumption interests or their love for the same host, a sense of "us" emerges. The fan badges and exclusive terms in the live streaming room are all group symbols that reinforce this sense of identity [12]. Moreover, consumer behavior driven by herd consumption is significantly influenced by social recognition. The rolling sales figures and comments in the live streaming room create social normative pressure, causing users to follow the trend and make purchases to seek group recognition [13]. To seek group recognition and reduce decision uncertainty, consumers will, out of the psychological tendency of "normative conformity", choose to make purchasing decisions that are consistent with the majority [4].

4.3 The Construction and Recognition of Symbolic Capital

During the interactive ceremony, the hosts will construct unique symbolic capital. For instance, for those in the clothing industry, the hosts may construct "aesthetic symbols", while for fitness hosts, they construct "health symbols". And for officials conducting live product promotion, they ingeniously transform the authoritative symbol into trust capital [13]. These symbols are internalized and recognized by consumers, making the consumption behavior go beyond the pursuit of the use value of the goods, and it is also a recognition and acquisition of the symbolic value. Through purchasing actions, consumers are also expressing their affiliation with the group represented by this symbol and their own identity positioning.

5 The Typical Behavioral Responses of Consumers

5.1 Impulsive Purchasing Behavior

Strong emotional appeal and sense of urgency in the live streaming room are created through the use of dynamic sound effects, the emotional acting of the hosts, time-limited sales promotions and countdown purchase alert. Such a setting is most likely to cause emotional contagion and group excitement. Consequently, such an environment stifles logical thinking within the consumer group and instead causes people to act impulsively in regards to buying.

5.2 Herd Consumption

Live streaming rooms have a large share of social identity and herd mentality. When consumers perceive the persuasive suggestions of the popular online hosts and purchase

behaviors of other consumers, in the attempts to gain group status and mitigate the risk of making decisions, they will show strong follow-the-trend consumption patterns. This is the immediate expression of group solidarity that comes as a result of the interactive ritual as far as behavior is concerned.

5.3 Continuous Participation

The emotional energy generated by the interactive ceremony and the positive shopping experience jointly trigger an important psychological mechanism - path dependence. This means that after consumers obtain positive rewards such as a sense of belonging and pleasure during a certain interactive ceremony, they tend to repeatedly choose the same host or the same style of live streaming room. Under this path-dependent influence, consumers will form fixed viewing and consumption habits. They shift from a single consumption experience to becoming loyal fans, not only engaging in continuous consumption but also actively sharing the live streaming room link to attract new viewers, consciously maintaining the order of the live streaming room, actively interacting with the host, and even spontaneously organizing offline fan gatherings and participating in offline activities organized by the host. Collins pointed out that emotional energy is the core driving force for individuals to continuously engage in social interaction, which perfectly explains why consumers will long-term follow a specific host.

5.4 Symbolic Consumption and Identity Expression

The use value of the goods that consumers buy does not simply exist in the live-streaming room, but the group symbols, which are beings created by both the hosts and the community. The consumers also use the consumption behavior to demonstrate their association with a given group and the identity positioning. Consumption is transformed to affirm one of social identity.

The consumer psychology and behavior driven by interactive rituals operate through a complete "element-psychology-behavior" mechanism chain. The first stage is the initiation and circulation of interactive rituals. The four elements of virtual presence, boundary setting, common focus, and emotional sharing are integrated with each other to form a positive feedback loop. The second stage is the intermediary transformation of the psychological mechanism. A successful ritual will trigger the "emotional energy" of consumers and make them have a strong sense of group belonging and recognition of the symbolic value of the host/commodity. The third stage is the external manifestation of consumption behavior. The internal psychological drive ultimately externalizes as typical consumption behaviors, primarily manifested in the form of: impulsive purchase triggered by emotional arousal and cognitive inhibition, group consumption driven by the need for social recognition, and continuous participation driven by emotional energy and symbolic recognition.

In conclusion, the interactive rituals in live-streaming sales successfully stimulate consumers' emotional energy, sense of group belonging, and symbolic recognition through a precise combination of digital elements, ultimately driving typical consumption behaviors such as impulsive purchase, group consumption, symbolic

consumption, and continuous participation. This "element - psychology - behavior" mechanism chain reveals the internal root cause of the great appeal of live-streaming sales.

6 Discussion

Although this article has established a preliminary framework, there are still many gaps in this field. Future research can be further developed and expanded in the following directions.

6.1 Deepening the Theoretical Perspective: From A Single Explanation to a Comprehensive Model

Most existing studies have used the interactive ritual chain theory in isolation. Future research could attempt to integrate it with other mature theoretical frameworks through cross-fusion. For instance, combining the interactive ritual chain with the S-O-R (stimulus - organism - response) model, empirical tests were conducted to verify how the interactive ritual elements (stimulus) mediate through perceived value and perceived trust (organism), ultimately influencing user behavior (response) [14]. This theoretical integration can further reveal the crucial role of emotional perception, that is, how emotions regulate the path from psychological cognition to behavioral response.

6.2 Research Method Innovation: From Qualitative Description to Big Data Analysis

The current research mainly relies on theoretical deduction and case studies, and there is a lack of quantitative measurement for interactive rituals, especially for "emotional energy". Future research can draw on two approaches: one is big data analysis, such as using natural language processing technology to conduct emotional analysis on massive bullet comments, reviews, and forwards, which can achieve multi-dimensional exploration of the intensity, polarity, and frequency of keywords in the content of bullet comments, and quantify the intensity and fluctuations of emotional energy; the other is rigorous empirical verification, through questionnaire surveys or experimental methods, using statistical tools such as structural equation models to verify the reliability and universality of the "element - psychology - behavior" mechanism chain proposed in this paper [15].

6.3 Attention to New Forms and Negative Effects

Pay attention to newly created types of live streaming: With the arrival of AI smart human hosts and virtual hosts, the constituent components (including emotional authenticity) and working mechanisms of interactive ceremonies are experiencing new challenges [16]. The next question to consider in the future is the logic of construction and consumer adoption of the interactive ceremonies in these new shapes and forms.

Enhance the study of the particular forms of live streaming: The focus in the future can be narrowed to the knowledge-based live streaming and charity live streaming to e-commerce and the enterprise self-streaming in more specific vertical areas, studying the peculiarities of their interactive rituals.

Consider the downsides of interactive ceremonies: Future science needs to take a closer look at the ways to help steer an unhealthy and irrational consumption culture using modes of governance like: raising the media literacy of consumers and making them more aware of platform responsibility, improving platform review mechanisms and introducing third-party detection systems to curb false promotion and data bubbles [17]. Meanwhile, the problems of the hidden dominance and power inequality which might lurk behind interactive ceremonies must be given a thorough analysis through the prism of both the ethics and protection of consumer rights.

7 Conclusion

This study builds an integrated "element–psychology–behavior" analytical framework to explain the great consumer attractiveness of live-streaming e-commerce by applying Randall Collins' Interactive Ritual Chain theory. The study shows that live-streaming e-commerce effectively reconstructs interactive rituals under conditions of technical mediation and commercial orientation by adapting the four fundamental ritual elements—virtual presence, boundary setting, common focus, and emotional sharing—to digitally mediated environments. These rituals create symbolic identification with both hosts and products, boost group belongingness, and increase customers' emotional energy—all of which are important psychological processes influencing purchase behavior.

The results imply that consumer habits including impulsive buying, herd consuming, ongoing involvement, and symbolic consumption are firmly ingrained in ritualized interaction processes rather than being solely products of marketing strategies. While social identification and symbolic capital convert emotional engagement into trust, loyalty, and purchase intentions, emotional energy serves as a persistent motivating factor. The final result of interactive rituals in live-streaming e-commerce, as opposed to conventional face-to-face rituals, is the conversion of emotional energy into quantifiable economic value, such as sales volume and user stickiness.

Overall, this study offers a theoretical explanation for the psychological processes behind live-streaming consumption and enhances the use of interactive ritual chain theory in digital commercial contexts. Additionally, it provides useful information for organizations and platforms looking to improve user experience, optimize interactive design, and direct more ethical and sustainable marketing tactics.

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