



Reconfiguring Virtual Public Sphere: A Systematic Literature Review of Affective Commerce in Live Streaming Shopping

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Abstract. This study conducts a systematic literature review (SLR) of 682 publications from 585 academic journals and conference proceedings to investigate the evolution of the virtual public sphere in the era of platform society. The review highlights the virtual public sphere as a concept in digital communication research that tries to comprehend the changing nature of public interaction in digital media contexts. The finding shows major trend in scholarly discourse away over conventional understandings of virtual interaction and toward issues such as digital transformation, social media, and virtual reality, particularly since 2018. This transition suggests that the virtual public sphere is no longer simply regarded as an open deliberative communication space, but rather increasingly operates according to logic of platformization. Public communication in digital contexts is today mediated by algorithms, influenced by platform infrastructures, and embedded in digital economic ecosystems. This paper suggests that the present virtual public sphere shows the transition from rational-deliberative communication to personal and platform-mediated interaction. This study adds to current discussions about communication transformation, algorithmic mediation, and new forms of public engagement in digital landscapes utilizing ideas from the virtual public sphere and platform society studies.

Keywords: Affective, Commerce, Live shopping, Platform .

1 Introduction

This last decade has witnessed sustained global adoption of livestreaming shopping as a fundamental component of the platform-based digital commerce industry. It has come of age as a significant part of the market in several industries. According to available industry statistics, the total size of the livestreaming shopping industry has rapidly expanded across major economies. While the adoption in China rapidly moved from a marginal approach to a major one of online retail business from 2010s, the value of transaction expanded by several orders from billion dollars a couple of years to hundreds of billion dollars of US money in the early 2020s [1]. Western markets have started following this trend with an expected increase in the number of factors over the next couple of years in the United States market. According to survey findings, almost half of viewers who watch livestream shopping sessions go on to make buying decisions, showing that real-time interaction, product display, and

host-audience engagement greatly improve conversion rates. During and after the COVID-19 wave, livestreaming shopping had a major increase in worldwide usage, as buyers seek digital experiences that replicated face-to-face interactions. These trends indicate that livestreaming commerce responds not merely to technological advancements, but also to shifting expectations of trust, immediacy, and social presence in digital consumption.

Originally conceptualized and developed, and China now expanded e-commerce streaming to Asia across the largest digital transformation force to drive faster in Asia. China has led the world with its livestream shopping via online marketplaces such as Taobao Live, Douyin, a Chinese sister version of TikTok and Kuaishou [2]. Beyond China, Southeast Asia has emerged as one of the fastest-growing places for livestream e-commerce, with Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines driving the way. This growth has been driven by massive social media penetration and broad mobile connectivity, allowing significant portions of the population to engage in livestream purchasing directly through apps such as TikTok Shop, Shopee Live, and Lazada Live. In these contexts, the livestreaming format is commonly used by local micro-sellers and small businesses, showing that livestream e-commerce adoption in Asia is not limited to top influencers but also embraces grassroots business participation that leverages real-time engagement for product discovery and sales. The path of livestreaming growth in Asia demonstrates a structural shift in digital consumer behavior: platforms that combine entertainment, interpersonal engagement, and quick transaction are reshaping how economic and social interactions occur digital. While other regions, such as North America and Europe, have just slowly begun to experiment with livestream shopping, the Asian experience demonstrates a more mature and diverse adoption, driven by both technological infrastructure and culturally deep habits for interactive media. Taken together, these developments show livestreaming e-commerce in Asia as more than just a market trend, but a fundamental shift in digital commerce practices that prioritizes real-time communication as a vital component of digital consumption.

These integrated smartphone platforms promote seamless interaction, entertainment, and immediate purchase, transforming traditional shopping into immersive real-time experiences. Live streaming's reach and user behavior show the format's societal penetration. Viewers not only stream in regularly, but they also spend a lot of time watching; the average session length for live video material is roughly 25-26 minutes, which is significantly longer than typical on-demand consumption [3]. Live streaming's ability to provide real-time, interactive engagement distinguishes it from typical video formats. In general, these numbers show that live streaming is no longer a minor or brief medium, but rather a critical component of worldwide digital media consumption, providing numerous chances for social connection, community building, and financial exchange. The scope and consistent growth of live streaming material provide a solid empirical framework for study that goes beyond commercial metrics to look into how communication practices evolve and are constituted in these dynamic virtual public sphere. Within the context of communication studies, livestreaming shopping extends beyond its function as marketplace and distribution channel; it is also a digital communicative space where real-time interactions between streamers, audiences, and platform structures take place in a dynamic ecosystem [4]. From ontological perspectives, live streaming shopping differ from conventional

advertising or e-commerce platforms, as its primary unit of analysis is not one-way persuasive messaging, but a sequence of real-time communicative practices. These activities occur using live video, text-based interaction, gestures, visual reactions, virtual gifts, and various types of platform-enabled gamification [5]. Live streaming shopping as ecosystem refers to a various of actors, including streamers and viewers, brands, platform algorithms, logistics, and influencer networks. This following structure shows multi-entity and connected world in which social behaviors are determined by both human interaction and technology structures. Existing research shows continuous trust as an important predictor of long-term purchasing motivation in livestreaming contexts [6]. Previous studies about live streaming shopping most focused in live streaming shopping through consumer behavior perspectives, thus prior studies has not addressed the structural aspects of the digital public sphere in the live streaming shopping trend.

Al Jamil and Ahmed Ismail (2024) define the e-commerce experience as an interaction between a variety of actors, including buyers, sellers who operate e-commerce platform, and facilitators such as referral tools and service person [7]. Their communicative features, such as interactivity and perceived politeness or friendliness, as well as seller image and the quality of the seller's Facebook page, have been shown to influence trust in the seller, though the strength of this influence appears to be limited in particular empirical studies [8]. Thus, the accessibility of appropriate information, the flow of interaction, and needs about the streamer's performance contribute to viewers decisions about viewing and purchasing. Within most factual level, livestreaming commerce is a space where streasers and viewers get involved in real time interaction through live video and chat based platforms. Livestreaming shopping also shows continuous interaction between actors and structure of platform to generate and conduct communicative behaviors. Zhang, Huang & Li (2022) showed that actors both streamers and viewers continuously adapt their behavior in response to one another in order to produce digital visibility within livestreaming ecosystem [9]. Streamers and viewers actively appropriate and adjust their way to enhance visibility, engagement, and profit goals. Mai, Ahmad, and Xu (2023) identify three main locus research about livestreaming shopping, susch as; streamers, viewers, and platforms. According to the literature review, publication about livestreaming shopping has increased rapidly over the last five years. Yet, most of current study it through limited conceptual framework, recognizing livestreaming shopping as digital marketing, persuasion based live interaction, and entertainment media that drives viewing intentions and purchase decisions. Need for a social approach that emphasize livestreaming shopping as a dynamic social activity caused by ongoing interaction among platform structures and user agency is emphasized by this conceptual fragmentation.

Although research on livestream shopping has evolved significantly, the area remains theoretically fragmented across marketing, information systems, and consumer psychology, which has hampered engagement with communication theory. While previous research has successfully explained purchasing behavior, trust, and engagement mechanisms, it has paid relatively little attention to livestreaming shopping as a digitally mediated public sphere in which communication practices are constantly reproduced through interactions between users and platform infrastructure. To complete this gap, the current study conducts a systematic literature review to map

the intellectual development of livestreaming shopping research, identify its dominant conceptual trajectories, and explain how the concept of the virtual public sphere has been reconfigured through algorithmic mediation, platform governance, and affective forms of public engagement. This conceptual fragmentation showed a bigger challenge to communication study because it restricts the ability to describe how digital public interaction is changing under platformization. As livestreaming shopping increasingly combines communication, commerce, entertainment, and algorithmic governance on a single platform, viewing the phenomenon solely through marketing or consumer behavior lenses risks missing the communicative processes that constantly negotiate public participation, social interaction, and collective meaning. Without a complete conceptual synthesis, the discipline lacks a coherent knowledge of how platform infrastructures modify the characteristics of the virtual public sphere and redefine the interaction between technical structures and human activity. Without a complete conceptual synthesis, the discipline lacks a coherent knowledge of how platform infrastructures modify the characteristics of the virtual public sphere and redefine the interaction between technical structures and human activity.

Addressing this issue requires more than recognizing specific empirical results; instead, it demands a systematic synthesis of the intellectual evolution of the area. Although several review studies have aimed at livestreaming shopping from marketing, e-commerce, and consumer behavior perspectives, there has been little effort to systematically map how communication scholars have conceptualized livestreaming shopping as a virtual public sphere within the larger context of platform society. A systematic literature review is thus required to find prevalent research themes, theoretical trajectories, and conceptual shifts that define the field's evolution. This study aims to reconfigure our understanding of livestreaming shopping beyond its commercial function, positioning it as a platform-mediated communicative space where affective interaction, algorithmic governance, and public engagement are regularly reproduced. This paper contributes to communication studies by establishing an integrative conceptual framework for future research on the virtual public sphere in platform-based digital settings.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Virtual Public Sphere

Studies on the virtual public sphere has grown significantly, enriching the subject of digital communication studies. According to a literature review of 682 publications from 1996 to 2026, research on the virtual public sphere has progressed from an initial emphasis on deliberative democracy to more complex analyses of social media, digital participation, and the role and function of platforms as spaces that shape public discourse or communication. In terms of theoretical framework, the majority of studies conducted to date still draw upon Jürgen Habermas's normative framework, which conceptualises the public sphere as a democratic arena for deliberation. However, developments have shown a shift whereby the public sphere in the digital context is no longer examined merely as an ideal discursive space, but as a space that

is transformed by communication practices between users or actors, the process of technological adaptation, and the dominance of platforms.

In the beginning, the concept of the virtual public sphere was always linked to Jürgen Habermas' traditional theory of the public sphere as a discursive place where citizens might engage in rational discourse free of the dominance of either the state or the market. The results of the co-occurrence network analysis demonstrate that research on the virtual public sphere has evolved within a clustered topic framework and has undergone considerable shifts from year to year. The keyword network in the following co-occurrence diagram shows a close connection between the concepts of “public sphere,” “internet,” and “social media”, the main nodes that form the basis of the discussion, which then extends to immersive technologies such as “virtual reality” and contextual issues such as the pandemic and digital transformation.

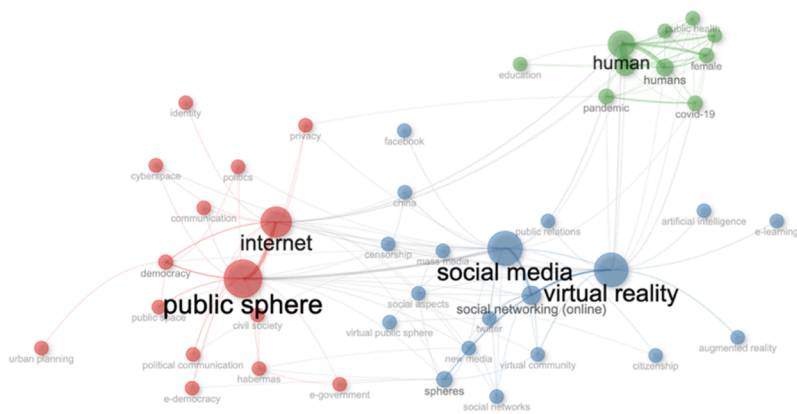


Fig. 1. Co-Occurrence Network

The results of the literature review also show that publications from the 2000s through 2012 that discussed virtual public spaces were dominated by clusters centered on the concepts of the public sphere, the internet, democracy, political communication, and civil society. During this phase, Jürgen Habermas’s ideas held significant influence, with the internet being positioned as an extension of the deliberative public sphere.

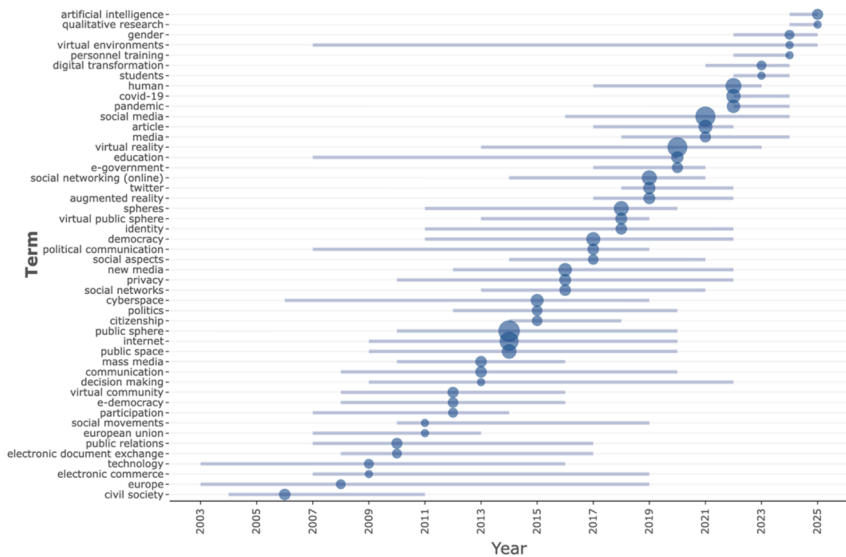


Fig. 2. Thematic Evolution Map

During the 2012-2018 era, research on virtual public spaces focused on concepts such as social media and public networks. There was a dramatic shift with the advent of ideas such as "social media," "social networking," "Twitter," "identity," "privacy," and "networking." The research focus has also turned to digital platform involvement, identity building in digital environments, privacy and surveillance concerns, and communication dynamics inside digital networks. Since 2018, the field of virtual public space research has continued to expand and shift. The SLR results' network analysis suggests a change in research dominance towards 'digital transformation', 'social media', and 'virtual reality'. This demonstrates that the virtual public sphere has changed toward the concept of 'platformisation', in which public communication in virtual spaces is managed by algorithms, controlled by platform architecture and logic, and integrated into the digital economy ecosystem. Studies also show an increasing trend away from network-based methods and toward an understanding based on platform logic and data technologies. In this context, the public sphere exists not as a result of social interaction among digital users, but as part of a 'platform society' in which digital infrastructure pushes, directs, and mediates public opinion. The concept of the 'algorithmic public sphere' has also emerged, emphasizing how the visibility of information in the digital environment is not organic, but rather produced by the logic of platform algorithms that function in an opaque manner. The research also shows that virtual public spaces are changing in the context of a 'platform society', in which interactions are mediated and regulated by technological infrastructure dominated by technologies [10]. Communication in virtual spaces no longer takes place organically, but is governed by algorithmic

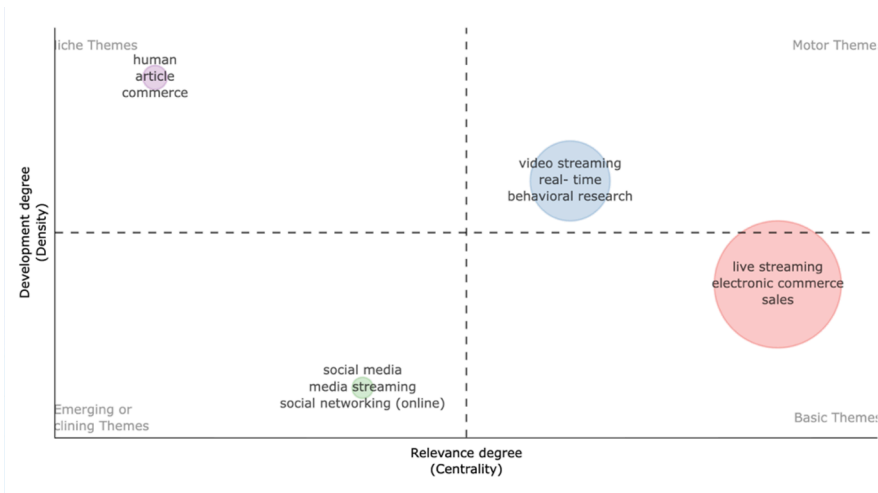


Fig. 4. Thematic Map

The growth of livestreaming across various digital platforms indicates that real-time communication formats are increasingly becoming an integral part of people's digital lives. However, this development does not merely signify a shift in communication technology. Livestreaming on digital platforms not only reflects an increase in digital media consumption but also marks a shift in the platforms' function toward becoming increasingly complex arenas for public social interaction. Live streaming is no longer used solely to broadcast content; it has evolved into a social arena where users engage in conversations, form virtual communities, build emotional connections, and even participate in various forms of symbolic exchange that take place in real time. This trend shows that livestreaming has evolved into a form of virtual public space that brings together diverse interests, identities, and forms of participation within the digital society.

3 Methods

To establish a conceptual discussion as part of the theorization process, the researchers completed both a systematic literature review using bibliometric methods and a manual literature review using the PRISMA approach.

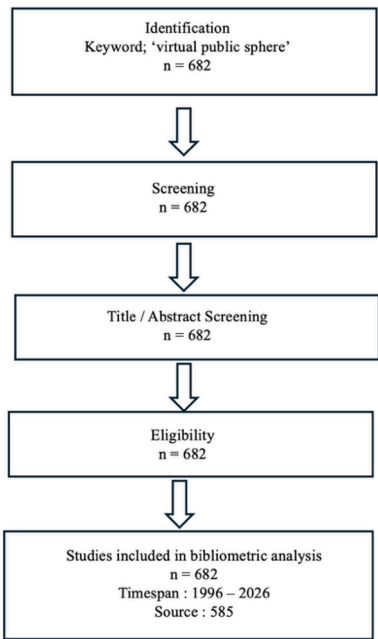


Fig. 5. Thematic Map

The process of identifying scientific articles with the keyword “virtual public sphere” in journal and publication databases yielded a total of 682 documents, which then underwent screening and selection without any further articles being eliminated; thus, all articles collected through bibliometric tools were retained as the corpus for the SLR analysis. This dataset covers publications from 1996 to 2026, sourced from 585 publications. These documents were then used as the basis for a bibliometric analysis to map conceptual developments, thematic trends, and shifts in theoretical perspectives in the study of virtual public spaces.

The bibliographic data were acquired from the Scopus database because of its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed publications and conference proceedings in communication, social sciences, and information studies. Data gathering was conducted in June 2026. The article selection followed the PRISMA structure consisting of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. Initially, 682 documents were identified from Scopus. Duplicate records were automatically deleted by the database, and the remaining publications were filtered based on document relevancy.

The bibliometric analysis was carried out by Bibliometrix (R-package) and Biblioshiny. Firstly, a descriptive performance analysis was conducted with the intention to determine the development of publications, productivity by sources and citations. Secondly, a science mapping analysis was carried out using techniques like

the co-occurrence network analysis and the analysis of themes evolution with the purpose of showing the concepts relationships and topic development over time.

4 Results & Discussion

4.1 Evolution Virtual Public Sphere

Theoretically, studies of virtual public spaces in the early 2000s show a strong tendency toward normative, deliberative, and liberal-democratic approaches. From this perspective, public space is understood as an ideal arena that enables rational discourse among citizens, where arguments are exchanged openly, on an equal footing, and free from the domination of power. The normative perspective positions the public sphere as an ideal arena that must be realized, while the deliberative dimension emphasizes the importance of rational communication in the process of shaping public opinion. Dahlberg (1998) emphasizes that cyberspace has emerged as a new deliberative arena, despite facing the challenge of corporate dominance that undermines the quality of public discourse [11]. Undoubtedly, Jürgen Habermas's philosophical framework serves as the foundation for the practice of liberal democracy, in which citizen participation and freedom of expression are key elements in maintaining the quality of democratic life. In the digital context, the internet at this stage is positioned as a "medium" with the potential to revitalize this public sphere by expanding access and participation among users or the public. However, regarding the debate over defining virtual public spaces, Calhoun (1998) also noted that inclusivity in the public sphere has shifted toward social fragmentation, which increasingly highlights the identities of homogeneous groups [12].

Research on virtual public spaces continued to explore concepts such as social media and public networks during the 2012–2018 period. There was a significant shift with the emergence of concepts such as "social media," "social networking," "Twitter," "identity," "privacy," and "networking." The research focus also shifted to participation on digital platforms, the construction of identity in digital spaces, issues of privacy and surveillance, and the dynamics of communication within digital networks. Theoretically, there has been a shift from the previous conception of the public sphere as an arena of rational discourse emphasizing consensus and logical argumentation; consequently, studies of the virtual public sphere now focus on performativity, interaction, and emotional expression in digital communication. Interactions in virtual spaces are no longer aimed solely at reaching consensus, but also at building visibility, identity, and engagement within broader social networks. W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg (2012) introduced the concept of "connective action," which emphasizes that public participation is now personal, decentralized, and mediated by digital technology [13]. Yochai Benkler (2015) also demonstrates that the public sphere is no longer centralized but is dispersed across communication networks that enable various actors to participate simultaneously—an idea that has since evolved into the concept of the "networked public sphere" [14]. Thus, the virtual public sphere is not a rational, interest-free space for deliberation, but rather a dynamic space of interaction where meaning and participation are constructed through performative social interactions.

The field of virtual public space research has continued to evolve and undergo shifts from 2018 to the present. The network analysis of the SLR results shows that the focus of research has shifted toward “digital transformation,” “social media,” and “virtual reality.” This confirms that the virtual public sphere has shifted toward the concept of “platformization,” in which public communication in virtual spaces is mediated by algorithms, influenced by platform infrastructure and logic, and has become part of the digital economy ecosystem. Theoretical shifts also reveal a growing divergence from network-based approaches toward an understanding centered on platform logic and data technology. Goldberg (2011) argues that the virtual public sphere cannot be truly free, but has been dominated by the logic of the digital economy, which monetizes user activity [15]. In this context, the public sphere no longer arises from users’ social interactions in the digital space, but is part of a “platform society” in which digital infrastructure plays a role in driving, directing, and mediating public opinion. The concept of the “algorithmic public sphere” has also emerged, describing how the visibility of information in digital spaces is not organic but is constructed by the logic of platform algorithms that operate in a non-transparent manner. Developments in the literature also indicate that virtual public spaces are undergoing a shift within the context of a “platform society,” where interactions are mediated and controlled by technological infrastructure dominated by tech corporations [16]. Communication in virtual spaces no longer occurs organically but is controlled by algorithmic mechanisms that determine the visibility and distribution of information accessed by the public.

4.2 Livestreaming Shopping as Platformed Public Sphere

The bibliometric findings show that the emergence of the virtual public sphere provides a critical conceptual framework for understanding livestreaming shopping beyond its traditional position as a digital commerce channel. While previous research has primarily looked at livestreaming shopping through the lenses of marketing communication, consumer behavior, and purchase intention, the thematic evolution and co-occurrence analyses presented in this study suggest a broader shift in how public communication is conceptualized in digital environments. Rather than simply serving as an online marketplace, livestreaming shopping is a platform-mediated communicative ecosystem in which economic trade, social interaction, and algorithmic control are inextricably linked.

The thematic evolution study shows that research on the virtual public sphere has gradually changed from conversations about democracy, civil society, and the Internet to topics like social media, digital transformation, and platform-based communication. This transformation represents an important epistemic shift in communication research. The public sphere is no longer primarily seen as a deliberative forum where citizens engage in rational-critical discourse, as Habermas first proposed, but rather as a digitally mediated environment in which participation is structured through platform infrastructures. As a result, communication in modern virtual spaces is organized not only through human interactions, but also by algorithmic algorithms that determine visibility, relevance, and engagement.

In a livestreaming virtual sphere, users are not merely passive audiences; rather, they are empowered to become active participants who take control of their

experience through the exchange of information and social interaction [17]. Furthermore, the interactions initiated by users, user comments posted through the platform's features, and real-time responses during live streams create a form of public communication that takes place openly within the digital platform space. Thus, live-streamed shopping can be understood not merely as a virtual space for economic transactions, but as a form of virtual public space that has undergone a transformation toward a model of public communication based on networks, affect, performativity, and platform logic.

The interactions that develop during live streaming also reveal a relationship between people and the platform's structure. Zhang, Huang, and Li (2022) show that the actors namely, streamers and viewers actively adapt to one another to build visibility through ongoing interactions, a process they term the "push-and-pull dynamics" with live-streaming shopping platforms. Visibility is jointly determined through a consistent push-and-pull dynamic between users in this context, creators and the platform. Streamers and audiences not only follow the platform's rules but also adapt and modify their strategies to optimize visibility, engagement, and commercial performance *performa komersial* [9]. In this context, interactions between streamers and viewers not only build social relationships but also generate data that serves as a reference for the algorithm. Thus, visibility in live streaming is the result of a structural construction mediated by the platform. On some live-streaming platforms, indicators of user engagement such as commenting, sending gifts, and live content recommendations that appear in the "For You" section are part of the algorithmic assessment.

Another key finding from the bibliometric mapping is the increased importance of emotive communication. Earlier conceptions of the public sphere focused on rational reasoning and consensus-building; however, contemporary research increasingly links digital participation to emotional engagement, performative interaction, and social visibility. Livestreaming shopping is an example of this change. Streamers foster intimacy with welcomes, comedy, storytelling, emotional persuasion, and spontaneous conversations, while viewers actively interact with comments, emoji replies, virtual presents, and real-time purchase behaviors [18]. These communicative techniques demonstrate how public participation in platform contexts is increasingly sustained through affective engagement rather than solely intellectual debate. The value of communication is determined not only by the quality of the arguments, but also by its ability to inspire engagement, sustain visibility, and drive continual interaction.

As a result, the data show that livestreaming retail should be viewed as one of the most mature forms of the redesigned virtual public space. Platformization, rather than reflecting a fall in public communication, has altered the systems that produce and sustain public interaction. Livestreaming shopping exemplifies how communication, business, entertainment, and technical governance intersect within a single platform ecosystem in which various human and technological actors continuously replicate social patterns. Thus, public involvement is inextricably linked to platform infrastructures that allow connection while also regulating visibility by algorithmic mediation.

5 Conclusion

Based on these findings, this study proposes a conceptual reconfiguration of the virtual public sphere. Instead of defining the virtual public sphere solely as an online deliberative arena, the concept should be reconceptualized as a **platformed public sphere**, a communicative ecosystem in which public interaction emerges through the recursive relationships among platform infrastructures, algorithmic governance, affective participation, and human agency. Within this perspective, livestreaming shopping represents not merely a commercial innovation but a contemporary form of digital public communication where communicative practices are continuously reproduced through the interaction between users and platform technologies. This conceptualization extends previous communication scholarship by repositioning livestreaming shopping as an evolving public communication environment embedded within the broader dynamics of platform society rather than limiting its interpretation to consumer behavior or digital marketing alone.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. Firstly, this study solely uses data on bibliometric counts from a single source and therefore might not include relevant articles cataloged in another academic journal databases (e.g. Web of Science, Google Scholar, or some regional journal databases). Secondly, since the data is from secondary literature and bibliometric maps, it is not able to investigate the communicative practices performed during a livestream shopping session in an active manner. This study thereby only indicates the structure of knowledge and theme of a particular field. The results could hardly capture the practice in which lived participants such as streamers, viewers, brands and platform companies practice their communicative practices. Thirdly, in terms of comparative analyses, this study doesn't distinguish the context between platforms, countries or culture backgrounds which might affect how the operation of platformed public communication is.

Thus, further research must build upon this research by exploring empirical studies of livestreaming shopping as a form of communication. Methods like digital ethnography, netnography, in-depth interviews, and discourse analysis can help to reveal, through closer inspection, how streamers and audiences can mediate public communication through real-time management of participation, trust, visibility, and social connection. Cross-platform comparisons of such platforms as TikTok Shop, Shopee Live, Lazada Live, and Taobao Live may be useful for analysing the impact of platform affordances and algorithmic arrangements.

Disclosure of Interests. The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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