

The Influence of "Opinion Leaders" in E-commerce Live Streaming on Consumer Purchase Intention

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Abstract: With the gradual popularization of the Internet, sales methods have also undergone significant changes. Major online live streaming platforms are now extensively utilized for product sales. Moreover, people's perception of sales has undergone considerable transformations. In recent years, e-commerce live streaming has experienced a remarkable development, evolving from a form of entertainment into a vital channel for information acquisition, social interaction, and sales. Compared to traditional sales channels, e-commerce live streaming possesses numerous advantages and provides a new model for product circulation. The "opinion leaders" in e-commerce live streaming directly influence consumers' willingness to purchase products. Through an analysis of various aspects, this study aims to provide essential insights for further improving the e-commerce live streaming sales system.

Keywords: E-commerce live streaming, Internet, Traditional sales channels.

1. Introduction

E-commerce live streaming represents a novel sales method in the informatization era, characterized by its lively and accessible nature, which makes consumer choices more diverse. In recent years, the content of e-commerce live streaming has become more relatable to people's lives. Its main objective is to build a bridge between consumers, merchants, and e-commerce platforms, strengthening the interconnectedness among these three parties. Using images, videos, or physical demonstrations as carriers, e-commerce anchors explain the products, not only enhancing consumers' comprehensive information acquisition but also reducing their trial and error costs. Despite the changing marketing strategies of merchants over time, consumer-centricity remains the constant focus. Opinion leaders in e-commerce live streaming must play a significant role in guiding consumers correctly, satisfying their needs, and promoting the healthy development of e-commerce live streaming. This article starts by examining the influence of opinion leaders on consumers' purchase intention and then elaborates on the specific reasons for such influence, concluding with comprehensive discussions and relevant recommendations.

2. Content of Opinion Leaders and Consumer Purchase Intention

2.1. Opinion Leaders

The concept of opinion leaders was first proposed by Paul F. Lazarsfeld, an American communication scholar at Columbia University, in the 1940s. It referred to individuals who, in the context of political elections at that time, came into contact with a large amount of campaign information through mass media and then disseminated original or processed information and suggestions to others, exerting personal influence on them. This formed a two-stage communication process: mass media-opinion leaders-general audience.

In the context of e-commerce live streaming, opinion leaders are individuals who informally spread opinions or provide information about a specific product or product category. They may endorse a particular brand as the best or suggest how to use a specific product. Generally, they are members of a reference group who, due to their special expertise, knowledge, personality, or other characteristics, have the ability to influence others. Opinion leaders can be found in various social strata and might be an "opinion leader" for a certain product but a follower in other areas.

E-commerce live streaming primarily involves real-time dissemination through video, and opinion leaders promote transactions by recommending products. This not only attracts more consumers but also achieves traffic monetization. The increasing interaction between the Internet and consumer groups makes consumers susceptible to the influence of opinion leaders. Undeniably, the openness of the Internet plays a decisive role in maximizing information sharing, making it a major factor in the emergence of opinion leaders during e-commerce live streaming. The development of e-commerce live streaming opinion leaders is showing a trend of multiple levels, identities, and diversification, including government leaders, celebrities, influential social media users, grassroots influencers, and more.

2.2. Consumer Purchase Intention

During the study of consumer behavior theory, consumer purchase intention stands out as a significant aspect. It mainly refers to the likelihood of a person buying a product to satisfy their needs. This probability is influenced by various internal and external factors. Internal factors encompass variables that influence consumers personally, such as age, occupation, income level, etc. External factors pertain to the attributes of the products being sold, including price, brand, after-sales service, and so on. Currently, consumers show a preference for online shopping due to its convenience and efficiency, allowing them to buy goods without leaving their homes and saving time spent in physical stores. Understanding consumer purchase intention is a psychological manifestation that holds vital significance in accurately predicting consumer

purchasing behavior. Before conducting e-commerce live streaming, e-commerce opinion leaders predict consumer purchase intention for the entire broadcast, leading to cost savings and increased sales efficiency. As the economic development structure undergoes innovative changes, consumer structures and levels are also evolving. Thus, studying consumer purchase intention also contributes to the research on marketing theories in practice.

3. The Main Reasons for the Influence of E-commerce Live Streaming Opinion Leaders on Consumer Purchase Intention

3.1. Relationship-Oriented Interactive Model

From the perspective of the operational model, e-commerce live streaming possesses a characteristic of close interaction with the audience. E-commerce live streaming opinion leaders engage in a process of heartfelt communication with consumers. Throughout the e-commerce live streaming process, opinion leaders and viewers interact through video, facilitating real-time and interactive communication. Despite being physically separated, e-commerce live streaming opinion leaders maintain a strong sense of intimacy, always upholding an equal status with the consumers. By establishing a communication style resembling that of friends, they enable consumers to comfortably embrace shopping advice. Moreover, interactive features such as gifting comments and selecting users to receive gifts entice more consumers to participate. This type of emotional interaction exerts an impact on consumers' emotions and purchase intention. Consumers tend to develop trust in e-commerce live streaming opinion leaders, thereby fostering repeat purchases.

3.2. Opinion Leaders Possess Strong Expertise and Fame

The majority of e-commerce live streaming operates under the TOC (Top of the Conversion Funnel) operational model. Various factors, such as the professional competence, values, and fame of e-commerce anchors, are the primary reasons for them becoming opinion leaders. For instance, the current popular live streaming celebrity, Li Jiaqi, has garnered consumer support due to his fame and the values he demonstrates during his live broadcasts. E-commerce live streaming leaders exhibit high involvement and in-depth understanding during product selection, as they personally try out the products before promoting them. As a result of this approach, the information provided by e-commerce opinion leaders is more authoritative and credible compared to traditional e-commerce methods.

The products recommended by opinion leaders during e-commerce live streaming often come with lower prices than those found in physical stores. Opinion leaders have the negotiating power with merchants and leverage the trust consumers place in them as a foundation. Consumers are more willing to purchase cost-effective products, even if it involves the expenses of opinion leaders or the losses from price reductions. By adopting a small profit-margin, high-sales volume strategy, e-commerce live streaming sales models outperform traditional sales methods. As a result, merchants are increasingly inclined to choose this approach, underscoring the crucial importance of long-term brand

image-building.

3.3. Information Source Influences Perception Bias

In the process of judging the influence of mass communication, there exists a common perception bias where people tend to identify persuasive information, propaganda, or negative messages, leading to unpredictable impacts on "others." Before actually entering an e-commerce live streaming session, consumers are often driven by the third-person effect, reinforcing their own belief that they will not engage in irrational shopping behavior, but others might. During the process of e-commerce live streaming, opinion leaders easily generate a reverse third-person effect, meaning that consumers believe the information source will have a greater impact on themselves. These information sources are primarily disseminated by e-commerce live streaming opinion leaders. For instance, phrases such as "OMG," "buy it," "this product has sold 100,000 units on Tiktok (a social media platform)," "loved by all girls," "a product Li Jiaqi has been using," and more, exert significant influence. Under the effect of such information sources, not only can it motivate consumers' enthusiasm, but it can also prompt them to foot the bill.

Products showcased in e-commerce live streaming have strong timeliness, such as cosmetics, snacks, etc., which are closely associated with the latest advertisements. As a result, the impact of information sources on perception bias becomes particularly prominent in this context.

4. Recommendations for E-commerce Live Streaming Opinion Leaders and E-commerce Companies

4.1. Establish a Strong Brand Image to Enhance Customer Loyalty

Regardless of the marketing strategies employed in e-commerce live streaming, products themselves must maintain high-quality standards. If the brand image of the products is unfavorable, it can quickly erode consumer trust and may even lead to a loss of competitive advantage in the market. With the development of the internet, the e-commerce live streaming industry has been presented with significant opportunities. It is crucial to recognize the importance of building a strong brand image as a foundation for enhancing customer loyalty and continually enriching product content.

E-commerce live streaming opinion leaders should thoroughly analyze the characteristics of different consumer groups on various platforms. By accurately understanding consumers' purchasing psychology, behavior patterns, and other aspects, they can provide products that cater to diverse needs. For instance, employing a multi-tiered consumer segmentation approach can effectively stimulate consumer desires and encourage them to make purchases. By crafting a unique and distinctive brand image, consumers will be more likely to share their experiences and make repeat purchases, ultimately enhancing their overall shopping experience.

4.2. Identify Target Audience and Cultivate Opinion Leaders

In the era of information technology, the e-commerce live streaming shopping model is becoming increasingly popular, and opinion leaders play a vital role in capturing consumers

and ensuring a strong forward-looking grasp of the target audience. Typically, the main consumers in e-commerce live streaming are college students and white-collar workers. Despite their limited spending capacity, they possess healthy consumer attitudes and shopping conditions. With the emergence of various online lending and borrowing platforms, these consumer groups are no longer restricted by their economic abilities. The success of e-commerce live streaming in achieving high sales volumes is directly related to consumers' trust.

During this process, opinion leaders play a functional role, and their choice of products should align with their own e-commerce marketing philosophy. It is important to note that traffic does not have an absolute impact during this process. By establishing a strong connection with the target audience, opinion leaders can effectively influence consumers' purchasing decisions and preferences, further boosting the success of e-commerce live streaming.

4.3. Strengthen Online Regulation and Raise Entry Standards

As technological advancements continue to progress, the opportunities provided for e-commerce live streaming also come with corresponding challenges. Live streaming shopping requires relatively low investment and is easily accessible, making it increasingly prevalent. However, if there is a lack of adequate quality inspection teams and insufficient online regulation, blind consumer pursuit can lead to unforeseen consequences. To effectively regulate e-commerce live streaming, prevent opinion leaders from engaging in false advertising or violating laws, it is essential to gradually enhance online supervision and appropriately raise the entry standards for products.

Comprehensive supervision of product quality and evaluation of the professionalism of opinion leader teams should be conducted. By implementing systematic measures, product reputation can be enhanced, ultimately providing consumers with a positive shopping experience. This approach ensures that e-commerce live streaming maintains credibility, consumer trust, and legal compliance while safeguarding against potential risks associated with irresponsible practices or misleading information.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, opinion leaders play a significant role in influencing consumers' purchase intentions during the process of e-commerce live streaming. To meet consumers' demands and provide high-quality products, opinion leaders should focus on the following aspects:

5.1. Enhance Professional Skills and Improve Live Interaction

E-commerce companies should comprehensively cultivate the professional skills of opinion leaders. To establish authority, opinion leaders should deeply understand the products they promote and provide specific information to users. This builds trust and credibility with their followers, leading to increased efficiency in live streaming sales and reduced information asymmetry. The higher the level of professionalism, the more products they are likely to sell. Additionally, companies should analyze the value of celebrity endorsements accurately and utilize big data to match customers, seizing opportunities in traffic operations.

5.2. Conduct Thorough Product Research, Precisely Position the Market, and Provide Excellent After-Sales Service

Opinion leaders should focus on the products they promote, master relevant industry knowledge, understand product performance and composition, and reduce consumer uncertainty while enhancing their trust. They should authentically demonstrate the product usage process and provide genuine feedback on product value to users, avoiding exaggerations, fraud, and misleading information. Responding professionally to product-related inquiries and improving after-sales service and customer support will further increase consumer trust and satisfaction, ultimately facilitating successful transactions.

5.3. Convey Positive Values to Consumers and Create a Favorable Live Streaming Shopping Environment

Opinion leaders should enhance live interaction, treat each viewer in the live streaming room seriously, and promptly respond to questions in the chat, thereby strengthening consumer engagement. This fosters the formation of virtual communities centered around opinion leaders, increasing audience loyalty and creating emotional resonance with consumers. As a result, consumers perceive a higher level of value and develop stronger purchase intentions.

By taking these steps, opinion leaders can effectively influence consumer behavior, enhance brand reputation, and drive the development of the e-commerce live streaming industry. For e-commerce companies, it is crucial to recognize the importance of opinion leaders and collaborate with them to create a more engaging and trustworthy live streaming shopping experience for consumers.

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