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An Analysis of Fan Needs in E-commerce Live Streaming from a Participatory Culture Perspective: A Case Study of Dongfang Zhenxuan (Post-print)

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Abstract

With the rapid development of internet technology and the e-commerce industry, live-streaming e-commerce has become a lucrative revenue stream for major e-commerce platforms, while fans converted from live room consumers have become an active and non-negligible force on the internet. The recent launch of Oriental Selection live-streaming has broken the traditional model of e-commerce live-streaming, further strengthening the emotional connection between audiences and hosts, and pioneered a new model that integrates knowledge into sales-oriented live-streaming. This paper takes the Oriental Selection live room as a case study to examine the needs of fans in China's live-streaming e-commerce through the lens of participatory culture, hoping to contribute to the innovative development of China's e-commerce live-streaming.

Full Text

An Analysis of Fan Demands in E-commerce Live Streaming from the Perspective of Participatory Culture: A Case Study of Dongfang Zhenxuan

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Abstract: With the rapid development of internet technology and the e-commerce industry, live-streaming commerce has become a lucrative revenue stream for major e-commerce platforms, and the consumers who have gradually evolved into fans within these live streams have become a force to be reckoned with in the digital sphere. The recent launch of the Dongfang Zhenxuan live stream has broken away from traditional e-commerce live-streaming models, further strengthening the emotional connection between audiences and hosts

while pioneering a new model that integrates knowledge into commerce-driven live streaming. This paper examines the Dongfang Zhenxuan live stream as a case study to analyze fan demands within China's live-streaming commerce landscape from the perspective of participatory culture, hoping to contribute to the innovative development of e-commerce live streaming in China.

Keywords: e-commerce live streaming; Dongfang Zhenxuan; participatory culture; fans

I. Composition of E-commerce Live Streaming

E-commerce live streaming originated from business explorations on 导购 platforms like Mogujie, but the true landmark event occurred in 2016 with Taobao's formal entry into the space. The launch of Taobao Live marked the arrival of a new era for e-commerce live streaming. By fostering emotional connections between hosts and audiences, e-commerce live streaming creates a strong sense of co-presence, and this interactive format that eliminates temporal and spatial distances between hosts and viewers represents a key reason for its popularity. The Dongfang Zhenxuan live stream, established by New Oriental, has broken away from the overwhelming marketing atmosphere of conventional live streams by carving out a new knowledge-driven commerce path that has captured the hearts of numerous audiences. This success stems from careful attention to the components within the live stream:

(1) Hosts

1. Established Recognition: The hosts of Dongfang Zhenxuan are not entirely newcomers to the scene. Its initial hosts were already well-known teachers under the New Oriental umbrella, such as Dong Yuhui and YOYO, who had accumulated considerable popularity through New Oriental's online classrooms. Teachers selected for Dongfang Zhenxuan have undergone professional training and possess distinctive speech patterns and sentence structures. Compared to live streams featuring complete novices, they already have a certain fan base, and their previous professional identities as teachers lend them a sense of familiarity and enhance their credibility in the eyes of audiences.

2. Knowledge and Experience: The main hosts who enter the Dongfang Zhenxuan live stream are well-educated, experienced frontline teachers who are passionate about their educational careers and strive to impart knowledge to their live-stream audiences through this platform. Therefore, when introducing agricultural products, they don't merely recite product specifications or discount details in a dry manner. Instead, they delve deeply into the stories behind the products, weaving knowledge of humanities, history, English, geography, and other subjects into their sales pitch through a narrative style. Additionally, hosts share personal life reflections. For instance, when introducing Wuchang rice from Northeast China, Dong Yuhui improvised a poem: "I haven't shown you the pristine snow of Changbai Mountain, nor have I let you feel the gentle

breeze blowing through the fields in October, nor have I shown you the heavy, bowing rice ears like wise sages. I haven't taken you to witness all this, but my dear, I can let you taste such rice. Romance is not just about starry skies and flower seas, but also about the mortal world." Countless audiences have been captivated by the knowledge displayed by Dongfang Zhenxuan's hosts, and this model of combining product sales with knowledge output has become the live stream's most distinctive feature.

(2) Audience

For live streams, the audience is not merely viewers but also consumers who determine sales performance. The real-time communication enabled between audiences and hosts creates a strong sense of interactive co-presence that establishes a powerful connection between them. This connection has transformed many audiences from consumers into fans, making them more enthusiastic about boosting consumption for their favorite hosts and deriving satisfaction from it, thereby increasing their stickiness with the hosts.

(3) Product Selection

"Dongfang Zhenxuan" leverages the Douyin platform to conduct live-streaming commerce for agricultural products, building high-quality supply chains and developing self-operated brands to support rural revitalization. In Dongfang Zhenxuan's showcase, agricultural products constitute the main category, with food and beverages accounting for 44% and fresh fruits for 26%. Meanwhile, hosts represented by Dong Yuhui endow agricultural products with emotional value through bilingual sales, narrative storytelling, and socialized dissemination, achieving strong connections between products and users [1]. Simultaneously, while strengthening quality control, Dongfang Zhenxuan has begun attempting to build its own supply chain, promote self-operated products, and establish its own brand.

II. Audience Participatory Behavior Practices

American communication and media studies scholar Henry Jenkins first proposed the theory of "participatory culture" in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participative Culture*. Jenkins inherited Michel de Certeau's concept of "poaching," which describes the relationship between authors and readers as a perpetual struggle over textual ownership and the control of interpretive meaning. Initially used to denote fan culture emerging in the television era, the concept has been further expanded with the enhancement of media technologies and the emergence of various types of live streaming.

(1) Participatory Companionship in Synchronous Live Streaming

With the continuous development of network technology, domestic live-streaming platforms have increasingly emphasized audience engagement and

interactive features, further expanding audience participation in live streams and significantly boosting their enthusiasm. When audiences consistently follow the same e-commerce live stream, they witness the host's growth trajectory to some extent and can express real-time emotions and product questions through bullet comments. This not only narrows the distance between hosts and audiences but also creates a communication and companionship atmosphere among audience members. Furthermore, these live streams integrate multiple media channels, further enhancing the intimate sense of cultivation between hosts and audiences and maximizing the transformation of audiences from consumers to fans, thereby encouraging active participation in interactions and purchases within the live stream.

(2) Participatory Production of Materials

As fans' discursive power has grown, they are no longer merely emotionally invested viewers; they have begun to reproduce and reinterpret host-related materials, creating new images or personas for their favorite hosts. Among these fan groups, many are "CP" (couple pairing) enthusiasts who pair their favorite hosts together, imagining intimate relationships between them and creating video edits, fan fiction, and other content while naming these pairings. In the Dongfang Zhenxuan live stream, notable CPs include Dong Yuhui and Shi Ming ("Shi Hui"), and Dong Yuhui and YOYO. The interactions between hosts in the live stream have attracted many CP fans, who can conjure up entire dramas from a single glance or gesture: Dong Yuhui probably liked YOYO but was rejected, and so on. Consequently, CP pairing names often feature creative wordplay through homophonic combinations or by identifying common characteristics. This practice also creates an identity symbol, and such behavior often allows the less popular party in the pairing to gain some benefits. With the widespread use of emojis in online social interaction, emoji creation has also become a form of secondary creation for fans as "textual poachers." For example, in the Dongfang Zhenxuan live stream, an image of Dong Yuhui holding a whiteboard and writing was captured by fans to create emojis like "Have you learned it?" and "You know what I mean," which were then used for promotional support. The production and use of these emojis not only deepens group identity among fans but also further promotes fans' secondary creation of materials.

(3) Participatory Communication in Communities

With the popularization of social platforms, the communication space for hosts' fans has continuously expanded, providing people from various regions, age groups, and social strata with a platform to gather and communicate over shared interests in the same host. Real-world barriers are dissolved in cyberspace, forming organized, division-of-labor virtual communities. These fans are enthusiastic about expressing themselves in these online virtual communities that bring together people from different places who like the same host, sharing content

and topics about the host that others in their social circles cannot understand. Foremost among these are Weibo Super Topics, also known as Super Topic Communities. After Dong Yuhui gained fame in the Dongfang Zhenxuan live stream, fans created a “Dong Yuhui” Super Topic Community on Weibo to share relevant information and materials about him, creating a real-time communication platform for fans. Under the Weibo Super Topic model, fans can quickly find their community and receive timely updates about their favorite host. These interactive communications can further promote the host and increase their popularity. Simultaneously, speaking and producing content within Super Topics can elevate one’s level in the community, enhancing fan participation, strengthening stickiness with the Super Topic, increasing group identity, and reinforcing emotional connections between fans and hosts.

III. Psychological Analysis of Dongfang Zhenxuan Live Streaming Fans

E-commerce live streaming is a form of popular cultural product whose essential attributes are entertainment and consumption. Its success depends on grasping and understanding audience psychology. Only by capturing audience demands can it truly satisfy audiences’ psychological and needs-based sense of participation and interaction, which represents an important reason why the Dongfang Zhenxuan live stream can stand out.

(1) Novelty-Seeking Psychology

Unlike other live streams filled with shouting, promotional offers, celebrity guests, and lucky draw giveaways, Dongfang Zhenxuan’s live stream breaks through this sales model to pioneer an entirely new approach. Through elegant narrative prose, hosts immerse users in the scenes they aim to create, generating strong emotional resonance between audiences and the narrated content, thereby motivating audiences to purchase products based on this emotional connection. Faced with slowing live-stream traffic growth, decreasing input-output ratios, and issues of homogenization and over-entertainment of content, Dongfang Zhenxuan has seized the opportunity to inject new momentum into existing models. High-quality content drives audience purchase desire and represents one reason for Dongfang Zhenxuan’s rapid rise to fame. Hosts complete emotional expression and brand value transmission by establishing ideological and emotional resonance with audiences. This sales format, distinct from other hosts’ “3, 2, 1, link up” and “lowest price on the internet” approaches, offers users a refreshing experience, creating Dongfang Zhenxuan’s explosive popularity and enabling it to carve out a new path differentiating itself from other live streams [1].

(2) Curiosity and Voyeuristic Psychology

Hosts in the Dongfang Zhenxuan live stream always choose to share different knowledge and express their thoughts and feelings when facing different products, analyzing their own psychology to present themselves to audiences as much as possible while also sharing personal life experiences. By positioning themselves as friends, they satisfy audience curiosity about hosts' private lives to some extent. Additionally, the live stream invites different guests to interact with hosts on screen and conducts outdoor broadcasts at product origin sites, enabling audiences to better understand their favorite hosts' character, interests, and other aspects through the screen. This satisfies audiences' voyeuristic desires to some extent and further enhances emotional connections between audiences and the live stream.

(3) Participatory Psychology

Under media empowerment, audiences have gradually become important determinants of hosts' careers, finding emotional anchor points on the path of supporting their favorite hosts while their sense of participation continues to awaken. Through examining Dongfang Zhenxuan hosts as representative cases of e-commerce live streaming, fans' participatory behavioral practices can be divided into three types: participatory companionship, participatory production, and participatory communication. As participation deepens, fans and hosts establish a quasi-intimate relationship. Consequently, to produce high-level, high-reputation e-commerce live streams, audience demands must be prioritized.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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