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## **Analysis of Consumer Behavior in Live Streaming Rooms from the Perspective of Register Theory: Postprint**

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### **Abstract**

This study adopts a stylistic and sociolinguistic research perspective, employing Halliday's register theory as its theoretical framework to conduct discourse analysis on livestream videos from Douyin livestream rooms of bloggers including Zhang Lan, Duoyu and Maomao Sister, Fan Xiaohui, Xiang Tai, and Huang Shengyi, with the aim of investigating how linguistic features of e-commerce livestreamers' speech community affect consumer behavior.

### **Full Text**

## **Register Theory Perspective on Consumption Behavior in Live Streaming Rooms**

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### **Abstract**

This study adopts a stylistic and sociolinguistic research perspective, utilizing Halliday's register theory as its theoretical framework. Through discourse analysis of live streaming videos from Douyin hosts including Zhang Lan, Duoyu and Maomao Jie, Fan Xiaohui, Xiang Tai, and Huang Shengyi, this research aims to explore how the linguistic characteristics of live streaming hosts' speech communities influence consumer behavior.

**Keywords:** Register Theory, E-commerce Platforms, Live Streaming Rooms

## 1. Register Theory Applied to Live Streaming Rooms to Promote Consumption

Register theory represents a significant concept within systemic functional linguistics, with key contributors including Malinowski, Firth, and Halliday. The notion of situational context was first introduced in 1923 by British anthropologist Malinowski, referring to the immediate environment in which discourse is produced. Building upon this theoretical foundation, J.R. Firth, founder of the London School, incorporated the concept of context into linguistics and developed it further. British linguist M.A.K. Halliday identified three crucial factors that determine register: field, tenor, and mode. Field refers to what is actually happening in the communicative process, reflecting the communicative function and purpose of the context. Tenor describes the relationship between participants in the communicative situation, embodying the interpersonal function of language. Mode pertains to the channel or medium used in linguistic communication, that is, the manner of expression.

Since 2015, the e-commerce industry has gradually become an indispensable component of China's economy, experiencing linear growth from 2019 to 2020 and maintaining high sales volumes through 2022, particularly in live e-commerce. The temporary downturn in brick-and-mortar retail contributed substantial traffic to the live e-commerce sector. Concurrently, with the development of major social internet platforms, the landscape has expanded beyond traditional e-commerce platforms such as Taobao, Pinduoduo, JD.com, and Vipshop. Platforms like Douyin, Kuaishou, Bilibili, Xiaohongshu, Huya, and Douyu have adopted a "social plus e-commerce" model, expanding into new business formats and establishing themselves as key venues for live streaming commerce.

## 2. The Rise of Consumer Purchasing Power in Live E-commerce

The report from the 20th Party Congress emphasizes the need to deeply implement innovation-driven development strategies, open up new fields and tracks for development, and continuously shape new drivers and advantages for growth. Today, "office workers" can complete tasks previously done in physical offices with just a computer and a mobile phone through video conferencing, shared documents, and mobile approvals. According to the "Statistical Report on Internet Development in China" released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), as of June 2022, China's online office user base reached 461 million, accounting for 43.8% of all internet users. The online economy has created a new breakthrough for the live streaming sector, with revenues showing linear growth patterns.

## 2.1 Surging Consumption Capacity and Diversified Shopping Needs

Socioeconomic development has elevated national consumption levels, increasing both purchase frequency and average order value, resulting in surging consumption capacity. Chinese consumers also exhibit diversified, personalized, and quality-oriented demands. Against this backdrop, meeting these upgraded consumption changes has become one of the challenges facing the “live streaming economy,” prompting platforms to devote considerable efforts to address this issue.

## 2.2 Large and Diverse Consumer Base

According to the 50th “Statistical Report on Internet Development in China” released by CNNIC, as of June 2022, China’s internet user population reached 1.051 billion, with an internet penetration rate of 74.4%. The live streaming user base reached 716 million, an increase of 12.9 million from December 2021, representing 68.1% of all internet users. Online medical service users reached 300 million, an increase of 1.96 million from December 2021, accounting for 28.5% of all internet users.

## 2.3 Purchase Continuity and Consumer Loyalty in Live Streaming Rooms

The immediate and efficient interaction in live e-commerce can satisfy consumers’ personalized information needs, thereby promoting purchases. However, this also makes consumers overly dependent on hosts, failing to guarantee connections between consumers and brands and causing brands to lose initiative in autonomous marketing. Professional hosts’ explanations can help brands build consumer trust, while unprofessional hosts’ exaggerations may subject brands to passive “false advertising.” Hosts’ fan traffic enables live e-commerce to reach more consumers, increasing sales while improving brand exposure. Nevertheless, traffic and selling power have become bargaining chips for hosts, with high slot fees, sales commissions, and suppressed product prices squeezing corporate profit margins. From a temporal perspective, the most direct short-term value of live e-commerce is the sales revenue generated during live broadcasts. Additionally, live streaming can attract new customers for brands and even convert them into members. Both the new customers attracted and their conversion to membership represent potential future revenue sources for enterprises. Therefore, sales revenue, new customer acquisition numbers, and new customer membership conversion rates all reflect the short-term value of live e-commerce. However, based on the preceding discussion of value, the long-term profit returns brought by live e-commerce are often less optimistic. Brands primarily hope to convert acquired new customers into loyal users who generate long-term profit income, specifically manifested in whether consumers will make regular repurchases of brand products. Yet the answer to this question is not straightforward. Whether profit-seeking, price-sensitive live streaming consumers can

demonstrate brand loyalty and generate long-term value compared to consumers acquired through other non-live promotion methods remains unknown.

## 2.4 Active and Autonomous Consumer Groups

The phenomenon of “birds of a feather flock together” is also common in consumer markets. Younger generations of consumers are proactive and autonomous in online transactions. As post-95s and post-00s generations gradually enter the workforce, circle-based consumption has become more pronounced, giving rise to a distinct new consumption characteristic—“no social interaction, no consumption.” Consumers can be categorized by age into “Generation Z,” “Millennials,” and “Post-War Generation,” and by income level into “Small-Town Youth,” “Petite Bourgeoisie New Middle Class,” “Mothers and Infants,” and “Singles,” among others, demonstrating clear market segmentation. For instance, “small-town youth” experience less work pressure and have lower daily expenses compared to white-collar workers and young people in first-tier cities, granting them more disposable income and higher potential consumption power. They often engage in consumption activities with friends during leisure time. These consumers form stable circles over time through shared interests, attitudes, hobbies, and values. In this new era of pronounced circle-based consumption, businesses seeking to leverage this trend must selectively target customers when developing marketing strategies.

## 3. Problems in Live Streaming Rooms Targeting Consumer Groups

### 3.1 Bottlenecks in Information Dissemination

**One-Sided Presentation:** Product introductions in live streaming rooms typically involve one-way information output from hosts, predominantly using positive and complimentary vocabulary to describe products—essentially presenting a one-sided narrative. Product descriptions eliminate negative reviews that might harm sales, focusing instead on showcasing product appearance and superficial user experience. Although live streaming rooms provide bullet comments for host-fan communication, the streaming team restricts comment content during broadcasts, permitting only messages favorable to products and the streaming room.

**Language Poverty:** In social media contexts, hosts design social discourse to guide audience participation through strategies such as “frequent use of interactive symbols” and “emotional personal expression.” In live streaming contexts, the close-up experience enabled by vertical screens and high-modality background elements provide audiences with an immersive atmosphere. The live streaming process primarily uses speech as its communicative modality. As speakers, hosts typically employ strategies such as opening remarks, conversational history, and body posture to elicit audience interaction and enhance participation and purchase intention. Generally, if hosts speak illogically and

lack hierarchical structure in live streaming rooms, it creates an unpleasant listening experience for users. Therefore, to deepen fans' impressions of the streaming room and ensure they remain engaged for sufficient duration, hosts prepare topics or humorous stories. This approach can mobilize user enthusiasm and stimulate their interactivity, as live streaming with a sense of participation may constitute a more successful broadcast. For example, in the “Oriental Selection” live streaming room, fans entered expecting to see teachers from New Oriental selling vegetables, only to be captivated by the hosts' “instant essay” eloquence, unwilling to leave even when the broadcast ended. New Oriental's bilingual product promotion became an overnight sensation, with sales reaching 68 million yuan on June 16, 2022 alone—nearly 15 times the revenue from Yu Minhong's inaugural broadcast. The channel gained nearly 14 million followers in nine days, and New Oriental Online's Hong Kong stock price surged from 3.7 yuan to 25 yuan within ten days, exceeding a 500% increase and adding 20 billion yuan in market value.

**Superficial and Flat Communication:** Communication in live streaming rooms occurs only between hosts or through bullet comment interaction. This simple interaction, serving as a crucial hub for facilitating transactions, can easily influence consumer emotions. As discussed in works like *The Crowd*, public sentiment in most eras has largely been blind and even anti-intellectual. While not unusual, traditional limitations on individual influence and information dissemination in conventional eras meant society possessed strong self-regulation mechanisms, resulting in smaller emotional fluctuations and less frequent extreme sentiments—though when they did occur, they created significant social impact. Today, however, social media has endowed ordinary individuals with greater personal influence, allowing micro-emotions to be rapidly amplified through social transmission chains and driving high-frequency emotional resonance. Simultaneously, emotional consensus can quickly find commercial outlets, promoting public action and generating more substantial social impact, unlike in the past when emotions and information remained at the communication level, awaiting the next emotional wave.

### 3.2 Consumption Carnival in Live Streaming Rooms from a Register Theory Perspective

**Host Rhetoric and Live Streaming Atmosphere Creation:** Live streaming sellers utilize appearance and selling rhetoric (distinctive linguistic symbols) to construct a host “persona” and enrich their personal image to attract attention and stimulate purchase desire. For example, Li Jiaqi's appearance and language attract numerous consumers. His male identity creates contrast when testing lipstick for fans, his banter with colleagues adds 趣味性, his analysis of product ingredients demonstrates professionalism, and his lipstick color competition with Jack Ma to become the “Lipstick King” is uniquely novel. Meanwhile, Li Jiaqi's signature phrases—“Oh my god,” “Buy it, buy it,” and “All my beauties”—establish personal linguistic symbols while expressing product

recommendations. This psychologically associates “Oh my god” with Li Jiaqi, achieving the effect of occupying consumers’ minds and establishing emotional identification.

**Celebrity-Host Encounters in Live Streaming Rooms:** Celebrities appearing in live streams themselves or being invited by hosts leverage their fame and credibility to attract attention, creating a win-win for shopping and star-chasing. Celebrity endorsements share similarities with celebrity live streaming sales, where a few simple words from stars become driving forces for fan consumption. Through live streaming technology, audiences and celebrities achieve spatiotemporal interaction. Whether transmitted through mobile or computer screens, audiences sense the infinite shortening of psychological distance between their real “self” and the “celebrity” on screen, amplifying personal presence. One purpose of shopping is to enhance personal presence, and this need is precisely satisfied during celebrity live streaming sales. Celebrity fans purchase endorsed products or celebrity 同款 to express love and support for their idols, realizing traffic monetization—what is known as fan economy.

### 3.3 Lack of Quality Assurance and After-Sales Support

**Difficulty Ensuring Product Quality:** On March 31, 2020, the China Consumers Association released a survey report on consumer satisfaction with live e-commerce, revealing that nearly 40% of consumers encountered issues in live shopping, including host exaggeration and false advertising, as well as products not matching descriptions. This reminds us that after becoming a new trend in e-commerce, the problems within this sector cannot be ignored. Industry self-discipline should be strengthened, consumer rights protection—including class action lawsuits—should be facilitated, the legal status of e-commerce live streaming should be clarified, regulatory oversight should be increased, and hosts cannot simply take money without assuming any responsibility. In recent years, competition in the e-commerce sector has intensified. With the rise of live streaming, “live selling” has become a new e-commerce model. Many live streaming influencers have become “sales kings,” with a single broadcast potentially generating tens of millions or even hundreds of millions in sales revenue, and some top influencers earning hundreds of millions annually. Many consumers enjoy shopping in live streams because, compared to traditional static product pages, live streaming better demonstrates product features and allows interaction with hosts to learn more about products. More importantly, live streams create a perception of “substantial discounts,” making consumers feel they are purchasing products at lower prices—buying means earning.

**Inadequate After-Sales Support:** To attract more consumers, live streaming rooms often select products through several low-priced 爆款 for traffic attraction or choose high-commission products. Such products undergo no meticulous inspection, leading to numerous after-sales problems. Issues include fake popularity, fabricated reviews, induced transactions, false transactions, and private transactions that circumvent safety supervision. Simultaneously, consumers are

susceptible to impulse purchases influenced by the live streaming atmosphere. Due to information asymmetry, consumers are misled by exaggerated or false information and purchase counterfeit goods and “three-no” products (without manufacturer, date, or quality certification). “Too many fakes,” “mixed quality,” and “products not matching descriptions” are concentrated feedback from consumers regarding product quality. When problems arise, consumers face difficulties finding customer service or operators and locating evidence.

#### 4. Research Methods and Results

This study selected live streaming discourse from Douyin hosts Zhang Lan, Duoyu and Maomao Jie, Fan Xiaohui, Xiang Tai, and Huang Shengyi during the 19:30-20:00 time slot. All language from these videos was transcribed, yielding a total of 107,396 characters. After data collection, this study employed a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative analysis to examine the transcribed texts, investigating how the three elements of register theory interact in live streaming sales.

Field refers to the background and theme of social activities, which determines the content of dialogue in social interactions. In live streaming rooms, hosts collaboratively introduce each product, with different emphases that complement each other’s content to comprehensively present product highlights and promote transactions. Due to regional and cultural differences, overseas and domestic live streams often emphasize different product aspects.

Tenor describes the exchange of information between participants, encompassing two types of relationships: their roles in social activities and their roles in interactive activities, such as speaker and listener. This study explains tenor in live streaming rooms through three aspects: personal pronouns, speech tone, and sentence tense. Hosts address fans with intimate terms such as “baby,” “family,” “sister,” which helps narrow the psychological distance and establish solid relationships. In terms of tone, declarative sentences predominate, with hosts stating order quantities directly rather than asking fans if they want to purchase, reducing fans’ thinking process and prompting command-like compliance. Sentence tenses primarily use present and future tense, encouraging fans to place orders for immediate and future needs. Mode refers to the function of the entire text in a given context, including oral or written communication, as well as communicative genre and rhetorical style. Communication between hosts and consumers in live streaming rooms occurs through screens. While it appears that only the host and assistant are on screen, there is actually a well-trained “team” behind the scenes serving as atmosphere drivers and the foundation of the streaming room. Hosts’ statements are coordinated with this backstage team in real-time, comprehensively considering the complexity of fans in the streaming room and employing short, easily understandable terms to introduce products directly.

In recent years, e-commerce has achieved breakthrough development, with

internet-plus new business forms and models proliferating. An increasing number of physical stores have joined the internet, transforming into e-commerce and further impacting the real economy. From social survey practice, most enterprises have entered online business, adopting internet-based new retail business models that combine traditional and online economies for production and operation. Currently, international trade impacts have intensified the overall market economy downturn and negative economic growth in various countries. For domestic export enterprises, reduced foreign trade orders have led to insufficient production, forcing companies to lay off staff and cut salaries. This has caused depression in real economy enterprises, negatively impacting employment, consumption, and investment to varying degrees. Meanwhile, rising prices of imported raw materials have also affected the real economy. Despite robust domestic economic development, the current economic downturn and unprofitable real economy are inextricably linked to international trade impacts and fierce competition.

Accompanying changes in economic conditions and consumption structure upgrades, coupled with increased policy support and improved industry standards, the “live streaming economy” will more profoundly transform new retail business formats, construct new development patterns for industrial systems, better unleash consumption potential, and contribute greater momentum to economic development. Live streaming rooms represent a massive channel and platform value. First, they enrich platform content and satisfy fans’ diversified needs. Second, they help platforms screen high-quality customers, increase fan stickiness, and extend viewing duration. Third, they enable real-time interaction, narrowing the distance between celebrities and fans. Fourth, they broaden traffic channels, expand user demographics, and increase user volume.

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