

Live-stream E-commerce Marketing from the Perspective of Media Convergence: A Case Study of Collaboration Between TV Hosts and Influencer Streamers (Postprint)

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Abstract

Under the trends of media convergence and the pandemic's economic impact, live-streaming e-commerce is developing rapidly. On April 6, 2020, CCTV launched a series of "Thank You for Supporting Hubei" charity live streams, thereby initiating this multi-IP collaborative live-streaming model featuring "TV hosts + influencer streamers." This paper takes six collaborative live streams from the first half of 2020 as research subjects, employs media convergence theory to analyze their motivations, characteristics, and communication effects, provides feasible pathways for the deep convergence transformation of traditional media, and also offers new cases for the study of media convergence theory.

Full Text

Preamble

Live-streaming E-commerce Marketing from the Perspective of Media Convergence: A Case Study of Collaborations Between TV Hosts and Internet Influencers

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Abstract: Driven by the trend of media convergence and the economic impact of the pandemic, live-streaming e-commerce is developing rapidly. On April 6, 2020, CCTV launched a series of charity live streams titled "Thank You for Fighting for Hubei," marking the beginning of a multi-IP collaborative live-streaming model featuring "TV hosts + internet influencers." This paper examines six collaborative live streams from the first half of 2020 as case studies, applying media convergence theory to analyze their motivations, characteristics,

and communication effects. The study aims to provide a viable pathway for the deep integration and transformation of traditional media, while also offering new empirical cases for media convergence theory research.

Keywords: media convergence; live-streaming e-commerce; host; influencer; agricultural assistance

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In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe, pressing pause on economic development worldwide. Traditional offline marketing models were obstructed, while new forms of media marketing played a more significant role. On April 6, 2020, CCTV launched a series of charity live streams titled “Thank You for Fighting for Hubei,” marking the first time that CCTV media hosts collaborated with internet influencers for live-streaming product sales. Since then, this multi-IP collaborative live-streaming model featuring “TV hosts + internet influencers” has emerged, with additional roles such as government officials and entertainment celebrities also joining collaborative live streams. The products sold in these live streams are primarily agricultural and sideline products from regions severely affected by the pandemic, such as Hubei. These live streams not only achieved considerable sales volumes but, more importantly, helped improve the industrial chain of agricultural and sideline products in rural areas, facilitated the discovery of new sales channels for agricultural products, and provided valuable experience for future development.

1. Media Convergence Theory

In 1979, Nicholas Negroponte introduced the concept of “Three Overlapping Circles” in a speech, referring to three rapidly developing industries at the time: printing and publishing, broadcasting and animation, and computing. He observed that these three media industries were increasingly converging. Subsequently, in his 1983 book *The Technologies of Freedom*, Ithiel de Sola Pool first coined the term “media convergence.” In 1987, Negroponte systematically proposed the conceptual framework for “media convergence.” He argued that the term has both narrow and broad definitions. Narrowly defined, media convergence refers to the “fusion” of different media forms, resulting in a “qualitative change” that creates new media forms, such as electronic magazines and blog news. The broad definition encompasses a wider scope, including the combination, convergence, or integration of all media and their related elements—not

only the convergence of media forms but also the integration of media functions, communication methods, ownership, organizational structures, and other elements [1].

Building upon Negroponte' s foundation, Chinese scholars have proposed that media convergence is not the only trend. In their research, Cao Yina and Fu Yujie, based on Roger Fidler' s viewpoint, introduced the concept of media differentiation. They argue that scholars have overlooked the non-overlapping portions of the three circles in the overlapping circles concept, which represent each medium' s competitive advantages. Moreover, they discuss the relationship between media convergence and media differentiation: from the perspective of Marxist philosophy, the unity of opposites between media convergence and media differentiation is inevitable, and both represent trends in media development [2].

2. Case Analysis

2.1 Analysis of Reasons for Collaborative Live Streaming

2.1.1 Government Encouragement of New Business Forms The media marketing model of live-streaming e-commerce has already developed considerably in China and is gaining strong momentum [3]. According to the 46th “Statistical Report on Internet Development in China” released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), e-commerce live streaming became one of the fastest-growing internet applications in the first half of 2020 as a typical representative of new business forms. As of June 2020, China' s e-commerce live streaming user base reached 309 million, an increase of 16.7% from March 2020, making it the fastest-growing individual internet application in the first half of the year. In the first half of 2020, domestic e-commerce live streaming exceeded 10 million sessions, with over 400,000 active hosts and more than 50 billion views [4]. On one hand, pandemic prevention and control measures prevented normal travel and consequently affected offline consumption, particularly for non-essential goods, which increased traffic for online live-streaming sales. On the other hand, consumers responded more actively to the national call after receiving signals about government policies encouraging the live-streaming economy.

2.1.2 Government Encouragement of E-commerce for Agricultural Assistance In the past five years' Central No. 1 Documents, content similar to “using the Internet to drive agricultural industry upgrading and agricultural product sales” can be found. On February 25, 2021, at the National Conference on Summarizing and Commending the Fight Against Poverty, Alibaba (China) Co., Ltd. was awarded the title of National Advanced Collective in Poverty Alleviation, while multiple Taobao store owners dedicated to helping impoverished populations through opening Taobao shops received the title of National Advanced Individual in Poverty Alleviation. With national support and encouragement, numerous e-commerce users and brands actively explore

ways to achieve both profit and agricultural assistance through live-streaming e-commerce.

2.1.3 Government Encouragement of Media Convergence Development Since the 18th Party Congress, the Central Committee has attached great importance to the in-depth development of media integration and transformation. Particularly traditional media such as newspapers, broadcasting, and television have actively explored paths for integration with other media and have accumulated certain practical experience. First, in terms of newspapers, the Southern Media Group has innovatively formed a comprehensive three-dimensional communication matrix comprising *Southern Daily*, *Southern Magazine*, Southern News Network, the “Southern Plus” client, and other platforms. Users can subscribe to mobile newspapers and electronic editions, and can access news and information through text, images, audio, and video without needing to subscribe to a complete print newspaper. Second, in television, many viewers noticed that “China Central People’s Television Station” became “China Media Group.” This is because it was formed in 2018 through the merger of the former China Central Television, the former China Global Television Network, the former China National Radio, and the former China Radio International. Beyond organizational restructuring, China Media Group continues to explore various forms of innovation and integration in news reporting, content production, and industrial development, with the “Thank You for Fighting for Hubei” charity live-streaming event representing a step forward in content innovation. Third, in broadcasting, when many questioned whether the radio industry would eventually disappear, the industry responded forcefully through the development of internet radio and online audio programs. Although radio lacks visual information, it frees the audience’s eyes and thus has a strong companionship function—listeners can engage in visual activities while listening to radio programs. This characteristic requires the broadcasting industry to continuously undergo deep integration and transformation, exploring new forms of media convergence and content innovation.

2.2 Characteristics of Collaborative Live Streaming

2.2.1 Convergence Development 2.2.1.1 Media + E-commerce Convergence

The protagonists of CCTV’s three “Thank You for Fighting for Hubei” live streams were respectively host Zhu Guangquan and influencer Li Jiaqi, host Ouyang Xiadan and entertainment star Wang Zulan, and hosts Li Sisi, Nigmat, Yang Long, Zhu Xun, and 30 county magistrates from Hubei. In this series of live streams, the IP of CCTV as the most authoritative media, the distinctive personal IPs of TV hosts, and the well-defined personal IPs of internet influencers were all present. The IP with the greatest communication effect in this series was CCTV, which attracted more attention and influence to the collaborative live-streaming model thereafter. This not only attracted consumers but

also drew participation from numerous merchants and platforms.

TV station + e-commerce platform essentially embodies the “media + e-commerce” marketing trend. On one hand, this internal convergence within the TV station consolidated the previously dispersed communication power of the four media organizations. Regardless of technological developments, TV stations as authoritative media have always maintained significant influence, as demonstrated by their extensive promotion of the collaborative live streams. To preheat the live streams and attract more consumer attention, TV stations released information about the live stream themes, times, locations, products, hosts, guests, and viewing methods across all media platforms.

Supported by new technological applications such as big data, cloud computing, and blockchain, joined by traditional enterprises and supply chain markets, and with continuous participation of new talent, e-commerce platforms possess strong vitality and are rapidly developing as the Internet’s largest current trend. The powerful economic role of e-commerce also means it must assume greater social responsibility.

2.2.1.2 TV Host + Influencer Convergence

Internally, this represents the convergence of multiple professional capabilities. The trend of traditional media transformation, upgrading, and integration has placed new demands on hosts’ comprehensive professional abilities. As news anchors, they previously needed to minimize appearances outside news programs to maintain the authoritative image of being the “Party’s mouthpiece,” but now they must display other personalities and temperaments in various programs, such as elegance, erudition, humor, and vitality. This tests hosts’ comprehensive professional abilities and reflects the evolution of CCTV’s programming style from completely serious to more approachable. For internet influencers, the collaborative live-streaming process tests their comprehensive abilities in managing the pace of product introduction and sales, handling unexpected situations during live streams, and ensuring product sales volumes.

Externally, this represents convergence between individuals and between teams. The 默契 cooperation between TV hosts and internet influencers and their respective teams is also a factor affecting live-streaming outcomes. This convergence is more akin to effective communication and collaboration. In the collaboration between internet influencer Li Jiaqi and TV host Zhu Guangquan, when Li Jiaqi used live-streaming jargon and internet slang, Zhu Guangquan did not understand these terms but used humor to keep the live stream going and avoid awkwardness. The division of labor between the two was also clear: Li Jiaqi was responsible for introducing product prices and basic information, while Zhu Guangquan used cultural connotations and various other methods to interpret and introduce products, earning the live stream high praise from viewers.

2.2.2 Multi-IP Single-IP programs and media can no longer satisfy audiences. To achieve better live-streaming effects, a multi-IP model is needed. Among

internet influencers, those with higher popularity and certain earnings, such as Viya, have repeatedly invited celebrities to co-host live-streaming sales. The addition of hosts represents a new form and innovative change under this dual-IP or even multi-IP model. Moreover, more hosts have joined since the pandemic, and their role differs from that of traffic stars—hosts not only bring traffic and popularity but also provide authoritative voices for live streams.

2.2.3 Multi-platform In this series of collaborative live streams, numerous platforms participated in all aspects including promotion, sales, logistics, and after-sales service. For example, in promotion, the three “Thank You for Fighting for Hubei” live streams on April 6, April 12, and April 15, 2020, all adopted both online and offline promotional methods. In online promotion, Taobao, JD.com, Pinduoduo, Toutiao, Gome, Suning.com, and Benlai Life e-commerce apps created special pages for the event, CCTV News promoted the event across all media platforms, and party secretaries and county magistrates from multiple cities and counties in Hubei endorsed the live streams. In offline promotion, offline stores of platforms such as Hema Xiansheng, 7Fresh, Gome, Suning, and Carrefour opened “Fight for Hubei” special zones, displaying micro-initiative public welfare posters on electronic screens and display boards in stores nationwide.

2.2.4 Agricultural Assistance Theme As mentioned above, one reason that facilitated the convergence of numerous IPs and platforms was the agricultural assistance theme. This theme attracted a large number of consumers to watch and purchase, particularly many who were not accustomed to online shopping or buying in live-streaming rooms. The products in these live streams were mostly agricultural and sideline products from regions severely affected by the pandemic. For example, the main products in the first “Thank You for Fighting for Hubei” live stream were mushrooms, lotus roots, and tea leaves. The second live stream featured Wolong Guoba, Hankou Erchang soda, hot dry noodles, Enshi Yulu tea, sweet potato noodles, and kudzu powder. The third live stream featured Shennongjia wild black fungus, Qionghuang Baihua honey, and spicy crayfish. All these characteristic Hubei agricultural and sideline products were sold out on the day of the live streams, solving farmers’ most difficult problems. From an integrated marketing perspective, selling agricultural and sideline products through live-streaming e-commerce features more concentrated sales, lower costs, and closer connections with the market—advantages that represent new development opportunities for underdeveloped regions. Moreover, due to continuous media attention and the ongoing efforts of e-commerce platforms, this marketing model is worth continuing after the pandemic to help solve product sales difficulties in underdeveloped regions.

2.3 Communication Effects

2.3.1 Massive Transaction Volume Achieving Agricultural Assistance Goals According to CCTV News data, the first “Thank You for Fighting for

Hubei” live stream achieved cumulative sales of 40.14 million yuan, the second reached 61 million yuan, and the third reached 65 million yuan. More intuitive data comes from the “Hubei Chongya” live stream. Viya and Wu Qian sold duck products from 510,000 ducks, generating sales of 180 million yuan [5]. These results were achieved in just four live streams. Obtaining such massive transaction volumes in a short period effectively helped farmers solve the problem of accumulated agricultural and sideline products, fulfilling the purpose of the charity live streams and achieving agricultural assistance effects.

2.3.2 Improved Rural Industrial Chain and Development of E-commerce Support Services For rural areas, selling agricultural products through live-streaming e-commerce, especially through collaborative live-streaming, both solves immediate difficulties and opens new sales channels. Currently, the government advocates for the integration and construction of county-level media, which can greatly help open markets for agricultural and sideline products, strengthen connections between production and sales, supply and demand, and farmers and consumers, and also drive the development of e-commerce support services such as customer service and logistics. This also provides a new direction for rural revitalization. The elimination of poverty in 2020 resulted from continuously summarizing experience and developing a sustainable poverty alleviation path [6-8].

2.3.3 Win-win for Hosts and Influencers Through this series of agricultural assistance-themed collaborative live streams, internet influencers achieved profitability while contributing to sustainable economic development and agricultural assistance, and TV hosts enriched their own images, gaining more stages to showcase their personalities and professional skills and attracting more attention. For both media and e-commerce platforms, active participation in public welfare is a win-win situation that also achieves a $1+1>2$ effect, providing a foundation and valuable experience for deeper and broader integration in the future. In today’s content-is-king era, being able to produce high-quality programs for audiences undoubtedly meets their needs and gains more recognition.

Following the government’s introduction of policies encouraging new business forms such as live-streaming e-commerce, traditional media, new media, and e-commerce platforms have all actively participated in deep media integration, helping promote agricultural product sales through collaborative charity live streams. Under the special circumstances of the pandemic’s severe economic impact, TV hosts and internet influencers were able to complete several high-quality charity live streams through collaboration—a successful case of media convergence that effectively solved the urgent problem of unsold agricultural products. However, this is only one step on the path of media convergence, with much more needing improvement and development in the future. In addition to common issues with live-streaming e-commerce—such as the need for strict product quality management, gradual improvement of live-streaming order, and the need to enhance influencers’ legal literacy and rule awareness—collaborative

live streaming has not yet formed a complete model and standard, preventing it from fulfilling more of its potential. Traditional media can explore more themes suitable for collaborative live streaming, and the market should develop corresponding regulatory measures.

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

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