

Luxury Brands Employ Livestreams for Social Media Marketing: A Thematic Analysis from the Chinese Consumer's Perspective

Yuxi GUO

Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Doctoral Student

キーワード

ソーシャルメディアマーケティング ストリーミング 高級ブランド 中国市場 顧客エンゲージメント

Keywords

Social media marketing; Livestream; Luxury brands; Chinese market; Customer engagement

原稿受理日：2022.12.24.

Quadrante, No.25 (2023), pp.303–321.

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Literature Review
 - 2-1. Livestream Technology Marketing
 - 2-2. Localized Chinese Market for Luxury Brands
 - 2-3. Theoretical framework
3. Methodology
 - 3-1. Research Approach
 - 3-2. Sample and Data Collection
 - 3-3. Research Design and Data Analysis
4. Findings
 - 4-1. Trendiness
 - 4-2. Customization
 - 4-3. Interaction
 - 4-4. Entertainment
 - 4-5. e-WOM
 - 4-6. Presentation
5. Discussion
 - 5-1. Trendiness
 - 5-2. Customization
 - 5-3. Interaction
 - 5-4. Entertainment
 - 5-5. e-WOM
 - 5-6. Presentation
6. Conclusion

1. Introduction

Livestream culture began in China when public video chat room service YY was used to host public performances in 2005. During the early phase, users only watched livestreams on computers due to Internet bandwidth limitations (Chen et al., 2019). With the development of 4G networks in 2015, the ubiquitous usage of mobile devices, and mobile-friendly media sites (Kang et al., 2020), users nowadays have access to live content anytime and anywhere. The continuous growth of the livestream industry has led to millions of viewers watching live content every day. In 2016, the major Chinese e-commerce site Alibaba introduced livestream technology for online vendors to use in e-commerce sales and advertising (Sun et al., 2019). Vendors either stream themselves or hire professional streamers (hosts experienced in livestream sales), key opinion leaders (KOLs, well-known influencers with proven experience and expertise in fashion), and celebrities (famous movie stars or singers in general) to endorse and promote products. Integrated video chat allows streamers to demonstrate products and respond to comments from the audience in real-time. As livestream marketing becomes increasingly popular in China, more and more consumers choose to shop from vendors' live rooms. Furthermore, people's reliance on online shopping increased due to the outbreak of COVID-19. This has prompted many companies to shift their focus to online operations to ensure their business operated as normally as possible during the pandemic.

While many luxury brands converted offline activities like fashion shows to become fully digital, their global operation of physical stores was severely affected. Observing as livestreaming became the trend for various domestic marketers in China, some luxury brands incorporated livestreams into new social media strategies to make up for the losses from offline channel operations and to adapt to local consumer behavior (Huang et al., 2020). Brands like Lanvin, Burberry, and Chanel livestreamed their collection releases on major e-commerce sites (e.g., Tmall) and social media (e.g., Weibo) gaining positive reactions from local consumers. Louis Vuitton held the first business-type livestream which aimed to increase business sales through Chinese social media on The Little Redbook, a social networking site which builds e-commerce shopping within online social communities. Not only did its livestream debut fail to receive the anticipated positive reaction, online audiences were disgusted by the cheap ambient atmosphere and careless merchandise display in the live room. Some mused that livestreaming may actually damage the brand's high-end image. In general, price becomes a selling point in live rooms as vendors distribute special discounts and coupons via shopping links, which provide customers a frictionless purchase transaction. In contrast, Louis Vuitton retained original pricing in their livestream and customers were directed to manually go to physical offline stores or official online stores.

To date, the vigorous application of livestreaming has attracted attention from the academic community (Chen et al., 2019) in debating whether localized livestream strategies suit luxury brands and their social media marketing in China. Even though luxury brands have been performing excellently with their online presence, livestream technology is an unexplored area with both challenges and opportunities.

Inspired by the online comments, this research argues the importance of deluxe digital atmospheres and sceneries in a luxury brand's live room. Kim and Ko's (2012) theory of luxury brands' social media marketing activities (SMMAAs) is referenced as the theoretical framework. Five attributes of SMMAAs—entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and e-WOM (electronic word-of-mouth)—are used

as prescribed themes and a thematic analysis is conducted on female Chinese consumers' feedback after watching footage of Louis Vuitton's livestream. This research also aims to provide an in-depth analysis of luxury brand livestream performance, distinguish livestream strategy from the extant asynchronous SMMAAs, offer new interpretations to existing attributes, and propose a sixth attribute of 'presentation'. Furthermore, this research seeks to contribute to social media marketing literature by filling the research gap and broadening the current knowledge of luxury brands' localized marketing strategies. Lastly, it offers practical implications for the luxury industry in terms of employing livestreams to increase market influence in the post-COVID-19 era.

2. Literature Review

2-1. Livestream Technology Marketing

Livestreaming is a hybrid social media incorporating video content, real-time interaction, and consumption (Liu et al., 2017; Scheibe et al., 2016), which differs from asynchronous social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter). Tian et al. (2016) noted that video chat among strangers was likely to be short and appealing only to frequent users. However, livestreaming has thrived in China and attracts both frequent and occasional users despite lengthy durations. Firstly, the content of the typical livestream in China is rich and varies from gaming to dancing and singing (Kang et al., 2020; Lin & Lu, 2017). Fresh live content is streamed with little post-production editing compared to videos on YouTube. Secondly, the interface design of livestream platforms in China allows viewers to interact in many ways at once (Kang et al., 2020). As a new form of marketing, the livestream embodied technical affordances which had direct impacts on consumers' perceptions. Sun et al. (2019) stressed the visibility, meta voicing, and guidance shopping affordances of livestreams influencing consumer perceptions of streamers' presence in the virtual shopping context from an IT (information technology) perspective (pp.3-4). The visibility affordance channeled the function of instant audio-visual delivery to consumers and satisfied their need to witness product demonstrations. The meta voicing affordance allowed consumers to directly communicate with streamers by posting comments in the comment section or bulletin board. Guidance shopping provided personalized services that offered consumers help from streamers with detailed product information. Streamers may also offer personalized advice cooperatively (Sun et al., 2019). In addition, the "buy as you watch" function simplified the process of traditional e-commerce shopping (Huang et al., 2020). Therefore, the affordances of livestreams lead to a persuasively interactive and practically personalized consumer discourse (Huang et al., 2020).

Livestreaming has become a popular means of social media marketing adopted by online sellers to attract consumer attention. "Livestream shopping" or "live commerce shopping", the process wherein consumers order through product links displayed in a streamer's live room, is a social media form of human-computer interaction (Sun et al., 2019, p.2). According to Kang et al. (2020), live commerce achieved a quantum leap forward with a year-on-year increase of 400% from 2017 to 2018, with consumers watching more than 150,000 hours of livestreams and purchasing more than 600,000 items every day. The viral spread of livestreaming has greatly interested researchers in examining its effectiveness. As sales volumes are a key measure of business performance, Chen et al. (2019) sampled some sellers from Taobao, a major

Chinese e-commerce site, and cross-matched their accounts on Yizhibo, a leading livestream platform which collects stream data, to compare their sales before and after adopting livestream technology. During the observational window, they noticed a 21.8% increase in some sellers' online sales volumes after employing livestream technology relative to sellers who did not. Besides, sellers of experience goods (products/services difficult to evaluate before consumption) had a 27.9% increase compared with sellers whose products were search goods (products/services easy to evaluate before consumption). Chen et al. (2019) reasoned that livestreaming benefited selling experience goods because of the visual real-time product demonstration (p.4497). In another study, Wongkitrungrueng et al. (2020) observed a greater range dispersion of customer engagement metrics including comments, shares, and emoji reactions after sellers adopted livestream sales. Live videos gained a higher number of reactions than status updates, photos, links, and recorded videos because they generated higher affective and cognitive impacts on customer engagement. A similar argument was noted in Addo et al. (2021), vital proxies of customer engagement (e.g., likes, chats, and visits, etc.) may be used to measure customer engagement with a livestream. Meanwhile, consumer purchase intent was also used to measure the efficacy of livestream marketing (Zhang et al., 2019). Consumers were often overwhelmed by false information, while also being cautious of online shopping due to unknown risk (Huang et al., 2020). Several studies (e.g., Chen et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019) argued that livestreams reduced perceived uncertainty and shortened the psychological distance for online consumers, which may in turn increase intent to purchase. Firstly, in comparison to conventional e-commerce product descriptions such as text, images, and video recordings, live product demonstrations were effective in offering authentic information, clarifying confusion, and saving customers from going through product reviews/comments themselves (Liu et al., 2018). Secondly, real-time transmission reduced online consumers' psychological distance and created an immersive virtual shopping environment. Both streamers' social presence and telepresence mediated by their livestreams created para-social interactions that had significant effects on consumers' cognitive and emotional states (Sun et al., 2019). While the hedonic atmosphere and high degree of involvement acted as potential inducers, impulse purchases were more likely initiated by strongly aroused consumers to achieve a sense of enjoyment and novelty (Gong et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2020).

Notedly, the creation of relationship bonds was mainly generated by interactions between online consumers and sellers/streamers. Organizations extensively capitalize on promoting a sense of intimacy and belonging that consumers hold with certain streamers (Huang et al., 2020). Regarding the study of how individual sellers used livestreams to build up stable relationships with consumers, Wongkitrungrueng et al. (2020) summarized four approaches (transaction-based, persuasion-based, content-based, and relationship-based) taken by online sellers to attract consumers. Those four approaches were all found to be useful in creating relationships between sellers and viewers, and increasing customer loyalty. Experienced sellers were better at attracting new consumers while retaining existing consumers by combining different approaches. The traditional selling approach was helpful to achieve short-term sales growth while relationship marketing brought long-term benefits to a business's sustainable development (Inks et al., 2019). Synchronous interactions mediated by livestream perfectly made up for the weakness in limited interactions with sellers in the online shopping context. In addition, relational consumers were

more devoted to a long-lasting relationship with the streamer/seller. Price was an important factor in terms of online shopping. However, once a consumer becomes a particular streamer's loyal follower, they may tolerate higher prices (Addo et al., 2021; Ozume & Azemi, 2018).

Admitting the dynamic and interactive impact of livestreams, consumers' affective commitment as the enduring desire to maintain a relationship enabled them to perceive certain sellers' endorsement as benevolent. Huang et al. (2020) thoroughly analyzed a top streamer in China, Austin Li, who successfully capitalized on his counterintuitive approach to selling feminine cosmetic products and gained a huge number of loyal followers. In addition, Mr Li personalized interactions with consumers, treating all of them as individuals conversing with a friend. The key way to construct trust in a relationship was communication (Gibson & Manuel, 2003). In the live commerce shopping context, Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020) concluded that two types of trust—trust in products (utilitarian and hedonic value) and trust in streamers (symbolic value)—both worked to increase sales and strengthen customer loyalty. Based on Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut's (2020) research findings, Chen et al. (2020) discovered that 'trust in products' may be the central trust, which includes brand awareness and expected product quality, whereas 'trust in streamers' may be the peripheral trust. Both forms of trust had positive impacts on increasing a customer's purchase intention and willingness to pay more. Therefore, livestreaming was found to be useful in building bonds between streamers and consumers, which may in turn increase consumers' purchase intention via trust (Chen et al., 2020).

Marketing through social media enabled brands to communicate directly with consumers without space and time restraints, which fundamentally changed the creation, distribution, and consumption of information online. No longer passive receivers, consumers were getting increasingly involved in the process of experience and information co-creation along with marketers (Tajvidi et al., 2017). User-generated content represented a decentralized information channel that allowed online users to use e-WOM to participate in peer-to-peer communications (Halliday, 2016; Pandey et al., 2018) between various parties like brands, consumers, and KOLs. These complex online interactions were all able to strongly influence social reactions (i.e., consumers' impressions of brands) and enhance the stickiness of the online community (Kang et al., 2020; Quach & Thaichon, 2017; Tajvidi et al., 2017). The combination of the cyber-physical environment and streamer attractiveness provided viewers practical information, knowledge of products/brands, and entertainment (Xu et al., 2020). Admiration mediated by expertise towards certain streamers may increase consumers' purchase intentions (Gong et al., 2020). Men and Zheng (2019) examined the influence of 'observational learning (OL)' on consumer behavior affected by Danmaku in the live shopping context. OL generated a sense of urgency (Peng et al., 2019) through which consumers felt encouraged to purchase due to other consumers' behavior. Men and Zheng (2019) believed OL may induce impulse purchases. Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020) also pointed out that livestreams had positive impacts on users' attitudes towards transactions in another study.

2-2. Localized Chinese Market for Luxury Brands

Luxury brands have utilized livestreams in their digital marketing strategies in recent years. A few brands like Burberry and Gucci livestreamed their fashion shows globally, but in those instances the goal

was more about launching collections rather than converting viewings into sales. The potential of localized business-type livestreams in the Chinese market was noticed when American celebrity Kim Kardashian West collaborated with Wei Ya, the most popular streamer on Tmall. 15,000 units of Ms West's namesake KKW fragrance were sold within five minutes. Some luxury brands (i.e., Giorgio Armani, Chanel, Lanvin) soon followed. This phenomenon indicated how intense the competition for attention was, even for well-known brands. Liu et al. (2018) argued that the digital landscape in China was fundamentally different due to its conformist culture and economic dynamic (pp.398). Firstly, Chinese consumers tend to receive information about luxury brands from social media sites and highly value the opinions of other online users. Secondly, Chinese consumers prefer the convenience of mobile sites, which explains the luxury sector successfully entering e-commerce sites without damaging its high-end position. The adoption of livestream technology indicated a combination of localized consumption and innovative application of digital marketing to luxury brands. When local consumer behavior transfers to more interactive social media channels, developing omnichannel marketing strategies to align with local consumers' expectations may be necessary for luxury brands.

Thus, the research question is: What is the feedback from young female Chinese consumers' on Louis Vuitton's livestream, according to the five attributes of luxury brand SMMAs?

2-3. Theoretical framework

Entertainment: Amusing and interesting content is more likely to be disseminated virally (Kim & Ko, 2012). Consuming pleasing content generated by marketers encourages users to return contribute (Bazi et al., 2019; Manthiou et al., 2013).

Interaction: Interaction towards luxury brands on social media means users who contribute brand-related content online and who wish to attract other like-minded users. This includes assisting peers by offering information, and exchanging opinions about certain brands/products (Muntinga et al., 2011).

Trendiness: Consumers using social media to get the latest information about brands/products (Godey et al., 2016). Brands advertise and conduct campaigns through social media to increase sales and develop their customer portfolio (Bilgin, 2018).

Customization: Brands' efforts to tailor service and information to customers' personalized needs (Godey et al., 2016). These customized services and information provide easy access, which helps to strengthen consumers' overall commitment to the brand (Kim & Ko, 2012).

e-WOM: Electronic word-of-mouth describes the dissemination of information by former, actual, and potential consumers about a brand/firm and its products online, while also being a popular reference for consumers making purchase decisions (Chen et al., 2011; Cheung et al., 2019).

3. Methodology

3-1. Research Approach

This research analyzed young female Chinese consumers' feedback about Louis Vuitton's livestream debut on a local social media site. Qualitative research was used, treating words as data, and involved an interpretive, naturalistic approach to inquiry (Creswell, 2007). In this case, young female consumers'

thoughts were multifarious and complex.

3-2. Sample and Data Collection

There were eighteen interviewees in total and ten of them were selected from the researcher's social circle by convenience sampling. The rest of the interviewees were recruited by snowball sampling to avoid the selection of non-representative participants. There were no financial incentives associated with participants in the research. All interviewees were females of Chinese nationality and aged between 23 to 30. Participants were required to have experienced (1) watching live e-commerce selling (on e-commerce sites or social media platforms) and (2) shopping in luxury brand stores (online or offline, no actual purchases necessary).

The semi-structured interview was chosen as it suited experience-type questions (Creswell, 2007). Participants were given open-ended questions which produced richer data while the researcher was able to ask probing questions. All interviews were conducted virtually in Chinese and lasted approximately 30–40 minutes each via Zoom meeting. All participants' identities were anonymized and permission to record voice was acquired from them beforehand. Following the guidance given by Terry et al. (2017), all voice data was transcribed verbatim in source language within two weeks after all interviews were completed.

3-3. Research Design and Data Analysis

Leading questions were asked before the formal interviews to familiarize interviewees with the online interview. Products presented in the livestream were from Louis Vuitton's limited summer collection. Due to copyright, video of the commercial and livestream were recorded from "The Little Redbook" by the researcher. For the sake of variable control, in order to ensure that positive interviewee feedback resulted from brand livestream performance rather than specialty of product, the commercial video was played before the livestream video. Formal interview questions were designed according to the theoretical framework; the five attributes of SMMAs proposed by Kim and Ko (2012), incorporating definitions of each attribute from previous literature. Interviews were started by addressing existing definitions and followed with probing questions. Research findings were mainly generated from answers to probing questions.

Operating within the qualitative paradigm, thematic analysis (TA) developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used due to its independence and flexibility with which to tackle texts and organic processes to extract codes and themes. TA has six phases in total: (1) initial reading of texts to gain familiarity; (2) getting familiar with texts; (3) developing basic themes; (4) consolidating into organized themes; (5) deriving global themes and networks; and (6) describing and analyzing networks (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In comparison to other qualitative analytic methods, TA only provides a method for data analysis and does not prescribe data collection methods, theoretical positions, epistemological or ontological frameworks. In addition, this method is accessible to beginner researchers who are new to qualitative research. Taking a deductive coding approach, the analytic starting point was a 'top-down' underpinned theoretical framework providing a foundation for coding and data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Even though data analysis was theory-driven, in which the five attributes were prescribed as themes, codes were

developed from the whole dataset (Terry et al., 2017). Data saturation appeared while interviewing the fifteenth participant such that no new insights were generated from later interviews.

The procedure of translating interview transcripts in the source language to English referenced the Minoo and Walters (2018) translation timing model. There are potential points in the TA process for English translation: (1) at the beginning before analysis (before phase 1); (2) after the end of analysis (after phase 6); and (3) during analysis (between phase 2–phase 3). All transcripts were translated between phase 2 and phase 3 as recommended by Minoo and Walters (2018). They stated that the validity of this model was based on the relativist ontological and subjectivist epistemological positions. Translation at this point was treated as an internal procedure within the overall process of TA. Since the researcher was more engaged with codes and themes instead of the entire dataset, they could move back and forth gaining familiarity from original transcripts in the source language and translated codes to avoid spending too much time or losing attachment to participants' own words. In so doing, the final report may include both participants' voices and the reflexivity of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4. Findings

This section reveals the coded information under each theme: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and e-WOM respectively by analyzing transcripts of interviews regarding Louis Vuitton's livestream. Besides contributing new perspectives to existing attributes, a sixth attribute of 'presentation' is revealed.

4-1. Trendiness

Most interviewees held positive attitudes towards Louis Vuitton employing livestreaming as a new marketing channel for Chinese consumers. Accustomed to using local sites, watching livestreams from mobile devices offered easy access to timely brand-related information. Some said that people less familiar with the fashion industry but potentially interested in luxury brands/products could use livestreams as a starting point. For example, interviewee 10 noted, "not everyone is keen on checking brand's official posts, especially watching stage videos or buying their magazines", and interviewee 4 commented, "this introductory livestream is similar to brand's launch event. Average people maybe do not care that much to use western social media just to get information of luxury brands."

4-2. Customization

Interviewees were more likely to search user-generated content on social media out of personal preference because of its diversity and dynamism relative to static information on a brand's official websites. Pre-purchase information such as suggestions for styling, product reviews, and assessments of practicality were highly referenced. Most interviewees perceived 'guidance shopping' offered by streamers in real-time to be the online version of personalized service offered by in-store salespeople. However, some of them complained that celebrities lacked professional knowledge of both the brand and its products, and that their service was incomparable to that of professional offline salespeople. Interviewee 15 said that professional KOLs' would have done a better job in offering styling tips, and that suggestions from Yvonne

seemed average. In addition, the huge number of viewers' comments made it impossible for streamers to respond to all but the most common, undermining the goal of customization.

Interviewee 01: there are so many comments posted and being pushed up, how could they respond quickly enough. Answering a few which were asked the most, which is not directly answering my question. But shopping in store, they answer my questions only.

4-3. Interaction

The typical livestream prioritizes communication between streamers and viewers, hence why interviewees were surprised at the end of the Louis Vuitton livestream when sales staff typed product information into the stream and directed viewers to buy from official online/offline stores instead of selling directly to them. Interviewee 2 described the stream as two streamers in scripted conversation, an impression also held by other interviewees. Interviewee 3 commented that she had expected at least one of the streamers to check customers' comments. Interestingly, most of the interviewees appreciated that they were free to leave to the live room anytime without talking to salespeople face-to-face.

4-4. Entertainment

Overall, interviewees also consider livestreams to be entertainment, with its value dependent on content quality, real-time consumer engagement, and the largest factor, streamer performance. Louis Vuitton's livestream was described as 'mediocre' by most interviewees due to it simply mimicking the livestream style of ordinary e-commerce sellers. Yvonne had been well known as an online fashion influencer regarding fashion, and the audience expected more innovative suggestions from her about how to wear certain products. Louis Vuitton had described Zhong as a 'dear friend of the brand', so her joining the livestream was meant to reinforce this position. Zhong posted photos of herself on social media (e.g., Weibo) wearing the brand's products as a method of promotion. Although celebrities were recruited to enhance the entertainment value of streams, this can also provide them the chance to interact with their fans online.

4-5. e-WOM

Most interviewees were less interested in publicly sharing brand posts than they were sharing with, and seeking suggestions from, friends and family. Some interviewees explained that they were sensitive to online privacy. However, they may observe the online interactions and save the posts of other users/KOLs as credible references for future purchase decisions.

4-6. Presentation

Visual presentation was considered by all interviewees as the key factor in the creation of an immersive online shopping context and authentic customer experience. Some commented that the products shown in the live room seemed inferior. Despite acknowledging the innovative livestream, they were disappointed at the unprofessional lights, crude decorations, and products carelessly placed

on the ground. Therefore, the feedback regarding the live room's atmosphere and scenery were grouped into a new SMMA attribute specific to livestreams. Since luxury brands had an excellent track record of creating luxurious online presences, interviewees expected the same quality from an official luxury brand livestream. Interviewee 9 who had been a loyal customer of Louis Vuitton for years thought that it was a live room selling knockoffs, and said she would not watch another Luis Vuitton livestream if the quality stayed the same. A few interviewees gave similar comments in that they would not have known it was a Louis Vuitton live room without being told. Most felt that the brand did not invest enough effort preparing its livestream debut for local consumers, another indication that the luxuriousness of live rooms have a significant impact on interviewees' perceptions of authenticity. Interviewee 15 commented that 'the live room looked so low-quality, which worked the opposite to improving my good impression of this brand'.

Interviewee 11: I'm not sure if they (Louis Vuitton) really cared about it, or they think consumers would buy their products because they now also do livestream. Like the time they released Lunar year limited editions. They simply added some Chinese cultural elements like printing some 'hanzi (Chinese characters)' on their products and expected they (Chinese consumers) would buy it anyway. That was so patronizing to us.

5. Discussion

The sixth SMMA attribute, 'Presentation' was derived from young Chinese female consumers' feedback about Louis Vuitton's initial use of livestreams in localized social media marketing. In the original SMMA theory, Kim and Ko (2012) proposed five separate attributes of luxury brand marketing on asynchronous social media. This research discusses how the synchronous nature of marketing livestreams, with their high degree of real-time customer involvement, attaches a sixth attribute. *Trendiness* indicates that the livestream is viewed by consumers as a timely channel for gaining the latest brand-related information. *Customization* means that the information provided by streamers satisfies consumers' individual needs and preferences. Meanwhile, streamers are expected to *interact* with viewers of the livestream by responding to their comments and questions. Good presentation equates to luxurious live room ambiances offering authentic online shopping experiences. All attributes above contribute to the consumers's entertainment experience and the extent they are willing to disseminate their opinions (*e-WOM*) about brands and products.

5-1. Trendiness

A report published by PwC in 2017 predicted that retailers' business models and consumer behavior may be reshaped, suggesting that potential opportunities for luxury brands in China may lie in developing infrastructure like mobile sites, E-commerce, innovation, and mobile payment (Cheng, 2017). Mobile sites offer consumers ease of use, with their smartphones playing a central role in online buying. Compared with customers in overseas markets, Chinese consumers were relatively slower to recognize western luxury brands, so consumer loyalty has not yet been fully developed (Yao et al., 2019). Meanwhile, customers are more used to local sites, as some western social media (e.g., Instagram, Facebook) are

restricted in mainland China (Sharma & Crossler, 2014). Nowadays, people spend more time using their mobile phones than other devices. Therefore, livestreams are perceived by Chinese consumers as a far more effective channel for information about luxury brands and products.

5-2. Customization

Godey et al. (2016) described customization as personalized information and services which meet personalized needs. According to Mandler et al. (2020) luxury brands' posts on social media mainly fall into two categories: non-personal content (quality, heritage, conspicuousness, and uniqueness) and personal content (hedonism and extended self). However, young female Chinese consumers express little interest in brands' official accounts on social media and perceive that information to be 'objective but static'. The Chinese consumer's online shopping experience is therefore a combination of E-commerce shopping with online social communities (Yao et al., 2019). Therefore, aside from checking specifications (e.g. size, material, weight) which exclude assessments of practicality, consumers tend to jump between different media platforms searching for user-uploaded information with a wider range of diversity. User-generated content includes different kinds of reviews which are perceived to be more reliable and relevant to what customers are looking for (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). In other words, concerning customized information, brands' posts are less recognized by Chinese consumers relative to user-generated content on social media.

Huang et al. (2020) argued in their research that a fast-food style marketing strategy through livestreaming contradicts a core feature of luxury brands by lifting the veil of private and personalized service offered in luxury stores. However, this research finds that young female Chinese consumers focus more on the quality of live-streamed information rather than on the form of personalized service. Guided shopping mediated by the livestream is viewed as the 'online version' of customized service shopping in offline luxury stores (Sun et al., 2019). To average people who may not go to luxury stores in person, the livestream provides them a taste of the in-store shopping experience. However, the streamer's performance determines whether consumers are satisfied with the livestreamed content. Real-time livestreams require a richer information output from the performance to attract and hold consumer attention. Consumers highly value livestream content despite the lengthy run time and therefore expect it to be highly relevant to their interests as well as give exact answers to their product-related questions. Consumers expect from streamers the same content they receive when searching for information on social media, gaining desired information including thorough product demonstration, design analyses, and practicality reviews. However, celebrities do not necessarily possess professional knowledge of brands nor products (Xu et al., 2020), while consumer trust in streamers is highly dependent on their expertise. For instance, Austin Li used metaphors to describe the texture of lipsticks and contextualized for audiences the occasions for their use, allowing the audience to picture themselves wearing the products. Li's professionalism helped him gain a huge number of followers who believe his endorsement is always sincere and candid. In contrast, Yvonne and Zhong's unnatural performance in Louis Vuitton's livestream left a negative impression, preventing them from developing closer relationships with online consumers. Salespeople in offline stores offer information/services to bridge the gap between the brand and consumers (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut., 2020). Livestreamers serve the same function with their performances and expertise. With the

pre-existing impression of livestreams as being ‘down-to-earth’, the celebrity streamers’ performance deviated from the norm of knowledgeable, enthusiastic streamers passionately endorsing the products and encouraging consumers to buy. To be fair, celebrities’ status on stage and screen may inhibit them from promoting products in live rooms in the same way as would professional streamers. This could explain why celebrity performances in livestreams are often considered disingenuous, affecting not only viewers’ impressions of them but also of the brand. Even though the use of local celebrities as streamers may please some consumers who are fans (Yu & Hu, 2020), a celebrity’s personal style may weaken the brand’s sense of presence to some degree (Xu et al., 2020). In that case, fans may remain loyal to their idols while average consumers will not pay attention to the streamers, resulting in no benefit to the brand from the celebrity’s endorsement.

5-3. Interaction

As discussed earlier, users’ affective commitments to streamers may be hard to transfer to brands. However, streamers responding to viewer comments in real time effectively builds relationships between them. Real-time interaction via livestream enables flat and equal communication (Gong et al., 2020) which is perceived by consumers as pressure-free relative to interacting with salespeople in person. The para-social relationship created in this context gives consumers a compensatory tendency as if they are communicating with a friend online (Huang et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2020). In addition, spontaneous interactions can make celebrity endorsements look more natural rather than them merely interpreting what brands want them to say (Zhou et al., 2019). During the age of the participatory web, online interactions make consumers feel empowered. As consumers become increasingly involved in brands’ value structures, they have become co-creators rather than passive receivers (Atwal & Williams, 2009). Interaction and customization are complementary to some extent in that streamers directly addressing live comments are seen as equivalent to personal responses.

5-4. Entertainment

The ‘entertainment’ attribute in the livestream context pertains to the enjoyment the consumer derives from viewing it. A feature of livestreams is their ability to combine streamer performance, quality information, live room ambiance, and consumer engagement, and deliver them synchronously. In other words, entertainment is no longer a dependent attribute, but a complex idea merged with trendiness, customization, presentation, and interaction simultaneously. Consumers now receive all of their information from the livestream rather than subjectively selecting content by individually sorting through social media posts. This phenomenon indicates that innovative livestream marketing has shifted consumers’ perception of online shopping towards that of a holistic experience that is social, hedonic, and consumer-oriented (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2018). Besides endorsing and demonstrating products, streamers are also responsible for creating a relaxing and entertaining live room atmosphere to attract attention and retain consumers. For example, Austin Li favors using exclamations and telling jokes to capture audience attention. Viewers find his performance amusing and not solely for the purpose of promoting products (Huang et al., 2020). Secondly, brands hiring celebrities as streamers appeal to their fan groups, naturally

bringing with them more online traffic. Celebrity fans may consider it an excellent opportunity to interact with their idols. However, celebrities cannot risk damaging the commercial value of their public image to act like salespeople. In many such cases, celebrity live room performances are mediocre compared to those of other professional non-celebrity streamers. Lastly, the hedonic atmosphere of the live room is bolstered by real-time sales reports in the live room. The number of transactions and goods left in stock are shown on screen, visible to viewers. Viewers seeing the purchase behavior of other users are more likely to make impulse purchases of their own to achieve temporary excitement and satisfaction. However, neither celebrities nor KOLs are fashion symbols, nor is their presence enough to be entertaining to all online viewers. Louis Vuitton in particular has no plans to sell from live rooms, depriving viewers of real-time consumption and the hedonic shopping atmosphere it brings.

5-5. e-WOM

In line with results of previous research, young female Chinese consumers consider e-WOM to be a credible source of pre-purchase information. Presently, luxury goods consumption is viewed as an expression of personal creativity, expressiveness, intelligence, and substance. Because buying luxury goods is financially risky, consumers may seek the opinions and decisions of others to make more informed purchase decisions (Gershoff & Johar, 2006). Livestreaming allows instant e-WOM from online users to influence others' attitudes and impressions toward brands (Men & Zheng, 2019). In addition, livestream viewers may change their brand perceptions based on observations of other users' behaviors. On the other hand, consumers are more willing to disseminate brand information posted by KOLs (Zhou et al., 2019). Hiring KOLs with recognized expertise and trustworthy reputations to promote products in marketing campaigns may naturally generate positive e-WOM communications, which may significantly influence consumer purchase behavior (Liu et al., 2018). This finding also supports the argument regarding the importance of streamer expertise.

5-6. Presentation

Presentation as the new attribute can only be applied to luxury brand livestream marketing and is not meant for ordinary E-commerce, in which price is the main attribute. Livestreams selling cheap products can afford to look cheap, but a luxury brand projecting a similar atmosphere may devalue its brand. This research defines presentation as the consistency of a luxury brand's livestream ambience with that of its offline stores. The consumption of luxury goods is regarded as sensory (Okonkwo, 2010). Both physical and non-physical elements shape store atmosphere, which in turn affects customers' perceptions of luxuriousness. Nunthiphatprueksa (2018) suggested that luxury store product display, decorations, sound, scent, lighting, color scheme, space, and room temperature all had a positive impact on customers' pleasure and arousal. Luxury stores deliberately invest in creating buying environments with specific impacts on customers' minds and, by extension, purchasing decisions. Exceptional ambiances and shopping experiences also create positive impressions and enhance consumer loyalty.

Since Chinese consumers started becoming aware of Louis Vuitton, their deluxe brand image has been developed and constantly enhanced through usage of the Internet. The luxury industry has long

invested in building a ‘webmosphere (web + atmosphere)’ (Okonkwo, 2010) that emphasizes both a luxurious online atmosphere and shopping functionality. Advertisements of luxury brands normally focus on visualizing aesthetic quality and attractiveness via image and video (Bazi et al., 2020). This explains why the media overexposure of Louis Vuitton in China did not damage the brand’s value proposition of exclusivity and rarity, but was effective in increasing brand influence (Liu et al., 2018). It is expected that brand loyalty can be built through creating luxurious and novel fantasies. Customer loyalty is sensitive, emotion-driven, and connected to the original value and luxuriousness of luxury brands (Okonkwo, 2010). Exclusivity, better quality, status, taste, and aspiration are the messages brands aspire to convey through marketing communication. Failing to deliver these messages may disappoint consumers (Okonkwo, 2010). The intangible luxury in how luxury products appear is highly pertinent to Chinese consumers.

Luxury brands must keep their deluxe high-end image consistent both online and offline. Even though Chinese consumers care about innovation and convenience in terms of online shopping, luxury brands are perceived as fundamentally different from normal consumer goods. Louis Vuitton’s livestream presence was inconsistent with its long-standing prestigious position in the industry, contradicting general impressions of the brand. In contrast, Lanvin’s livestream hosted on The Little Redbook, which built an ‘elegant afternoon tea’ atmosphere by using soft lighting and French-style background music based on their brand tone while incorporating exclusive elements such as brand history and design inspirations, was attractive and entertaining to consumers even with no selling taking place. Lanvin successfully increased brand awareness while maintaining its luxuriousness. The deluxe atmosphere and aesthetic scenes of its livestream counterbalanced the general rule that livestreams mainly sell products on price. Therefore, the key to presenting luxurious online shopping experiences to livestream viewers is to merge various sensory and visualized elements into the livestream. Low-quality impressions may discourage consumers from getting to know brands more closely. Since livestreaming builds an immersive virtual shopping context for online viewers, the fundamental goal should be to provide a better, more authentic online shopping experience which is perceived as similar to shopping in physical stores. A deluxe presentation of the brand’s live room effectively mobilizes online consumers’ emotional commitment to the brand.

6. Conclusion

This research analyzed the feedback from local young female Chinese consumers with respect to luxury brands employing livestreams in new social media marketing strategies by adding new perspectives to the existing five attributes, and proposing ‘presentation’ as a sixth attribute exclusive to livestream marketing. Livestreams deliver trendiness, customization, presentation, and interaction synchronously, with the potential to become recognized as convenient channels for customized information with luxurious offline store-like atmospheres. While online viewers enjoy the virtual shopping experience, their active online engagement also contributes to the entertainment attribute. Furthermore, overall positive online consumer engagement will become reference points for other customers in terms of peer communication and making future purchase decisions.

This research offers practical implications for marketers of luxury brands considering livestreams as part of their social media marketing strategy in the Chinese market. Learning the perspectives of

local customers may help them to create marketing content that is more relatable and attractive to local consumers. Due to the lack of price advantage, premium brands should invest in preparing livestreams that manage and maintain their prestigious online presence. Meanwhile, brands should develop an exclusive narrative strategy to differentiate themselves from the existing livestream model adopted by conventional e-commerce sellers. In light of this, brands must balance the requirements of local customers with their global brand position. The luxury sector faces challenges in adapting to the new digital world in emerging economies without losing its value proposition of exclusivity and rarity. Lastly, the Chinese market has become more complex and competitive, characterized by millennials and Gen-Z consumers with digitally savvy attitudes and ever-evolving behaviors. Luxury brands will need to meet changes in consumer behavior in the post-COVID-19 era for them to capitalize on the opportunities brought by livestreams, and strengthen their influence.

Due to the pandemic, the selection of interviewees was limited. In addition, perspectives of consumers ambivalent to luxury products are not addressed here. Therefore, the feedback collected from those interviewed in this research should not be generalized as representing all young female Chinese consumers. Louis Vuitton's livestream was held in real-time with copyright prohibiting access to an original full-length video recording. Future research may continually monitor how the attributes of brands' livestream marketing impacts consumer brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty, and purchase intention.

References

- Addo, P. C., Fang, J., Asare, A. O., & Kulbo, N. B. (2021). Customer engagement and purchase intention in live-streaming digital marketing platforms, *The Service Industries Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02642069.2021.1905798>
- Ashley, C. & Tuten, T. (2015). Creative strategies in social media marketing: An exploratory study of branded social content and consumer engagement. *Psychology and Marketing*. 32(1), 15-27. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20761>
- Atwal, G., & Williams, A. (2009). Luxury brand marketing: The experience is everything. *Journal of Brand Management*, 16(5-6), 338-346. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2008.48>
- Bazi, S., Filieri, R., & Matthew, G. (2019). Customers' motivation to engage with luxury brands on social media. *Journal of Business Research*, 112, 223-235. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.02.032>
- Bilgin, Y. (2018). The effect of social media marketing activities on brand awareness, brand image and brand loyalty. *Business and Management Studies*, 6(1), 128-148. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15295/bmij.v6i1.229>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research* (1st ed.). Sage Publications.
- Chen, C., Lu, Y., Hu, Y., & Hong, Y. (2019). Everyone can be a star: Quantifying grassroots online sellers' live streaming effects on product sales *Proceedings of International Conference on System Sciences*, 26, 4493-4498. <https://hdl.handle.net/10125/59887>
- Chen, C., Zhao, Q., & Wang, J. (2020). How livestreaming increases product sales: Role of trust transfer and elaboration likelihood model. *Behaviour & Information Technology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2020.1827457>
- Chen, Y., Wang, Q., & Xie, J. (2011) Online social interactions: A natural experiment on word of mouth versus observational learning, *Journal of Marketing Research*, 48(2), 238-254. <https://doi.org/10.1509%2Fjmk.48.2.238>
- Cheng, M. (2017). *E-commerce in China – The future is already here*. Pricewaterhouse Coopers, Limited. <https://www.pwccn.com/en/retail-and-consumer/publications/total-retail-2017-china/total-retail-survey-2017-china-cut.pdf>
- Cheung, M. L., Pires, G., & Rosenberger, P. J. (2019). The influence of perceived social media marketing elements on consumer-brand engagement and brand knowledge. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing*, 32(3), 695-720. <https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-04-2019-0262>
- Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Gershoff, A., & Johar, G. (2006). Do you know me? Consumer calibration of friends' knowledge. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32 (4), 496-503. <https://doi.org/10.1086/500479>
- Gibson, C. B., & Manuel, J. A. (2003). Building trust: Effective multicultural communication progress

- in virtual teams. In C. B. Gibson & S. G. Cohen (Eds.), *Virtual teams that work* (1st ed., 59-88). Jossey-bass.
- Godey, B., Manthiou, A., Pederzoli, D., Rokka, J., Aiello, G., Donvito, R., & Singh, R. (2016). Social media marketing efforts of luxury brands: Influence on brand equity and consumer behavior. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(12), 5833-5842. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.04.181>
- Gong, X., Ye, Z., Liu, K., & Wu, N. (2020). The Effects of Live Platform Exterior Design on Sustainable Impulse Buying: Exploring the Mechanisms of Self-Efficacy and Psychological Ownership. *Sustainability*, 12, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12062406>
- Halliday, S. V. (2016). User-generated content about brands: Understanding its creators and consumers. *Journal of business research*, 69(1), 137-144. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.07.027>
- Huang, H., Blommaert, J., & Praet, E. V. (2020) “OH MY GOD! BUY IT!” a Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the Discursive Strategies Used by Chinese Ecommerce Live-Streamer Austin Li. In: C. Stephanidis et al. (eds.) *HCI International 2020 – Late Breaking Papers* (305-327). Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-60152-2_24
- Inks, S. A., Avila, R. A., & Talbert, G. (2019). The evolution of the sales process: Relationship selling versus “the Challenger Sale”. *Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science*, 29(1), 88–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21639159.2018.1552527>
- Kim, A., & Ko, E. (2012). Do social media marketing activities enhance customer equity? An empirical study of luxury fashion brand. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(10), 1480-1486. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.10.014>
- Lin, J., & Lu, Z. (2017). The rise and proliferation of livestreaming in China: Insights and lessons. *HCI International 2017 – Posters’ Extended Abstracts*. *HCI 2017*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-58753-0_89
- Liu, J. H., North, M., & Li, C. (2017), Relationship building through reputation and tribalism on companies’ Facebook pages. *Internet Research*, 27(5), 1149–1169. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IntR-03-2016-0078>
- Liu, S., Perry, P., & Gadzinski, G. (2018). The implications of digital marketing on WeChat for luxury fashion brands in China. *Journal of Brand Management*, 26(4), 395-409. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-018-0140-2>
- Mandler, T., Johnen, M., & Grave, J. F. (2020). Can’t help falling in love? How brand luxury generates positive consumer affect in social media. *Journal of Business Research*, 120, 330-342. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.10.010>
- Manthiou, A., Chiang, L., & Tang, L. (2013). Identifying and responding to customer needs on Facebook fan pages. *Journal of Technology and Human Interaction.*, 9(3) 36-52. <https://doi.org/10.4018/jthi.2013070103>
- Men, J., & Zheng, X. (2019, December). *Impact of Social Interaction on Live-streaming Shopping*

- Websites*. [conference paper]. Eighteenth Annual Pre-ICIS Workshop on HCI Research, Munich. https://sighci.org/uploads/2019_sighci_proceedings/RiPPaper6.pdf
- Minoo, E. H., & Walters, T. (2018). Lost in translation? Cross-language thematic analysis and hospitality research. *International journal of contemporary hospitality management*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-10-2017-0701>
- Muntinga, D. G., Moorman, M., & Smit, E. G. (2011). Introducing COBRAs: Exploring motivations for brand-related social media use. *International Journal of Advertising*, 30(1), 13-46. <https://doi.org/10.2501/IJA-30-1-013-046>
- Nunthiphatprueksa, A. (2018). An influential role of luxury fashion store environment. *Journal of Community Development Research*, 12(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.14456/jcdr-hs.2019.1>
- Okonkwo, U. (2010). *Luxury online* (1st ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ozuem, W., & Azemi, Y. (2018). *Online Service Failure and Recovery Strategies in Luxury Brands: A View from Justice Theory*. In W. Qzuem, & Y. Azemi (Eds.), *Digital Marketing Strategies for Fashion and Luxury Brands*. (p.108-125) IGI Global.
- Pandey, A., Sahu, R., & Dash, M. K. (2018). Social media marketing impact on the purchase. intention of millennials. *Int. J. Business Information Systems*, 28(2), 147–162. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJBIS.2018.091861>
- Peng, L., Zhang, W., Wang, X., & Liang, S. (2019) Moderating effects of time pressure on the relationship between perceived value and purchase intention in social E-commerce sales promotion: Considering the impact of product involvement, *Information Management*, 56(2), 317-328. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2018.11.007>
- Quach, S., & Thaichon, P. (2017). From connoisseur luxury to mass luxury: Value co-creation and co-destruction in the online environment. *Journal of Business Research*, 81, 163-172. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.usres.2017.06.015>
- Scheibe, K., Fietkiewicz, K. J., & Stock, W. G. (2016). Information behavior on social Live streaming services. *Journal of Information Science Theory and Practice* 4(2), 6–20. <https://doi.org/10.1633/JISTaP.2016.4.2.1>
- Sharma, S., & Crossler, R. E. (2014). Disclosing too much? Situational factors affecting information disclosure in social commerce environment. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 13(5), 305–319. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2014.06.007>
- Sun, Y., Shao, X., Li, X., Guo, Y., & Nie, K. (2019). How live streaming influences purchase intentions in social commerce: An IT affordance perspective. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 37, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2019.100886>
- Tajvidi, M., Wang, Y., Hajli, N., & Love, P. (2017). Brand value Co-creation in social commerce: The role of interactivity, social support, and relationship quality. *Computers in Human Behavior* <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.11.006>

- Terry, G., Hayfield, N., Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. In C. Willig & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (2nd ed. 17-37). SAGE Publications, Ltd.
- Tian, L., Li, S., Ahn, J., Chu, D., Han, R., Lv, Q., & Mishra, S. (2013). *Understanding user behavior at scale in a mobile video chat application*. Proceedings of the 2013 ACM International Joint Conference on Pervasive and Ubiquitous Computing, 647–656. <http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/2493432.2493488>
- Wongkitrungrueng, A., & Assarut, N. (2018). The role of live streaming in building consumer trust and engagement with social commerce sellers. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 543-556. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.08.032>
- Wongkitrungrueng, A., & Assarut, N. (2020). The role of live streaming in building consumer trust and engagement with social commerce sellers. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 543-556. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.08.032>.
- Xu, X., Wu, J., & Li, Q. (2020). What drives consumer shopping behavior in live streaming commerce. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 21(3), 144-167.
- Yao, Y., Boardman, R., & Vazquez, A. (2019). Cultural considerations in social commerce: The differences and potential opportunities in China. In R. Boardman, M. Blazquez, C. E. Henninger, & D. Ryding (Eds.), *Social commerce* (1st ed., p. 43-58). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Yu, S., & Hu, Y. (2020). When luxury brands meet China: The effect of localized celebrity endorsements in social media marketing. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Service*, 54, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.102010>
- Zhang, M., Qin, F., Alan-Wang, G., & Luo, C. (2019). The impact of live video streaming on online purchase intention, *The Service Industries Journal*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02642069.2019.1576642>
- Zhou, S., McCormick, H., Blazquez, M., & Barnes, L. (2019). e-WOM: The rise of the opinion leader. In R. Boardman, M. Blazquez, C. E. Henninger, & D. Ryding (Eds.), *Social commerce* (1st ed., pp. 189-212). Palgrave Macmillan.