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Exploring the influence of eWOM in live streaming on consumer purchase intentions in China: A qualitative analysis

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Abstract: The rapid rise of live streaming commerce in China has transformed the retail environment, with electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) emerging as a pivotal factor in shaping consumer behavior. As a digital evolution of traditional word-of-mouth, eWOM gains particular significance in live streaming contexts, where real-time interactions foster immediacy and engagement. This study investigates how eWOM influences consumer purchase intentions within Chinese live streaming platforms, employing the Information Adoption Model (IAM) as theoretical framework. Using a grounded theory approach, this research applies NVivo for data coding and analysis to explore the cognitive and emotional processes triggered by eWOM during live streaming. Findings indicate that argument quality, source credibility, and information quantity significantly enhance consumer trust and perceived usefulness of information, which, in turn, drives information adoption and purchase intention. Furthermore, the study reveals that social interaction between live streaming anchors and audiences amplifies the influence of consumers' internal states on information adoption. This study enhances the Information Adoption Model (IAM) by introducing social interaction as a moderator between consumers' internal states toward live streaming eWOM and their adoption of information, highlighting the value of social interaction in live streaming. It also incorporates information quantity, showing how eWOM quantity affects trust and perceived usefulness. Furthermore, the study contributes to exploring how factors like argument quality, source credibility, and information quantity shape consumer trust and perceived usefulness, offering insights into the cognitive and emotional processes of information adoption in live streaming.

Keywords: live streaming eWOM; information adoption model; social interaction; live streaming commerce; grounded theory

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of e-commerce in China has led to the rise of innovative platforms, such as live streaming, which blend real-time consumer interaction with digital marketing strategies (Huang et al., 2022). Live streaming has emerged as a central tool in the e-commerce landscape, enabling sellers to connect with consumers in an immersive and engaging way, enhancing user trust and loyalty (Sun et al., 2019; Xin et al., 2023). A significant element in this environment is electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which includes user-generated content, reviews, and real-time feedback, and has gained substantial influence within live streaming platforms (Xin et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022). The immediacy of live streaming creates a uniquely interactive setting, where audiences can observe product demonstrations, ask questions, and receive feedback from both the anchor and other audiences, enhancing transparency and trust (Chen and Lin, 2018; Lee and Chen, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). This dynamic environment has reshaped consumer behavior in China, underscoring

the importance of understanding how eWOM in live streaming impacts purchase intentions and decision-making processes (Huang et al., 2022; Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut, 2018).

China's live streaming industry has seen remarkable growth, with platforms like Taobao Live, Douyin, and Kuaishou driving this expansion by offering innovative ways for sellers and anchors to promote products through interactive, real-time engagements. Unlike traditional forms of eWOM such as online reviews or social media posts, live streaming eWOM offers consumers the ability to interact directly with anchors, view product demonstrations, and receive immediate feedback, fostering a sense of immediacy and trust (Liu and Liu, 2023; Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut, 2018). This integration of entertainment and commerce in live streaming creates a unique environment where consumers are more likely to be influenced by eWOM due to the trust and engagement generated during live interactions (Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut, 2018; Wongkitrungrueng et al., 2020). Such trust-building mechanisms within the live streaming format play a crucial role in shaping purchasing behaviors, as audiences feel more confident and engaged in their buying decisions (Li and Liu, 2019; Liu and Liu, 2023; Zhang et al., 2022).

eWOM refers to any positive or negative statement made by current or past customers regarding a product or service, which is shared publicly online, impacting broader consumer perceptions and decisions (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In live streaming, eWOM is embedded within real-time interactions between anchors and audiences and among audience members themselves, creating a highly interactive environment (Xin et al., 2023). This immediacy enables consumers to respond instantly to product features, ask questions, and engage in feedback exchanges, amplifying live streaming eWOM's influence on decision-making (Zhang et al., 2020). Real-time comments, reviews, and reactions foster a continuous live streaming eWOM dialogue, allowing audiences to share personal insights, ask questions, and influence each other's purchasing choices. This ongoing conversation shapes consumer perceptions and behaviors in ways unique to live streaming platforms (Chen and Lin, 2018).

However, despite the growing prevalence of live streaming eWOM, research examining its specific impact on consumer purchase intentions, especially within the context of Chinese consumers, remains limited. While eWOM has been widely studied in various online settings, such as social media and e-commerce websites (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; King et al., 2014; Zhu et al., 2016), the unique characteristics of live streaming, such as real-time interaction, immediate feedback, and heightened consumer engagement, introduce factors that are not fully understood in the current literature.

Prior studies have predominantly focused on more static forms of eWOM, where consumers read reviews or comments at their own pace, without immediate interaction with other consumers or sellers. These studies have demonstrated the significant influence of eWOM on consumer attitudes and intentions in general (Cheung et al., 2008; Erkan and Evans, 2016). However, few studies specifically address live streaming eWOM, particularly in the Chinese market, where this format has become an integral part of digital commerce (Huang et al., 2022). This study addresses this

gap by specifically exploring live streaming eWOM, where real-time interaction and feedback can significantly shape consumer attitudes and behaviors.

Moreover, while existing studies largely employ quantitative methodologies to assess the statistical impact of eWOM on consumer behavior (Erkan and Evans, 2016; Zhu et al., 2016), there is a lack of in-depth exploration of the cognitive and emotional processes that drive purchase intentions within live streaming eWOM environment. To fill this gap, this study adopts a qualitative approach, using grounded theory to examine the deeper cognitive and emotional factors affecting purchase intentions in live streaming contexts.

While existing research has explored eWOM in traditional commerce, this study uniquely focuses on the interactive nature of live streaming eWOM, examining how real-time feedback and social interactions contribute to consumer trust, perceived usefulness, and information adoption. This study goes beyond static eWOM (e.g., online reviews) to capture the dynamic, immediate environment of live streaming, addressing gaps in understanding cognitive and emotional processes in consumer decision-making. Additionally, it extends the Information Adoption Model (IAM) by integrating social interaction and information quantity, adding depth to eWOM research (Sussman and Siegal, 2003).

2. Live streaming commerce in China

The live streaming commerce refers to a new service mode that is based on live streaming platforms and that highly depends on live streaming technology for real-time commodity displays, consultation replies and shopping guides (Xin, et al., 2023). It provides a new marketing communication mode that differs from traditional e-commerce. In this new model, live streaming anchors gather audiences with similar preferences and treat them as intimate friends (Xin et al., 2023). Vivid images are presented to the audience, who provide real-time comments (Zhang et al., 2022). Live streaming has been launched to enhance consumers' virtual shopping experience, and through the live streaming commerce, "buying while watching" can be realized (Luo et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2019; Yen, 2018). It has experienced exponential growth in China, becoming a pivotal component of the nation's digital economy. As of December 2023, the number of livestreaming users in China reached 816 million, an increase of 65.01 million compared to December 2022, accounting for 74.7% of the total internet users in the country (CNNIC, 2023). This substantial user base highlights the widespread adoption and influence of live-streaming commerce among Chinese consumers.

In 2023, the market size of live-streaming commerce reached nearly five trillion yuan, a significant increase from 420 billion yuan in 2019, and is projected to surge to 8.16 trillion yuan by 2026 (OU, 2024). Major platforms such as Taobao Live, Douyin, and Kuaishou dominate this sector (OU, 2024). Douyin has seen significant growth in its e-commerce segment, with a reported 256% year-over-year increase in total transaction volume in 2023 (TechNode, 2024). Kuaishou's live-streaming commerce business generated 1.18 trillion yuan in 2023, reflecting its substantial market presence (OU, 2024). This data underscores the significant role that live-streaming plays in the

country's e-commerce sector, offering consumers interactive and engaging shopping experiences.

3. Information Adoption Model (IAM)

The Information Adoption Model (IAM) serves as a theoretical framework that explores how individuals evaluate and adopt information during decision-making, particularly within digital environments like online reviews, social media, and eWOM. As an evolution of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), IAM focuses on understanding how persuasive information can shape attitudes and behaviors through distinct cognitive processing routes. Initially introduced by Sussman and Siegal (2003), IAM was developed to examine how people assess online information, especially in contexts involving knowledge-sharing and eWOM.

The key constructs within IAM—information quality, source credibility, argument quality, and information usefulness—shape how information is perceived and whether it is ultimately adopted by users. According to Sussman and Siegal (2003), information quality encompasses attributes like accuracy, completeness, and timeliness. High-quality information enhances perceptions of usefulness, thereby increasing the likelihood of its adoption. Source credibility, encompassing factors such as trustworthiness and expertise, is another pivotal construct, as it significantly shapes user perceptions. Research by Cheung et al. (2009) indicates that users are more inclined to accept information from credible sources with minimal cognitive scrutiny, which highlights the importance of source credibility in shaping initial trust.

Source credibility is particularly significant in the context of eWOM, as Metzger et al. (2003) has shown that in conditions of information uncertainty, individuals are more likely to depend on credible sources to form opinions and make informed decisions. When consumers have limited knowledge about a product, credible eWOM sources become crucial in shaping their perceptions and influencing their subsequent behaviors.

Another essential determinant within IAM is argument quality. This construction relates to the logical strength, clarity, and persuasive power of the information provided. According to Bhattacharjee and Sanford (2006), well-supported, clearly articulated arguments enhance the perceived usefulness of the information, influencing users' decision-making processes. High-quality arguments facilitate processing through the central route, thereby exerting a stronger impact on user attitudes and beliefs by fostering a deeper engagement with the content.

In IAM, information usefulness acts as a mediating factor, bridging constructions, argument quality and source credibility, to users' intentions to adopt information (Sussman and Siger, 2003). Information usefulness pertains to the extent to which users perceive information as relevant and valuable for their decision-making. This concept is fundamental to IAM, as it directly influences whether individuals incorporate the information into their belief systems or behavioral patterns. When users deem the information to be useful, they are more likely to adopt it, integrating it into their decision-making processes and potentially altering their attitudes or behaviors (Erkan and Evans, 2016; Sussman and Siger, 2003).

Information adoption represents the culmination of cognitive evaluations, where individuals choose to accept and integrate information into their knowledge base or decision-making framework (Erkan and Evans, 2016; Sussman and Siger, 2003). This process is particularly relevant in online contexts, where information is evaluated based on its credibility, quality, and quantity. Specifically, in eWOM settings, users often depend heavily on the opinions and experiences shared by others, which significantly shape their own decision-making processes (Li and Liu, 2019).

Recently, IAM has been extended to examine information adoption in online commerce which has gained considerable traction (Erkan and Evans, 2016; Verma et al., 2023). Especially in China, where platforms like Taobao Live and Douyin are frequently utilized by influencers and brands to market products (Xin et al., 2023). Within this interactive environment, IAM may offer valuable insights into how audiences evaluate and adopt the information presented by anchors during live streaming, ultimately impacting their purchasing decisions.

IAM, however, does not explicitly address trust or other internal states as determinants of information adoption, highlighting a limitation in explaining the full range of cognitive and emotional factors influencing consumer responses. Thus, the following research question has been proposed to explore these internal states in live streaming eWOM:

Q1. What are consumers' internal state that influence adopting the information in live streaming eWOM in China?

Eagly and Chaiken (1993) defined argument quality as the strength or plausibility of persuasive argumentation which is related to substantial strength to argue with a message. Hussain et al. (2017) contend that if arguments and reviews are perceived as pertinent to their needs, customers will assess them more favorably. Cheung and Thadani (2012) posited that eWOM quality volume was positively associated with information usefulness. Huang et al. (2022) tested that argument quality of YouTube product reviews was positively related to information usefulness. Similarly, Verma et al. (2023) stated argument quality has a positive impact on eWOM credibility, eWOM usefulness and attitude towards eWOM. Furthermore, some customers base their decisions solely on the quantity of reviews rather than carefully examining the reviews; therefore, information quantity is regarded as a supplementary method of reviewing (Filieri et al., 2018; Park and Lennon, 2009).

The IAM, however, does not include information quantity as a determinant of consumers' internal states. Beyond argument quality and source credibility, the present study aims to explore whether information quantity, or any potential factors, can influence consumers' internal states in China. Accordingly, the following research question is proposed:

Q2. What factors of live streaming eWOM that influence consumers' internal states in China?

Information adoption in IAM represents the response to eWOM, which may lead to shifts in attitudes and behaviors (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). In digital commerce, the primary purpose of online comments is to aid consumers in making purchase decisions (Erkan and Elwalda, 2018). Bulut and Karabulut (2018) explain that the most significant behavioral response to trust in online comments is the intention to purchase, as consumers frequently base their judgments on user-generated content

(Bulut and Karabulut, 2018). Purchase intention serves as both the precursor and foundation for actual purchase actions (Khwaja et al., 2020). This study intends to explore what factors influence consumers' purchase intention in the live streaming; therefore, propose the following research question.

Q3. What influences consumers' purchase intention in live streaming in China?

4. Social interaction

Steuer (1992, p. 10) defined interactivity as the extent to "which people participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time." This definition emphasizes the user's role in actively shaping their experience within a digital environment. Sundar (2012) further considered interpersonal interactivity as one of the heuristic cues that affect how users evaluate online information.

In the context of live streaming commerce, social interaction plays a critical role. Scholars have highlighted the influence of live streaming anchors in shaping consumer perceptions (Hu and Chaudhry, 2020; Ming et al., 2021). Xiao et al. (2019) found that responsiveness from YouTube influencers positively influences audiences' attitudes toward the information presented, suggesting a similar dynamic may exist in live streaming e-commerce. Social interaction has also been identified as a moderator in various studies (Li and Liu, 2019; Wu et al., 2009). For instance, Wu et al. (2009) demonstrated that social interaction strengthens the relationship between individual trust and behavior, while Li and Liu (2019) showed that social interaction enhances the effect of coworker support and feedback on behavior. However, the specific role of social interaction in the process of information adoption in live streaming eWOM remains underexplored. Addressing this gap, this study proposes the following research question:

Q4. What does the role of social interaction play in the relationship between consumers' internal states aroused by live streaming eWOM and their information adoption?

5. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach using grounded theory. The role of eWOM in live streaming is relatively new and not well understood. Qualitative research allows for exploration into this complex phenomenon, capturing the nuances of how real-time interactions between streamers and viewers influence consumer behavior (Charmaz, 2006). In the meantime, purchase intentions in a live streaming environment are influenced not only by information but also by emotional connections and perceptions. Qualitative methods are ideal for investigating these emotional and cognitive processes, offering insights into the motivations and decision-making pathways that numerical data might not reveal (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). Besides, live streaming is characterized by its immediacy and real-time interaction, which creates a unique context for eWOM. Qualitative research is well-suited for capturing this dynamic environment, allowing researchers to understand how instant feedback, audience interaction, and anchor influence shape consumer attitudes and purchase intentions (Charmaz, 2006). The impact of eWOM during live streaming may vary based on different contexts, such as audience demographics. A qualitative approach

provides the flexibility to deeply explore context-specific nuances, enabling a rich understanding of consumer behavior within Chinese market (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). Unlike quantitative research that offers broad, generalized results, qualitative research provides in-depth insights. For live streaming eWOM, it is crucial to understand the intricacies of how different aspects of the live streaming experience, like audience interaction, and real-time comments, shape consumer purchase decisions. In-depth interviews allow participants to express their personal experiences and provide a detailed picture of these influences (Creswell and Poth, 2013). Since the influence of live streaming eWOM on purchase intention is an emerging area of study, qualitative research can help generate new theories or frameworks. This exploratory approach supports the development of grounded theories (Charmaz, 2006) originally developed by Glaser et al. (1968), which is used to inductively develop theories from empirical data, making it a suitable approach for understanding complex social phenomena that are not yet well-explored in academic literature. The application of grounded theory enables insights to emerge directly from the data, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the role of eWOM in live streaming commerce (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin and Strauss, 2014).

In terms of sampling method, this study employed purposive sampling, a method where samples are selected based on the researcher's objectives and specific research questions (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). Purposive sampling aims to obtain samples that are most critical and representative of the research question, allowing for an in-depth understanding and exploration of the research phenomenon. The interviewees need to meet the criteria that they had live streaming shopping experiences and had concerns about the live streaming eWOM.

For the sources of interviewees, the study primarily targeted live streaming consumers from Zhejiang Province, China, as the live streaming commerce transaction volume of Zhejiang Province has consistently ranked among the top two in China over the past three years, according to the Zhejiang Province E-commerce Promotion Center (2021, 2022). These interviews were conducted mainly in person and online interviews with who were willing to attend. All participants were informed beforehand of the voluntary nature of the study and the confidentiality principles. The researcher recorded the entire interview sessions, and after each interview, transcriptions were created based on the notes and audio recordings.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted which facilitated the exploration of diverse themes in live streaming environments. 30 Chinese nationals in China who were active users of live streaming platforms were interviewed, with each session lasting approximately one hour. This sample size was determined based on qualitative research guidelines suggesting that data saturation, a point at which no new information or themes emerge, typically occurs with 20 to 30 participants (Guest et al., 2006). The interview, developed from an extensive literature review, contained 32 questions that aligned with the study's four research questions. This structured approach facilitated consistent yet flexible discussions, allowing participants to express their unique insights while covering core themes. All interviews were audio-recorded, then transcribed verbatim and translated into English for subsequent analysis. To ensure data accuracy, a rigorous back-translation process was employed, aligning with best practices in qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2000).

As for the basic demographic information of the participants, 43% were male ($n = 13$), while 57% were female ($n = 17$), and 13% were between 18–22 years ($n = 4$), 33% were aged 23–27 ($n = 10$), 37% were between 28–32 years ($n = 11$), 13% were between 33–37 ($n = 4$), and 4% were between 38–42 ($n = 1$). Occupation categories were also diverse: 10% were teachers ($n = 3$), 13% were students ($n = 4$), 20% were corporate employees ($n = 6$), 13% were freelancers ($n = 4$), 13% were salespersons ($n = 4$), 7% were civil servants ($n = 2$), 7% were doctors ($n = 2$), 10% were accountants ($n = 3$), and 7% fell into other categories ($n = 2$).

Validity and reliability

To strengthen the validity of the study's findings, triangulation was employed, involving multiple researchers in the coding process and incorporating participant feedback to verify the accuracy of interpretations. This approach aligns with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) guidelines for establishing credibility in qualitative research. Specifically, the interview guide was reviewed by two researchers specializing in marketing and language to ensure that the questions were relevant and understandable for the target audience. After the interviews, member checking was conducted by sharing transcriptions with participants, allowing them to confirm that their views were accurately represented.

The interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached, meaning that no new themes or insights were emerging from the data (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). Saturation ensures that the findings are comprehensive and reflect the full range of participants' experiences. After reaching theoretical saturation, which are 25 interviews, an additional five consumers were interviewed. This is to make sure no new themes, codes, or variations of themes were identified in the later stages of data analysis (Guest et al., 2006).

Reliability was ensured through consistent procedures in both data collection and analysis. Since 30 participants were invited to attend the semi-structured interviews, according to the suggestion of Campbell et al. (2013), 6 of 30 data were conducted to test reliability. Two researchers independently coded a subset of the interview transcripts, and Cohen's Kappa coefficient was calculated to measure inter-coder reliability, achieving a value above 0.7, which indicates a strong level of agreement between coders (Cohen, 1960; Landis and Koch, 1977). To further enhance reliability, the coding framework was periodically reviewed and refined through collaborative discussions among the research team, ensuring consistency, coherence, and alignment with the study's objectives.

6. Data analysis and results

For efficient data analysis and coding, NVivo 14 was employed, a widely used qualitative data analysis software that aids in organizing and retrieving coded data, enhancing analytical rigor (Phillips and Lu, 2018). In line with the best practices, initial categories with fewer than ten occurrences were excluded to maintain focus on the most salient themes (Charmaz, 2006), ultimately resulting in a refined structure of 43 initial categories. The grounded theory approach guided the analysis, which

involved three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin and Strauss, 2014; Strauss, 1987).

6.1. Open coding

The first stage of analysis involved open coding, a foundational process in qualitative research where interview transcripts are systematically broken down into discrete units of meaning, with each segment assigned an initial category (Corbin and Strauss, 2014).

The open coding process identified 43 codes that represented various aspects of how eWOM influences consumer purchase intention in live streaming. A theme mentioned frequently is usually considered representative and important. In a study involving 30 participants, if a theme is mentioned by at least 9 participants (i.e., one-third of respondents), it can be considered a significant theme. This helps identify common points of interest shared among respondents (Guest et al., 2006). The coding also emphasized the importance of argument quality, source credibility and information quantity. These factors collectively impact the consumer’s information adoption process, influencing whether eWOM is considered a useful and trustworthy reference. **Table 1** presents examples of interview responses that contributed to the classification of the initial category.

Table 1. Open coding.

	Examples of Interview Transcripts	Initial Category
1	Some of the live streaming eWOM is posted by the audience from an objective point of view—neither exaggerated nor undervalued - fairly saying the advantages and disadvantages of the product. (Female, 23, Teacher)	Objective
2	When discussing a product or service, many participants provide detailed explanations, including specific reasons for their viewpoints. They might mention particular features they found useful, compare the product to alternatives, or describe how it solved a problem for them. This logical structure of information helps me understand the rationale behind their opinions. (Female, 18, Student)	Logical
3	Live streaming eWOM covers a wide range of contents, from basic features to advanced functionalities. (Male, 36, Doctor)	Comprehensive
4	Live streaming eWOM has to remain tightly tied to the theme of live streaming. (Female, 39, Freelancer)	Relevant
5	There are many specific examples, detailed descriptions, and real feelings. (Male, 31, Sales)	Detailed
6	Live streaming eWOM provides information that meets my needs. (Female, 28, Corporate Employee)	Fulfill a need
7	If someone shares incorrect information, other viewers or even the anchor can quickly address and rectify it. This collective verification process requires the overall accuracy of the eWOM. (Female, 25, Freelancer)	Accurate
8	Since live streams occur in real-time, the feedback and comments from other audience members are immediate and current. (Male, 31, Sales)	Up to date
9	I observe people discussing the same problem or praising the same point. (Female, 25, Teacher)	Consistent
10	There are many real buyers in the discussion area sharing detailed shopping experiences. (Female, 22, Student)	Audiences with purchasing experience
11	With their professional knowledge and rich experience, audiences can provide objective and accurate evaluations and suggestions, focusing on aspects of technology and performance. (Male, 25, Corporate employee)	Knowledgeable
12	Experts in specific fields usually have their own selection criteria, and their recommendations are generally based on experience and comparison. (Female, 35, Freelancer)	Experts
13	I find people who write live streaming eWOM reliable because their spontaneous, firsthand accounts are shared in a transparent and interactive setting. (Male, 29, Civil servant)	Reliable

Table 1. (Continued).

	Examples of Interview Transcripts	Initial Category
14	I find people who write live streaming eWOM trustworthy. Their real-time, authentic, and often personal contributions provide valuable insights. (Male, 25, Corporate Employee)	Trustworthy
15	There are also fans who specially come to the live streaming, perhaps because they have an interest in the anchor or the product. The message of these fans is more active, contributing to a form of fan-driven traffic. (Female, 28, Accountant)	Fans
16	I've noticed that during live streaming, the number of recommendations in eWOM from other audiences is quite substantial. (Male, 27, Teacher)	Quantity of recommendations
17	In a live streaming environment, there are often many people contributing to the conversation—each with different backgrounds, needs, and experiences. (Female, 29, Accountant)	Quantity of live streaming eWOM
18	During live streaming, there are often hundreds of audiences sharing their thoughts, questions, and opinions simultaneously. This creates a wealth of information covering a wide range of product aspects. (Male, 21, Student)	Quantity of information in live streaming eWOM
19	I find the information in live streaming eWOM very useful. The comments and feedback provide real-world insights that go beyond what the anchors or official sources might present. (Female, 25, Teacher)	Useful
20	I often find information shared by other audiences during live streaming highly valuable when learning about products and services. (Male, 30, Sales)	Valuable
21	Audiences often share personal experiences with the product, like how they use it, what they like, and even the challenges they face. This kind of information helps me understand the product's real-life performance and how it might meet my needs. (Female, 29, Corporate Employee)	Helpful
22	When I watch live streaming, I find the eWOM from other audience members incredibly informative. They often share various insights about the showcased products or services. (Female, 33, Freelancer)	Informative
23	Information shared through live streaming eWOM is practical. It often focuses on real-world usage and offers practical insights that I can apply immediately. Audiences who contribute to live streaming typically share their personal experiences, tips, and tricks. (Male, 31, Doctor)	Practical
24	I consider the eWOM from other audiences during live streaming to be reliable. The real-time nature of live streaming eWOM makes them feel authentic and unfiltered. Real audiences are sharing their opinions and experiences spontaneously. (Female, 27, HR)	Reliable
25	I find live streaming eWOM from other audiences trustworthy. It's based on genuine reactions and experiences. Since everything happens live, there's little room for manipulation, giving me confidence in what is said. (Male, 36, Doctor)	Trustworthy
26	I consider live streaming eWOM from other audiences fair because it presents a balanced mix of opinions and experiences. In a live streaming, diverse audiences share honest thoughts in real time, which means you're likely to hear both positive and negative feedback about a product or service. This diversity ensures that no single viewpoint dominates the conversation, providing a more balanced assessment. (Female, 33, Freelancer)	Fair
27	I find that live streaming eWOM from other audiences is dependable. It often comes from real-time experiences of people like me who are interacting with the product. (Male, 27, Teacher)	Dependable
28	During live streaming, audiences aren't just giving canned responses; they're sharing thoughts spontaneously, making the responses feel more honest. (Female, 29, Corporate Employee)	Honest
29	The product showcased in the live streaming addresses a problem I'm facing and seems like it could bring me significant convenience and benefits. (Male, 26, Fitness Trainer)	Benefit others
30	This collective sharing of information helps me learn. Since comments happen in real-time, I can ask questions or see others ask questions that get answered promptly, either by the anchor or knowledgeable audiences. This interactive environment allows me to gather a wealth of product knowledge quickly. (Female, 27, HR)	Accept the knowledge
31	When considering a purchase, live streaming eWOM is incredibly influential in my decision-making. (Male, 31, Doctor)	Help make purchase decisions
32	I often adopt the opinions suggested by live streaming eWOM because it feels like I am getting insights from people who have direct experience with the product in real time. (Female, 30, Civil servant)	Adopt the opinion
33	The collective experiences and perspectives of users help me feel more confident in my judgments and decisions. When other audiences share their thoughts, I often find myself in agreement. (Male, 25, Corporate employee)	Agree with the opinion
34	The immediacy and interactivity of live streaming make live streaming eWOM feel more genuine and relevant, so I follow it closely to make more informed choices. (Female, 35, Freelancer)	Follow suggestions

Table 1. (Continued).

	Examples of Interview Transcripts	Initial Category
35	I am often very inclined to purchase products after reading the live streaming eWOM. The immediate feedback and genuine reactions from audiences significantly influence my buying decisions. (Male, 25, Corporate Employee)	Highly likely to buy
36	I often feel motivated to try new products recommended during live streaming after reading the eWOM. Real-time feedback and recommendations from audiences provide me with immediate and authentic insights. (Female, 30, Civil servant)	Try
37	I'm often so convinced by the products showcased during live streaming that I actively recommend them to friends and family. (Female, 25, Corporate Employee)	Recommend
38	I'm highly likely to return to this live streaming platform the next time I need to buy a product. The real-time feedback and honest opinions shared by others are invaluable in making informed purchasing decisions. (Male, 30, Sales)	Will purchase from this live streaming
39	I feel a genuine sense of closeness to the anchor when I watch live streaming. Real-time interaction makes the experience more personal compared to other forms of media. (Male, 30, Lawyer)	Feel closer
40	I really appreciate how the anchor runs the live streaming because they actively encourage audience participation. Throughout the live streaming, the anchor frequently pauses to read comments and address questions from audiences like me. This open invitation makes me feel comfortable sharing my thoughts and asking anything I'm curious about. (Female, 30, Civil servant)	Respond and ask
41	I really value the live streaming sessions where I can interact with the anchor because I genuinely feel that they pay attention to me. When I comment or ask a question, the anchor often responds directly, sometimes even mentioning my username. This immediate acknowledgment makes me feel seen and appreciated, as if I'm part of a conversation rather than just a passive audience. (Male, 33, Sales)	Feel being paid attention
42	I really appreciate live streaming for allowing me to directly interact with the anchor in real time. I can share thoughts, ask questions, or even offer suggestions, and the anchor often responds immediately (Female, 24, Accountant)	Exchange and share opinions with the anchor
43	I find that the live streaming anchor is highly skilled in communication, which significantly enhances my viewing experience. They are adept at conveying information in a clear and engaging manner, making even complex topics easy to understand. (Male, 29, Civil servant)	Having enough skills to communicate

6.2. Axial coding

In the second stage, axial coding was employed to explore relationships between initial codes and to identify broader categories and subcategories. This process is integral to grounded theory, as it involves reassembling data by examining connections among codes to build coherent themes (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). Through axial coding, researchers were able to link key concepts to broader constructs. With the assistance of NVivo 14, eight subcategories were systematically identified and classified (Johnston, 2006). NVivo's capabilities facilitated a structured approach to axial coding, enabling efficient categorization and visualization of connections among themes, which strengthened the analytical depth of the findings (Johnston, 2006; Phillips and Lu., 2018).

To further clarify the direction of this study and provide a foundation for the subsequent axial coding analysis, the 43 open codes were categorized, forming eight main categories (see **Table 2**).

Table 2. Axial coding.

Main-Category	Concept	Code	Frequency
AA1 Argument quality	Argument quality refers to the effectiveness and persuasiveness of an argument in supporting its conclusion (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Sussman and Siger, 2003). It is a strong persuasive power that is embedded in information and influences customers' decision-making (Bhattacharjee and Sanford, 2006).	a1 Objective	23
		a2 Logical	19
		a3 Comprehensive	18
		a4 Relevant	16
		a5 Detailed	16
		a6 Fulfill a need	10
		a7 Accurate	10
		a8 Up to date	10
		a9 Consistent	10
AA2 Source credibility	Source credibility is the recipient's trust in the source of information (Ohanian, 1990). It refers to the extent of which the information recipient believes that the source of information can be relied on, and it affects the information recipient's adoption of information, which has nothing to do with the information itself but can reflect the degree to which the information is considered trustworthy (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993).	a10 Audiences with purchasing experience	24
		a11 Knowledge	15
		a12 Experts	13
		a13 Reliable	11
		a14 Trustworthy	10
		a15 Fans	10
AA3 Information quantity	The quantity of eWOM is defined as the number of online reviews or comments about a product or service (Fan et al., 2013). According to Shen et al. (2015), the quantity of online reviews in traditional e-commerce frequently indicates how well-liked a product is.	a16 Quantity of recommendations	24
		a17 Quantity of live streaming eWOM	15
		a18 Quantity of information in live streaming eWOM	10
AA4 Information usefulness	Information usefulness refers to the degree to which a message recipient perceives the information as helpful, valuable, and relevant for their decision-making or understanding of a subject (Sussman and Siger, 2003).	a19 Useful	24
		a20 Valuable	15
		a21 Helpful	11
		a22 Informative	10
		a23 Practical	10
AA5 Trust	Trust in eWOM refers to the confidence that consumers place in online user-generated content. It reflects the belief that the information provided is credible, reliable, and can be depended upon when making purchasing decisions (Pyle et al., 2021).	a24 Reliable	23
		a25 Trustworthy	23
		a26 Fair	21
		a27 Dependable	13
		a28 Honest	13
		a29 Benefit others	10
AA6 Information adoption	Information adoption refers to a process in which potential consumers adopt useful information on goods and services as a reference in their purchase decision process (Cheung et al., 2008; Sussman and Siger, 2003).	a30 Accept the knowledge	16
		a31 Help make purchase decisions	15
		a32 Adopt the opinion	13
		a33 Agree with the opinion	10
		a34 Follow suggestions	10
AA7 Purchase intention	A consumer's behavioral intention is the possibility that the consumer can change his or her psychological state when receiving certain information or certain stimuli; thus, engaging in a certain behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen, 1991).	a35 Highly likely to buy	17
		a36 Try	13
		a37 Recommend	13
		a38 Will purchase from this live streaming	10

Table 2. (Continued).

Main-Category	Concept	Code	Frequency
AA8 Social interaction	Social interaction refers to the relationship between individuals through interactions (Sundar, 2012). People influence each other’s decisions by transmitting communication (Chen and Lin, 2018).	a39 Feel closer	21
		a40 Respond and ask	17
		a41 Feel being paid attention	16
		a42 Exchange and share opinions with the anchor	14
		a43 Having enough skills to communicate	13

6.3. Selective coding

The goal of selective coding is to systematically address the interrelationships between categories, identify core concepts from these categories, and analyze the connections between these core concepts and various dimensions to construct or depict a comprehensive theoretical framework or phenomenon (Bhattacharjee, 2012). In this study, through continuous comparison and discussion, eight main categories summarized earlier were deeply synthesized and integrated. The specific relationships were discussed below.

As for the information adoption process in live streaming eWOM, argument quality, source credibility, and information quantity drive audiences to adopt information by stimulating internal states of trust and perceived usefulness in the live streaming context. These internal states enhance consumers’ receptivity to information presented during live streaming eWOM, leading to a greater likelihood of information adoption.

As consumers focus cognitively and invest emotionally in live streaming eWOM, their propensity for information adoption increases, which subsequently fosters purchase intention. Additionally, the interaction with anchors during live streaming intensifies audiences’ internal states, further boosting their likelihood of adopting the information provided.

The model constructed in this study illustrates the formation and transformation mechanisms of eWOM, information adoption, and purchase intention within e-commerce live streaming environments. The detailed model is presented in **Table 3**, providing a comprehensive view of how live streaming eWOM influences consumer purchase intention in this context.

Table 3. The relationship structure of the main Scope.

Relationship Structure	Relationship Structure	Representative Statements of Interviewees (Analyzed Relationship Structure)
Argument Quality → Information Usefulness	The argument quality of live streaming eWOM has a positive relationship with the information usefulness thereof.	When the eWOM’s arguments are true, specific, and logical, I feel the information provided in the eWOM is more useful. (Male, 31, Sales)
Source Credibility → Information Usefulness	The source credibility of live streaming eWOM has a positive relationship with the information usefulness thereof.	When eWOM comes from genuine buyers who have bought and personally experienced the product, their information and feedback are more authentic and useful as a reference. (Female, 18, Student)
Information Quantity → Information Usefulness	The quantity of live streaming eWOM has a positive relationship with the information usefulness thereof.	When the live streaming eWOM content is packed with information, I can quickly get the information I need. (Male, 24, Sales)

Table 3. (Continued).

Relationship Structure	Relationship Structure	Representative Statements of Interviewees (Analyzed Relationship Structure)
Argument Quality → Trust in eWOM	Argument quality of live streaming eWOM has a positive relationship with trust therein.	Some eWOM is made from an objective standpoint by audiences, without exaggeration or criticism, and they mention both the pros and cons of the product. This makes me feel that such eWOM is trustworthy. (Male, 36, Doctor)
Source Credibility → Trust in eWOM	Source credibility of live streaming eWOM has a positive relationship with trust therein.	If the source of the eWOM is reliable, such as genuine audiences, loyal followers who have been watching the livestreaming for a long time, or verified professionals, then I am more inclined to trust the information they provide.”. (Female, 29, Accountant)
Information Quantity → Trust in eWOM	The quantity of live streaming eWOM has a positive relationship with the trust therein.	I tend to trust reviews that are numerous, because each person’s comments are different. Someone asked a question that I hadn’t thought of, and by reading it, I can learn more. I feel that the more reviews there are, the more comprehensive the information I can gather. (Male, 27, Teacher)
Information Usefulness → Information Adoption	The information usefulness of live streaming eWOM has a positive relationship with information adoption.	I think live streaming eWOM is quite useful, especially when it helps me decide whether to continue following a particular live streaming or purchase a product. (Male, 21, Student)
Trust in eWOM → Information Adoption	Trust in live streaming eWOM has a positive relationship with information adoption.	I will carefully read the eWOM that I consider reliable, to see how they describe the pros and cons of the product. I am very likely to adopt the opinions suggested by live streaming eWOM. (Female, 22, Student)
Information Adoption → Purchase Intention	Information adoption of live streaming eWOM has a positive relationship with purchase intention.	I will try the product recommended in the live streaming if the information in live streaming eWOM helps me to understand the product. (Female, 27, HR)
Social Interaction ↓ eWOM Information Usefulness → Information Adoption	Social interaction between audience and live streaming anchor enhances the relationship between information usefulness of live streaming eWOM and information adoption.	I believe that the social interaction between the audience and the live streaming anchor significantly amplifies how useful the information shared during the streaming, which in turn influences my decision to adopt the information in live streaming eWOM. When the anchor actively engages with audiences—by responding to comments, answering questions, or even calling out usernames, it creates a more personalized and interactive experience. (Male, 27, Teacher)
Social Interaction ↓ Trust in eWOM → Information Adoption	Social interaction between audience and live streaming anchor enhances the relationship between trust in live streaming eWOM and information adoption.	In my opinion and from my experience, the social interaction between the audience and the live streaming anchor plays a crucial role in how much I trust the eWOM and whether I decide to adopt the information presented. When the anchor enthusiastically interacts with the audience responding to comments, answering questions, or even mentioning audiences by name, this direct engagement makes me feel valued and heard, which in turn increases my trust in both the anchor and the information being shared. (Female, 39, Freelancer)

7. Discussion

Q1. What are consumers’ internal state that influence adopting the information in live streaming eWOM in China?

The findings of this study suggest that consumers are more inclined to adopt information from live streaming eWOM when they perceive it as useful. During live streaming, audiences often share their experiences, tips, and opinions in real time, contributing valuable insights. The results indicate that live streaming eWOM, characterized by rich content, practicality, helpfulness, and value, significantly enhances the chance of adopting information among consumers. These findings align with existing literature, which has established that individuals are more likely to adopt information they perceive as useful (Hussain et al., 2017; Leong et al., 2021; Sussman and Siegal, 2003).

This study also finds that consumers tend to adopt information from live streaming eWOM when they have a strong level of trust in the live streaming eWOM. Trust is a crucial factor for consumers because it influences how much credibility they assign to the information presented. The interactive environment of live streaming enhances this trust because they can see questions being asked and answered openly. In essence, trust determines whether consumers accept or disregard the eWOM from audiences during live streaming. The immediate nature of live streaming means that audiences are reacting honestly to what they are seeing at that moment. When audiences perceive the live streaming eWOM reliable, trustworthy, fair, honest, dependable and benefit themselves, they feel more confident in adopting the information. The participants mentioned that the trust in live streaming eWOM not only helps make better choices but also enhances their trust in the live streaming platform and the community of audiences.

Q2. What factors of live streaming eWOM that influence consumers' internal states in China?

Firstly, argument quality presented in live streaming eWOM plays a critical role. This study finds that when audiences provide well-considered, logical, and detailed explanations regarding a product or service, it significantly enhances the perceived value of the information. Participants indicated that simple statements like "This product is great" are far less impactful than explanations that delve into why the product is effective, highlighting specific features, benefits, or comparisons with other products. High-quality arguments that include evidence, personal experiences, and clear reasoning render eWOM more persuasive and informative. Such detailed information allows consumers to evaluate whether the product or service aligns with their own needs.

Secondly, the source credibility of the individuals sharing their opinions is a major factor. This research finds that consumers consider live streaming eWOM from other audiences to be reliable, honest and trustworthy because it comes directly from real people sharing their genuine experiences and opinions in real-time. Unlike edited reviews or promotional content, live streaming eWOM is unfiltered and spontaneous, which reduces the chances of them being manipulated or biased. The participants also explained that consumers tend to give more weight to live streaming eWOM from audiences who appear knowledgeable, experienced, and expertise. If a person has a history of providing reliable information or demonstrates expertise in a relevant field, their input becomes more trustworthy and useful. Credible sources reduce the uncertainty and risk associated with relying on eWOM, making consumers more comfortable perceiving trustworthy and usefulness in the information.

Lastly, the information quantity also impacts consumers' internal states. When there is a substantial number of live streaming eWOM from different audiences, it provides a broader perspective. A larger quantity of live streaming eWOM allows consumers to identify common themes or consensus among users. If many people are pointing out the same advantages or issues, it adds to the credibility and usefulness of that information. However, it is important that the quantity does not become overwhelming. Some participants noted that a large number of live streaming eWOM could create a more interactive and lively experience; however, it can also be overwhelming, e.g., "There are times when the live streaming eWOM just flood the

screen. It feels very active, but sometimes it's too much to read" (Male, 31, Sales). Participants mentioned that too much information can be confusing, especially if it is repetitive or irrelevant.

Besides, live streaming eWOM rolls fast, which can enhance the experience by reflecting real-time reactions. Live streaming eWOM that are relevant, such as recommendations, feedback, or shared knowledge, significantly increase the usefulness of information and trust in live streaming eWOM. Moderate volume enhances information usefulness and trust in live streaming eWOM, as audiences can engage with the content more thoughtfully, e.g., "When the live streaming eWOM isn't so crowded, I actually pay attention to what people are saying. I've learned a lot from others' comments in those moments" (Male, 29, Corporate Employee). Ideally, there should be enough diverse and pertinent feedback to help consumers make an informed decision without causing information overload.

High-quality arguments demonstrate that the person has thought carefully about their opinion and can back it up with solid reasoning. Credible sources assure that the information comes from someone trustworthy and knowledgeable. An appropriate quantity of consistent feedback from multiple audiences provides reassurance through interaction. When these factors align, consumers feel more confident in trusting in live streaming eWOM and perceiving it to be useful.

Q3. What influences consumers' purchase intention in live streaming in China?

The present study finds that when consumers adopt information from the eWOM from other audiences during a live streaming, it influences their intention to make a purchase right then and there. Participants mentioned that the real-time feedback and opinions shared by other audiences provide them with valuable insights that they might not get elsewhere. In the meantime, the immediacy of live streaming means that consumers can see these genuine reactions as they happen, which makes the information feel more authentic and trustworthy. The interactive nature of the platform allows consumers to ask questions and receive immediate answers, further reducing any hesitation that consumers might have.

In essence, adopting the live streaming eWOM from other audiences can enhance consumers' confidence in the product and decreases perceived risks. This positive reinforcement makes consumers more inclined to proceed with a purchase during the live streaming. It is not just about the product itself but also about the shared experience and collective endorsement from audiences, which strongly influences consumers' intentions to buy. It is aligned with previous research that consumers who adopt the eWOM are likely to have purchase intentions (Erkan and Evans, 2016; Erkan and Evans, 2018; Khwaja et al., 2020; Tien et al., 2019)

Q4. What does the role of social interaction play in the relationship between consumers' internal states aroused by live streaming eWOM and their information adoption?

This research finds that consumers have noticed that the social interaction between the anchor and the audience during live streaming amplifies how they feel internally when exposed to live streaming eWOM and influences whether they adopt the information afterwards. When the anchor actively engages with audiences, by responding to comments, addressing questions, or mentioning audiences by name, it creates a more interactive and personalized experience. This engagement heightens

audiences' emotional and cognitive responses to the eWOM shared during the streaming. For example, a 26-year-old female salesperson said: "When I'm watching a live streaming where the anchor and audiences share their experiences and insights about a product, I tend to absorb that information carefully. If the information addresses my needs, answers my questions, and resolves any doubts I might have, I feel more confident about the live streaming eWOM and perceived information useful, and are more likely to follow live streaming eWOM".

Furthermore, the anchor's ability to facilitate a dynamic conversation makes live streaming eWOM feel more credible and trustworthy. Participants addressed that the anchor might highlight positive comments from the audience, reinforcing favorable perceptions and creating a sense of community endorsement. When the anchor addresses both positive feedback and concerns from the audience, participants feel it demonstrating transparency and authenticity. This open dialogue enhances consumers' trust in the information, as it shows that the anchor values the audience's input and is willing to engage with different viewpoints.

What is more, the current research finds that social interaction makes live streaming eWOM more useful to consumers. Participants responded that when audiences share their opinions or experiences about a product, the anchor often highlights these comments, elaborates on them, or provides additional insights. This interaction not only validates the audiences' contributions but also enriches live streaming eWOM. It helps clarify any doubts that consumers might have and provides multiple perspectives on the product or service being discussed. The anchor's involvement ensures that important points are emphasized, and that misinformation is addressed promptly (Wongkitrungrueng et al., 2020).

Social interaction between the anchor and the audience does not just provide information; it creates an emotional experience that enhances the effectiveness of live streaming eWOM. This heightened emotional state makes consumers more open to adopting and acting upon the information presented during the live streaming.

8. Implications

8.1. Theoretical implications

Theoretically, this study enhances the Information Adoption Model (IAM) by introducing social interaction as a role of moderator between information usefulness and adoption. This new perspective demonstrates that the live streaming setting intensifies the value of social interaction. This insight not only expands IAM's scope but also opens new pathways for examining other forms of social engagement in digital contexts.

In the meantime, this research enriches the IAM by adding information quantity. This just confirmed Petty and Cacioppo (1986)'s finding that the number of arguments in a message can induce persuasion. Unlike traditional settings where eWOM information is static, live streaming offers a dynamic, interactive platform where real-time engagement influences how information is perceived and adopted. The integration of information quantity as an influencing factor extends IAM by showing how the volume of eWOM impacts trust and perceived usefulness, thereby

contributing to a richer understanding of the factors that drive information adoption in live streaming environments.

Finally, this research contributes to exploring the consumer internal states, including trust and information usefulness, as mediators between eWOM and information adoption. This research suggests that factors such as argument quality, source credibility, and information quantity work by shaping internal states of trust and perceived information usefulness. This perspective provides deeper insights into the psychological processes that underpin information adoption, highlighting that both cognitive and emotional responses are crucial in determining whether consumers accept or reject eWOM in live streaming.

8.2. Practical implications

This study offers valuable practical insights, especially for vendors, live streaming platforms, and anchors in the fast-growing Chinese live streaming commerce market. Firstly, it highlights the power of eWOM in shaping consumer purchase intentions during live streaming. Vendors and live streaming platforms should recognize that consumers are significantly influenced by source credibility, argument quality, and information quantity. For instance, encouraging verified consumers and knowledgeable experts to share detailed and honest feedback about products can make the live streaming eWOM more trustworthy and persuasive.

To leverage the real-time interactivity of live streaming, platforms could develop tools to support dynamic engagement between audiences and anchors. This interactivity not only strengthens consumer trust but also creates a sense of community endorsement. Anchors can strategically enhance purchase intentions by actively engaging with audiences, responding promptly to comments, and addressing common questions. This responsiveness fosters a personalized and transparent experience, which can increase the audience's loyalty and trust.

Additionally, social interaction among audiences serves as a powerful moderator for eWOM impact. Creating avenues for audiences to discuss products in real-time can improve consumers' perception of eWOM's usefulness. In practical terms, live streaming platforms may also benefit from this spotlight trustworthy live streaming eWOM.

9. Limitations and future research

This study provides a foundation for understanding the influence of live streaming eWOM; however, several areas remain open for further exploration. First, future research could examine the influence of cultural factors on live streaming eWOM effectiveness across different regions and consumer groups. While this study focuses on China's live streaming market, the findings may differ in other cultural contexts where consumer trust, social interaction norms, and communication styles vary. Comparative studies across cultures could reveal additional insights into how cultural values shape consumer responses to eWOM in live streaming, enriching global marketing strategies.

Second, the role of individual personality traits and consumer characteristics in processing eWOM deserves closer examination. For instance, factors like trust

propensity, prior online shopping experience, or social media savviness may moderate how consumers perceive eWOM trustworthy and usefulness. Future studies could adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative insights with quantitative data on consumer traits, to build a more nuanced understanding of individual differences in eWOM influence.

Third, further research could investigate the impact of eWOM format and presentation style in live streaming. Elements such as the tone of eWOM, the use of multimedia (e.g., visuals and emoticons), and the language style (e.g., formal vs. conversational) may shape how consumers process and respond to information. Examining how these stylistic factors interact with eWOM to affect purchase intentions could help in designing more effective live streaming experiences.

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