

## Discussion on the Influence Mechanism of Emotional Expression in KOL Live Streaming on Consumer Trust

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**Abstract:** This article focuses on the live-streaming scenario of Kols and delves deeply into the mechanism by which emotional expression influences Consumer Trust. By analyzing relevant theories and existing research, the key elements of emotional expression in Kols' live streaming and the constituent dimensions of Consumer Trust are clarified. By combining practical cases and logical reasoning, this paper analyzes how emotional expression influences consumers' emotional perception, cognitive judgment and other intermediate links, and thereby affects consumers' trust. Research has found that positive and moderate emotional expression helps build Consumer Trust, while negative or excessive emotional expression may damage trust, providing theoretical guidance for KOL live-streaming marketing practices.

**Keywords:** KOL Live Streaming; Emotional Expression; Consumer Trust; Influence Mechanism

### 1. Introduction

With the rapid development of Internet technology, live-streaming e-commerce, as a new business model, has risen rapidly and occupied an important position. In 2023, the market size of live-streaming e-commerce in China reached 4.9 trillion yuan, increasing by 35.2% year-on-year. [1] Key Opinion Leader (KOL) live streaming has become one of the core forms of live-streaming e-commerce. With the influence of Kols and the real-time interactivity of live streaming, it has attracted the attention and participation of a large number of consumers.

During the live streaming process of Kols, they not only guide consumers to make purchases through detailed product introductions and recommendations, but also emotional expression runs through the entire process, becoming a key factor influencing consumers' decisions. The

emotional expression of Kols can create a unique live-streaming atmosphere and establish an emotional connection with consumers. For instance, when a beauty KOL recommends a new lipstick, they excitedly describe their feelings after using it and show off their beautiful makeup. Such passionate emotional expression will make consumers more willing to pay attention to the product and even generate a desire to purchase.

However, at present, there is still a lack of systematic and in-depth research on the internal mechanism by which the emotional expression of Kols in live streaming precisely affects consumer trust. Although some studies have focused on the influence of interactive factors in live streaming on consumer behavior [2], the exploration of the core element of emotional expression is still not comprehensive and in-depth enough. Therefore, an in-depth exploration of this issue holds significant theoretical and practical significance.

This study aims to comprehensively reveal the influence mechanism of emotional expression in Kols' live streaming on Consumer Trust and construct a clear and reasonable theoretical framework. Theoretically, enrich the research results in the fields of live-streaming marketing and Consumer Trust to provide reference and inspiration for subsequent related studies. In practice, it is necessary to help Kols and merchants gain a deeper understanding of the significant role of emotional expression in live-streaming marketing, optimize live-streaming strategies, enhance Consumer Trust, and thereby increase the effectiveness and benefits of live-streaming marketing.

### 2. Literature Review

#### 2.1 Research Related to KOL Live Streaming

KOL live streaming is a special form of live-streaming e-commerce, integrating the influence of Kols with the real-time interactive feature of live streaming. Existing research

mainly focuses on the marketing effectiveness of KOL live streaming, consumer behavior, and the relationship between Kols and consumers, etc. In terms of marketing effectiveness, research has found that recommendations from Kols can significantly increase product sales and brand awareness [3]. For instance, products recommended by some well-known beauty Kols often sell out within a short period of time, which indicates that the influence of Kols can be directly translated into purchasing behavior. In terms of consumer behavior, research shows that consumers' purchasing decisions are influenced by multiple factors, including the professional image, interactivity and emotional connection of Kols, etc. [4] Consumers are more inclined to purchase products recommended by Kols they trust, as this trust reduces their perception of purchase risks. In terms of the relationship between Kols and consumers, research indicates that establishing a long-term and stable relationship is crucial for enhancing consumer loyalty [5]. Kols can enhance consumers' sense of identity and belonging to a brand through interaction and emotional communication with them.

## **2.2 Research Related to Emotional Expression**

Emotional expression is the process by which an individual conveys their emotional state to others through words, expressions, actions and other means. In the field of marketing, emotional expression is regarded as an important marketing tool that can profoundly influence consumers' emotional responses and purchasing decisions.

Previous studies have found that positive emotional expression can enhance consumers' positive emotional experience and increase their favorability towards brands and products [6]. For instance, enthusiastic salespeople often manage to capture consumers' attention and stimulate their desire to purchase.

Meanwhile, the authenticity of emotional expression is also an important factor influencing consumers' responses [7]. Consumers are more willing to believe in genuine and natural emotional expressions and are averse to overly exaggerated or false ways of expression. If Kols' emotional expressions during live streams seem insincere, consumers may become suspicious of them, thereby reducing their willingness to purchase.

## **2.3 Research Related to Consumer Trust**

Consumer trust is a kind of confidence and reliance that consumers have on merchants, products or services during the purchasing decision-making process. In live-streaming e-commerce, Consumer Trust is a key factor influencing consumers' purchasing behavior.

Existing research has explored the formation mechanism of Consumer Trust from multiple perspectives, including factors such as the reputation of merchants, product quality, and after-sales service [8]. Meanwhile, some studies have also focused on the application of trust factors in interpersonal relationships in live-streaming e-commerce, such as the trust relationship between Kols and consumers. For instance, consumers are more inclined to purchase products recommended by Kols they trust, as this kind of trust is similar to recommendations among friends, which can reduce consumers' information search costs and purchase risks [9].

## **3. Types and Characteristics of Emotional Expression in KOL Live Streaming**

### **3.1 Types of Emotional Expression**

Positive emotional expressions are relatively common in KOL live streams, mainly including enthusiasm, excitement, friendliness, optimism and other emotions. For instance, when Kols introduce products, they are full of enthusiasm, expressing their love and approval for the products with exaggerated tones and rich expressions. This can quickly capture consumers' attention and stimulate their interest in purchasing. Just like some beauty Kols, when recommending new lipsticks, they will excitedly show the effect after applying them and constantly emphasize the advantages of the lipsticks, making consumers feel their sincere love for the products.

Negative emotional expressions are relatively rare, but they should not be ignored either. They mainly include emotions such as disappointment, anger and anxiety. For instance, when Kols encounter product quality issues or have poor communication with merchants, they might show disappointment or anger during the live stream. Although this expression might be true, if not handled properly, it could affect consumers' trust in the product and the merchant. For instance, a certain KOL flew into a rage during a live stream because the sample they

received did not match the promotion. Although they expressed their dissatisfaction, it also raised consumers' doubts about the quality of the product.

### **3.2 Characteristics of Emotional Expression**

#### **3.2.1 Real-time performance**

The emotional expression in KOL live streaming has the characteristic of real-time nature. Emotions will constantly change along with the progress of the live stream and the interaction with consumers. Kols need to adjust their emotional state in a timely manner according to the situation at the live streaming site in order to better communicate and interact with consumers. For instance, when consumers ask interesting questions or give positive feedback, Kols will immediately show excitement and gratitude. When encountering technical glitches or negative comments, Kols need to quickly adjust their emotions, remain calm and professional.

#### **3.2.2 Intuitiveness**

Through live-streaming videos, consumers can directly observe the emotional expressions of Kols, including facial expressions, body language and tone of voice, etc. This intuitiveness makes emotional expression more genuine and vivid, and can more strongly touch consumers. For instance, a smile from a KOL, a gesture of giving a thumbs-up or an excited tone can all enable consumers to sense their genuine emotions, thus making it easier for them to resonate.

#### **3.2.3 Interactivity**

The emotional expression in Kols' live streams is closely related to consumer interaction. The emotional expression of Kols can trigger emotional responses from consumers, and consumers' feedback will further influence the emotional expression of Kols. This interactivity forms a cycle of emotional communication, continuously deepening the emotional connection between Kols and consumers. For instance, when a KOL expresses their fondness for a certain product, consumers might express their agreement or raise questions in the comment section. The KOL can then further adjust their emotional expression and product introduction based on these feedback-ups.

## **4. Analysis of the Impact Path of Emotional Expression on Consumer Trust**

### **4.1 The Impact of Emotional Expression on**

### **Consumers' Emotional Perception**

#### **4.1.1 Positive emotional expression triggers positive emotional perception**

The positive emotional expressions of Kols can trigger positive emotional perceptions in consumers, such as pleasure, excitement and trust. When Kols introduce products with enthusiasm, consumers will be influenced by this emotion, feel happy and thus be more willing to pay attention to product information. For instance, when a food KOL shows great enjoyment and satisfaction while tasting food during a live stream, consumers will unconsciously feel this pleasure and develop an interest in the food. At the same time, positive emotional expression can also enhance consumers' trust, making them feel that Kols are sincerely recommending products rather than seeking personal gain.

#### **4.1.2 Negative emotional expression triggers negative emotional perception**

On the contrary, negative emotional expressions can trigger consumers' negative emotional perceptions, such as disappointment, doubt and unease. If Kols show dissatisfaction with products or merchants during live streams, consumers will doubt the quality of the products and the reputation of the merchants, thereby reducing their trust in the Kols. For instance, if a KOL of electronic products complains during a live stream that a certain mobile phone has quality issues, consumers may become disappointed with the phone and even doubt the reliability of the KOL's recommendation.

## **4.2 The Impact of Consumers' Emotional Perception on Their Cognitive Judgment**

#### **4.2.1 Positive emotional perception promotes positive cognitive judgment**

Positive emotional perception will enable consumers to have positive cognitive judgments about Kols, products and merchants. When consumers feel happy and trusted, they will think that Kols have professional knowledge and a good reputation, products are of high quality and practical, and merchants provide excellent services. For instance, after consumers experience the enthusiasm and professionalism of Kols, they are more willing to believe their evaluations of the products and think that the products indeed have the advertised effects.

#### **4.2.2 Negative emotional perception leads to negative cognitive judgment**

Negative emotional perception will lead

consumers to have negative cognitive judgments about Kols, products and merchants. Consumers may think that Kols are unprofessional or unreliable, that the product quality is problematic, and that the merchant's service is poor. For instance, when consumers resonate with the negative emotional expressions of Kols, they might think that the KOL is merely recommending products for the sake of making money, and thus become skeptical of other products they recommend as well.

#### **4.3 The Ultimate Impact of Consumer Cognitive Judgment on Consumer Trust**

Consumers' perception and judgment of Kols, products and merchants will directly affect their trust in Kols. If consumers believe that Kols are professional and reliable, the product quality is guaranteed, and the merchant's service is excellent, they will be more willing to trust the KOL and purchase the products they recommend. Conversely, if the cognitive judgment is negative, consumers will reduce their trust in Kols and may even stop following their live streams. For instance, after consumers purchase products recommended by Kols multiple times and find that the quality of the products meets their expectations, they will gradually build trust in that KOL. However, if the products they purchase frequently have problems, they will lose trust in the KOL.

### **5. Theoretical Expansion of the Impact of KOL Live-Streaming Emotional Expression on Consumer Trust from the Perspective of Social Exchange Theory**

#### **5.1 Overview of Social Exchange Theory**

Social exchange theory holds that the interaction among individuals is an exchange process based on cost-benefit analysis. In this kind of exchange, people expect to obtain the greatest benefit at the lowest cost and will adjust their behavior according to the feedback during the exchange process. In the context of live-streaming e-commerce, there exists an implicit social exchange relationship between Kols and consumers. Kols hope to gain consumers' attention, trust and purchasing behavior by providing product information, emotional companionship and other content. Consumers, on the other hand, invest their time and attention, expecting to receive valuable product recommendations and emotional experiences

from Kols.

#### **5.2 The Role of Emotional Expression in Social Exchange**

The emotional expression of Kols can be regarded as an important exchange resource. Positive emotional expressions, such as enthusiasm and excitement, can bring consumers a pleasant emotional experience, which is similar to an emotional "gain". After experiencing such positive emotions, consumers will be more willing to invest more time and attention in live streaming and develop a favorable impression of Kols. For instance, a fashion KOL enthusiastically introduces new clothing styles during a live stream, showcases various matching methods, and expresses their unique insights and passion for fashion. Such positive emotional expression makes consumers feel that they have obtained valuable fashion information and emotional enjoyment from the live stream, thus making them more willing to exchange with the KOL.

Although negative emotional expression is usually regarded as detrimental, in some cases, it can also serve as an exchange resource. When Kols truly express their disappointment or anger over product issues, consumers may consider the Kols honest and responsible. Such genuine emotional expressions can enhance consumers' trust in the Kols. For instance, a certain beauty KOL discovered during a live stream that the quality of a new product did not match the promotion. She expressed her disappointment and dissatisfaction on the spot and promised to communicate with the merchant to solve the problem. The authenticity of this negative emotional expression made consumers feel that the KOL was considering the issue from the consumers' perspective, thereby increasing their trust in the KOL.

Emotional expression can also affect consumers' perception of exchange costs. Positive emotional expression can reduce consumers' perception of the cost of time and attention investment. When consumers watch live streams in a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere and feel the enthusiasm and friendliness of Kols, they will find it a pleasure rather than a burden to spend time following the live streams. On the contrary, negative emotional expression may increase consumers' perception of exchange costs. If Kols frequently express negative emotions such as anxiety and anger during live streams, consumers may feel that



watching the live stream is an unpleasant experience and thus think that investing time and attention is not worth it.

### 5.3 The Crucial Position of Trust in Social Exchange

In the theory of social exchange, trust is an important factor in maintaining the stability and sustainable development of exchange relations. In the context of KOL live streaming, consumers are willing to exchange with Kols only if they trust that Kols can provide genuine and accurate product information as well as valuable emotional experiences. The emotional expression of Kols is an important means to build and maintain consumer trust. Through positive emotional expression, Kols can convey sincere and friendly signals, making consumers feel respected and cared for, thereby enhancing their trust in Kols. At the same time, genuine expressions of negative emotions can also demonstrate the honesty and sense of responsibility of Kols, further consolidating consumer trust.

### 6. Conclusion

This study delves deeply into the influence mechanism of emotional expression in Kols' live streaming on Consumer Trust. Research has found that the emotional expression in Kols' live streaming has characteristics such as real-time nature, intuitiveness and interactivity, and can be divided into two types: positive emotional expression and negative emotional expression. Positive emotional expression can trigger consumers' positive emotional perception, promote positive cognitive judgment, and ultimately build Consumer Trust. Negative emotional expression, however, will have the opposite effect. The importance of positive emotional expression in building Consumer Trust was further verified through case analysis. KOLs should focus on positive emotional expression during live streaming, create a good live streaming atmosphere, and establish an emotional connection with consumers. It is necessary to adjust the emotional expression strategy in a timely manner based on the situation at the live broadcast site and the feedback from consumers, maintaining the authenticity and moderation of emotions. Businesses should choose Kols with positive emotional expression abilities and good reputations for cooperation to enhance the

effectiveness of live-streaming marketing. Kols and merchants should pay attention to consumers' emotional perception and cognitive judgment, constantly optimize products and services, and enhance Consumer Trust.

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