

Formation, Regulation, and Repair: A Dynamic Consumer Trust Mechanism in Live-Streaming E-Commerce

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Abstract. With the growth of platform and live streaming technologies, e-commerce live streaming has become a key form of consumption and communication in the digital economy. By improving information visibility and interactivity, it reduces consumers' search costs, enhances decision-making efficiency, and fosters trust through bidirectional interaction. However, trust in this context is not spontaneous—it is co-constructed by multiple agents and shaped by ongoing processes rather than existing as a static outcome. This study explores how consumer trust is dynamically constructed in e-commerce live streaming from the perspectives of streamers, products, and platforms. Using a grounded theory approach, we conducted in-depth interviews with 22 users who had experience with live streaming shopping and had established trust in this transaction mode. Based on interview data, we developed a theoretical model of consumer trust mechanisms and analyzed how the three dimensions jointly influence trust orientation and subsequent purchasing behavior. Findings indicate that consumer trust is synergistically shaped by multiple factors and evolves through micro-processes of trust building, modulation, and repair. This research contributes to the understanding of dynamic trust in live streaming contexts and offers practical insights for improving user experience and supporting the sustainable development of the e-commerce ecosystem.

Keywords: The Grounded Theory; Live-streaming E-commerce; Construction of Trust Mechanisms; Consumer Behavior; Platform Economy.

1. Introduction

With the rapid expansion of live-streaming e-commerce platforms, the number of streamers has increased significantly, and selling styles have become increasingly diversified. Meanwhile, the variety of products available in live-streaming scenarios continues to expand. According to the Report on the High-Quality Development of Live-Streaming E-commerce (2024), the market size of live-streaming e-commerce reached approximately RMB 5.8 trillion in 2024, accounting for more than one-third of the total online retail sales in China [1]. Live-streaming e-commerce has become not only an important driver of platform-based economic growth and brand communication, but also a key channel through which consumers obtain product information and make purchase decisions.

However, despite providing consumers with more choices and greater opportunities for comparison, live-streaming e-commerce also involves potential risks. In particular, under conditions of information asymmetry and uncertainty, consumers tend to rely on trusted intermediaries to reduce decision-making risks [2]. Therefore, the establishment of trust between consumers, streamers, and platforms has become a critical issue in this context.

Existing studies have widely examined consumer trust in live-streaming e-commerce based on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model. These studies suggest that factors such as streamer characteristics, product visibility, and virtual atmosphere can enhance consumer trust and further stimulate impulsive purchasing behavior [3, 4, 5]. In addition, some scholars have focused on platform strategies, arguing that scenario construction and emotional interaction in live-streaming environments can strengthen consumers' sense of social presence and spatial presence, thereby facilitating trust formation [6, 7].

Nevertheless, most existing research treats trust as a mediating variable and considers it as a relatively static factor. This study argues that trust in live-streaming e-commerce is essentially a dynamic

process. Specifically, streamers attract consumers through personal image, professionalism, and interaction; platforms enhance perceived security and value through institutional mechanisms and immersive environments; and products increase authenticity through visual presentation. At the same time, inappropriate discourse and negative public opinion may weaken trust and trigger consumer skepticism. Therefore, trust is continuously shaped through consumers' evaluations of streamers, products, and platforms across different contexts.

Based on this, this study focuses on the process of trust formation under multiple influencing factors. Using qualitative research methods and textual analysis of live-streaming discourse and consumer perceptions, this paper aims to clarify the relationships among streamer attributes, product value, platform scenarios, and trust orientation. Furthermore, it seeks to explore the formation mechanism of consumer trust in live-streaming e-commerce and its impact on consumers' emotion, cognition, and behavior.

2. Theoretical Background and Literature Review

2.1. Trust Theory and Mechanism

The concept of trust was first systematically examined in sociology. In the early twentieth century, Simmel argued that social life is fundamentally based on trust, which serves as one of the most important integrative forces in society [8]. Since then, trust has become a key topic across multiple disciplines.

From a psychological perspective, trust is regarded as an individual's subjective tendency or disposition. Deutsch suggested that external environments provide stimuli, while individuals decide whether to trust based on their subjective attitudes [9]. Rotter further pointed out that trust propensity is closely related to personality traits and cognitive levels [10]. From an economic perspective, trust is conceptualized as a form of social capital. Arrow emphasized that trust acts as a "lubricant" for economic exchange, enabling stable transactions, reducing risks, and improving efficiency [11].

In terms of trust models, existing studies mainly adopt an empirical approach. Mayer et al. proposed a widely used model of trustworthiness, suggesting that trust is influenced by both the trustor's propensity and the trustee's attributes [12]. This model provides a useful framework for analyzing how streamer characteristics affect consumer trust in live-streaming e-commerce. In addition, Pelsmaekers et al. highlighted the dynamic nature of trust, arguing that trust can be constructed, adjusted, and reconfigured over time [13]. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding streamer-audience interactions. Furthermore, Fuoli et al. proposed a trust repair framework based on crisis communication, suggesting that trust can be restored by reducing negative factors and reinforcing positive images [14]. This provides practical implications for trust reconstruction in live-streaming contexts.

2.2. Live-streaming E-commerce and Trust Construction

2.2.1. Antecedents of Trust

Understanding how consumer trust is formed is essential for optimizing platform strategies. Existing studies mainly focus on key elements of the live-streaming system, including streamers, products, and platforms.

At the streamer level, prior research shows that professionalism, personal charisma, and interaction styles significantly influence trust judgments. For example, Wang et al. found that streamers construct a positive image through linguistic strategies such as personalized address and commitment expressions, thereby enhancing emotional connection and trust [15]. Yan further suggested that high-quality content and sincere interaction strengthen emotional engagement and facilitate trust formation [2].

At the product level, due to the nature of online transactions, consumers cannot physically interact with products. Live-streaming compensates for this limitation by providing detailed demonstrations and explanations, thereby reducing the “lack of tactile experience” [16]. In addition, user-generated comments in live chats provide supplementary references [17]. Product visibility and perceived authenticity positively influence consumers’ value perception and enhance transaction credibility [4].

At the platform level, institutional mechanisms, technological support, and regulatory systems play a foundational role in trust construction. Zhou et al. introduced the concept of “scenario,” arguing that immersive environments enhance user identification [6]. Pan further noted that a harmonious platform atmosphere strengthens social presence and encourages trust in sellers [18].

2.2.2. Effects of Trust

Once trust is established, it significantly influences consumer psychology and behavior. Filho et al. found a positive relationship between trust perception and positive emotional states, which increases the likelihood of impulsive consumption [19]. Yan also suggested that trust shortens the decision-making process, enhances purchase intention even when product knowledge is limited, and improves repurchase rates [2].

2.2.3. Trust as a Mediating Mechanism

Building on the above, many studies conceptualize trust as a mediating variable linking stimuli, perception, and behavior. Specifically, streamer characteristics and product presentation, as well as consumers’ perceptions of security, value, and flow experience, influence trust, which in turn affects purchasing behavior [3, 5].

2.2.4. Dynamic Mechanism of Trust

Recent studies have moved beyond static perspectives and emphasized the dynamic nature of trust. Li proposed a sequential process of trust development, including predictive trust, initial trust, and deepened trust [20]. Yan further categorized this process into three stages: formation, maintenance, and repair, providing a more comprehensive understanding of trust evolution in live-streaming contexts [2].

2.2.5. Risks of Trust

Although research on trust risks in e-commerce remains limited, some studies have addressed the fragility of trust. Li pointed out that unmet expectations and negative word-of-mouth may damage trust [20]. Li and Ling argued that excessive mediation of trust in the live-streaming industry may lead to moral blindness and ambiguous responsibility [21].

2.3. Research Gaps and Contributions

Although existing studies have examined trust from multiple perspectives, several limitations remain. First, most studies adopt a linear framework (e.g., streamer/product/platform → trust → behavior), while overlooking the dynamic adjustments of trust across multiple actors and contexts.

Second, although some studies recognize the dynamic nature of trust, they mainly focus on stage classification and lack detailed analysis of how trust is continuously constructed, negotiated, and modified in real interactions.

Third, current research is dominated by the SOR model and quantitative methods, emphasizing causal relationships between variables, while lacking micro-level analysis based on empirical materials and discourse practices.

To address these gaps, this study adopts a qualitative approach based on grounded theory and analyzes live-streaming discourse and consumer experiences. It aims to construct a process model of consumer trust, focusing on how consumers evaluate and integrate trust across streamers, products, and platforms, and how these evaluations shape emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses.

This study makes two main contributions. First, it extends the object of trust from individual elements to the overall live-streaming system, providing a new perspective for understanding trust adjustment across multiple actors. Second, it shifts from a variable-based model to a mechanism-based model by offering a micro-level analysis of trust formation through discourse data.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Method

This study adopts grounded theory as the primary research method. Grounded theory is a qualitative approach that aims to develop theory from empirical data through systematic coding and constant comparison.

This research focuses on how consumer trust is generated and evolves within live-streaming e-commerce contexts. In this study, trust is not treated as a static variable but as a dynamic process that is continuously constructed, negotiated, and adjusted in specific communication settings. Therefore, grounded theory is particularly suitable, as it enables the identification of key concepts and mechanisms of trust formation based on consumers' lived experiences. Through systematic coding of interview data, this study seeks to extract core categories and construct a process-oriented model of trust.

3.2. Data Source

In-depth interviews were conducted to collect rich qualitative data on consumers' experiences and perceptions in live-streaming contexts. This method allows for a detailed examination of how consumers' trust is formed, strengthened, or weakened under the influence of streamers, products, and platforms, thereby providing a solid empirical foundation for grounded theory analysis.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on the characteristics of live-streaming audiences. The selection criteria were as follows (see Table 1 for participant information):

- (1) Individuals with experience in watching and purchasing through live-streaming e-commerce platforms;
- (2) Individuals who have experienced clear instances of trust or distrust, such as completing a purchase due to trust or abandoning a purchase due to broken trust;
- (3) Individuals who are able to clearly recall and articulate their perceptions and behavioral motivations during live-streaming, trust formation, and purchase decision-making processes.

Table 1. Basic Information of Interview Participants

ID	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Live-Streaming Platforms
A1	Famale	21	Bachelor	Student	Xiaohongshu, Taobao
A2	Famale	22	Bachelor	Student	Douyin
A3	Famale	22	Bachelor	Student	Douyin, Xiaohongshu
A4	Male	22	Bachelor	Student	Douyin, Taobao
A5	Famale	29	Bachelor	Finance and Accounting	Douyin, Taobao
A6	Male	30	Master	Biopharmac-euticals	Douyin
A7	Famale	26	Bachelor	Teacher	Douyin, JD.com
A8	Famale	23	Bachelor	Student	Douyin, Xiaohongshu
A9	Male	27	Master	University Counselor	Douyin
A10	Famale	23	Bachelor	Student	Douyin, Xiaohongshu
A11	Famale	26	Bachelor	Chemical Industry	Douyin, Kuaishou
A12	Famale	23	Bachelor	Student	Douyin, Xiaohongshu
A13	Famale	25	Bachelor	Administrat-ion	Douyin, Taobao
A14	Male	24	Master	Materials Engineering	Douyin
A15	Famale	24	Bachelor	Foreign Trade	Taobao, Douyin, Xiaohongshu
A16	Famale	26	Master	Teacher	Douyin, Xiaohongshu
A17	Famale	30	Master	Civil Servant	Douyin, Xiaohongshu, Taobao
A18	Famale	25	Bachelor	Translator	Douyin, Xiaohongshu
A19	Famale	29	Master	Teacher	Douyin, Xiaohongshu
A20	Famale	33	Master	Finance	Douyin, Xiaohongshu, Kuaishou
A21	Famale	22	Bachelor	Student	Douyin
A22	Famale	28	Bachelor	Entrepreneur	Douyin

A total of 22 participants were interviewed through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and focused on participants' actual behaviors and subjective experiences in specific live-streaming contexts, in order to enhance the authenticity and richness of the data.

A semi-structured interview format was adopted, allowing participants sufficient flexibility to express their personal experiences and perceptions. Meanwhile, the researcher guided the conversation to maintain thematic consistency and used probing questions (e.g., asking participants to elaborate on specific situations, emotional responses to live-streaming atmospheres, and perceptions of streamer credibility) to encourage deeper reflection on their psychological processes and behavioral motivations. This approach enabled the collection of rich and analytically meaningful qualitative data.

With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded for transcription and data analysis. Among the 22 interview transcripts, 20 were randomly selected for three-stage coding and model construction, while the remaining two were used to test theoretical saturation.

4. Data Coding and Analysis

4.1. Open Coding

In During the open coding stage, the study adhered to the principle of objectivity and conducted a detailed line-by-line analysis of the interview transcripts. Initial labels were assigned to meaningful segments of the data through close reading and constant comparison.

To improve analytical rigor, labels with a frequency of fewer than three occurrences were excluded. Concepts with similar or identical underlying meanings were then grouped and merged through iterative comparison, leading to the formation of higher-level categories. Through this process, a total of 95 initial concepts and 54 preliminary categories were identified (see Table 2).

Table 2. Open Coding Results

Raw Statements (Initial Concepts)	Initial Categories
Sometimes I ask the streamer questions to see whether they can respond promptly (timely reply to comments); I will first watch for a few minutes to observe whether they can quickly respond to others' requests and whether they are responsive to audience questions (responsiveness to audience needs)	Immediacy
When the streamer replies to me, I feel valued (enhancing audience recognition); some streamers respond to comments during the live stream, which makes people feel reassured (demonstrating reliability); I pay close attention to the streamer's attitude when replying—if they seem impatient, I may leave immediately (attention to interaction attitude)	Effectiveness
Some streamers claim to support agriculture and even broadcast from places of origin; if the products are natural and additive-free, I can accept a slightly higher price (product traceability); some usage scenarios they describe align with my real life (constructing usage scenarios)	Added Value Attribution
Sometimes even if the product is not good, the emotional value provided by the streamer makes me feel it is worthwhile (providing emotional value); for example, Dongfang Selection introduces cultural knowledge behind products, which resonates with me (triggering cultural resonance)	Emotional Needs Fulfillment
I prefer energetic streamers because they put me in a good mood (distinctive streaming style); their way of speaking is down-to-earth—they eat while streaming and explain things sincerely, without exaggeration (appealing linguistic style)	Personal Style
A streamer once built an image of being independent and strong, but later appeared contradictory, which caused my trust to collapse (consistency of persona); I tend to buy beauty products from female streamers who are similar to me (perceived similarity)	Personal Attributes
I think a streamer's image is very important and they should take responsibility for their words (moral image expectation); a clean and pleasant appearance makes me like them more (attractive appearance)	Image Construction
If a streamer is well-known, I assume they are less likely to sell poor-quality products (perceived social responsibility); if they have few followers and low sales, I tend not to purchase (attention to follower base)	Popularity
If a streamer frequently gives back to fans, it increases my willingness to purchase (fan feedback mechanism)	Emotional Responsiveness
If a streamer truly likes a product, their explanation will be emotionally engaging (authentic emotional expression); their description matches the product's actual features (consistency in description); they objectively present both advantages and disadvantages (objective evaluation)	Recommendation Objectivity
Some streamers offer shipping insurance, which is crucial because I can return products (after-sales assurance); if problems occur and they provide timely solutions and satisfactory compensation, I am willing to continue purchasing (crisis response attitude)	After-sales Service Quality
Sometimes it is obvious that the streamer is purely selling for profit, which creates a poor impression (strong utilitarian motive)	Explicit Sales Motivation
Their knowledge of the product is very important—they should understand it thoroughly (product knowledge mastery); demonstrations in the live stream convince me of the product's functionality (functional demonstration)	Product Explanation Depth
If the streamer produces the product themselves and focuses on a specific category, I perceive them as more professional (domain authority)	Vertical Specialization
They can highlight aspects of the product category that resonate with my needs (understanding user needs)	Consumer Insight
If their product selection leads to a good experience, I perceive them as trustworthy (reducing psychological defensiveness)	Product Selection Quality
I am cautious with skincare and food products (product safety concern); I prefer well-known brands (brand preference).	Product Attribute Differentiation

Continuation Table 2. Open Coding Results

Collaborations make me want to buy (co-branded product appeal).	Scarcity Creation
Unique features make me willing to try (curiosity triggered by uniqueness).	Highlighting Selling Points
Factory-direct shipping makes me believe the price is cost-effective (pursuit of cost-effectiveness)	Price Consideration
I evaluate whether the product meets my needs (functional fit judgment).	Functional Fit Evaluation
If product quality is good, I can tolerate minor issues (quality determines perception)	Product Quality Priority
I check sales volume (sales data review); others' negative experiences are informative (evaluation of user feedback).	Purchase Data Evaluation
Brand reputation assures me of quality (brand guarantee); well-known brands like Shiseido encourage me to try (brand-driven purchase)	Brand Effect
Products shipped directly from origin seem more trustworthy (traceability of source); testing reports increase credibility (third-party endorsement); I verify whether the product comes from official stores (verification of seller identity)	Product Source Identification
When buying clothes, I first check whether the streamer is live before purchasing (enhancing repurchase probability); if the streamer secures good deals, I perceive them as capable (enhancing favorability toward streamer)	Accumulation of Consumer Trust
If the product meets expectations, I increase my trust in the streamer (post-purchase evaluation)	Expectation Management
Platform recommendations often match my needs and feel natural (reduced perception of advertising intent)	Usage Experience Optimization
I rely on algorithmic recommendations rather than searching myself (algorithm-driven exposure)	User Data Utilization
The platform must ensure product authenticity (guarantee of authenticity); I trust platforms like Douyin more than low-price platforms due to quality assurance (quality assurance provision)	Product Information Verification
If the platform environment deteriorates, I may stop purchasing (content governance)	Platform Governance
After platforms such as Douyin and Kuaishou intervene, consumers' rights can be fully protected (timely intervention in disputes); the platform acts as a safety net (consumer-oriented protection); shipping insurance is truly a great invention (well-developed after-sales mechanism)	Protection of User Rights
I use Douyin quite frequently, and it feels familiar and convenient (usage habit)	Platform Affordances
Its transaction system is sufficiently mature (well-established transaction system); a relatively clean and well-organized live-stream interface improves user experience (user-friendly interface design)	Live-streaming Industry Infrastructure
Douyin also offers "lucky bags," allowing me to participate in draws while watching, and the high winning probability makes me feel lucky on the platform (incentive mechanism)	Platform Identification Enhancement
Douyin sometimes distributes coupons, which are cost-effective, so I am more likely to purchase during live streams (multi-benefit incentives)	Consumption Stimulation
Positive comments in the chat section can stimulate my purchase intention (positive fan feedback); comments that appear authentic make me believe real users are purchasing rather than fake reviews (perceived audience authenticity); a clean and well-organized live-stream environment gives a professional impression (spatial environment construction); when the streamer says a promotion ends today, I feel an urge to purchase (on-site emotional arousal)	Atmosphere Construction
If the after-sales service is unsatisfactory, I will feel uncomfortable when encountering the same seller again (continuity of negative perception); once there are genuine skeptical voices, my trust in the streamer will decrease (influence of discourse on trust)	Opinion Climate
Compared to completely unfamiliar streamers, those I have prior exposure to give me a natural sense of familiarity and closeness, making me more willing to support them (pre-established familiarity)	External Image Perception

Continuation Table 2. Open Coding Results

I find recommendations from friends relatively trustworthy (priority of interpersonal recommendations)	Social Trust
By observing a streamer's daily posts, I can roughly understand their personality (perception through daily content); I also actively verify whether the streamer has constructed a false persona (background verification of streamer)	Non-live Content Exposure
Public controversies surrounding a streamer influence my trust (awareness of public opinion); I may also spend time learning product-related knowledge beforehand (acquisition of product knowledge)	Pre-existing Knowledge Construction
I analyze what aspects negative reviews focus on and evaluate whether I can accept them (deconstruction of negative reviews); negative reviews help me identify the lower bound of product quality (priority trust in negative feedback); I actively search external platforms such as Xiaohongshu or Weibo to check others' evaluations (external platform evaluation search)	Dependence on User Reviews
This is a matter of consumption habit, as it represents stability and consistent product quality (fixed purchasing preference)	Risk Avoidance Psychology
After trying some of their products, I develop an intention to try other products (willingness to try new products); I tend to trust products recommended by Douyin and thus give new streamers a chance (platform-to-streamer trust extension); I am willing to purchase unfamiliar products recommended by trusted streamers (streamer-to-product trust transfer); as a loyal user, I will follow the streamer if they switch platforms (streamer-to-platform trust transfer)	Trust Transfer
Once trust is established, I will wait for their next live stream (increased fan loyalty); my purchase decisions become less cautious (reduced decision caution); I may proactively subscribe to their live streams (enhanced engagement with streamer); I prefer buying from familiar streamers because it feels more reassuring (derived sense of security)	Trust Accumulation
I tend to stick with certain sellers to avoid risks (control of trial-and-error cost); once I trust them, I will purchase directly if suitable products appear (shortened decision-making time); even at a higher price, I still prefer familiar streamers (streamer dependency)	Changes in Purchase Decisions
If a streamer is involved in a scandal, it will affect my evaluation, and I may lose trust from a moral perspective (handling of negative events); I will also classify the nature of the controversy (classification of public opinion)	Rational Evaluation of Controversy
For sellers I frequently purchase from, I have higher tolerance and acceptance (increased tolerance due to trust)	Self-maintenance of Relationship
My viewing frequency increases (increased viewing frequency); when I encounter their live stream, I am more likely to stay and watch (enhanced viewing intention); watching live streams has become a way to relax (entertainment and leisure function)	Lifestyle Reshaping
Live-stream shopping is more engaging (shopping enjoyment); it provides better audiovisual experiences (immersive audiovisual experience); I can directly observe the overall effect of the product (visualized browsing)	Transformation of Shopping Mode
I remain cautious toward unfamiliar products or streamers (cautious evaluation, vigilance toward unfamiliarity)	Risk Perception
Live-stream content may not be fully truthful (media virtuality)	Perceived Falsity
Past negative experiences reduce initial trust (experience spillover); over time, I may become dependent on live shopping (habit formation)	Experiential Perception

4.2. Axial Coding

During the axial coding stage, the relationships among the initial categories were systematically examined. By comparing and clustering categories with similar properties and dimensions, the study identified 23 subcategories with higher levels of abstraction, and their conceptual meanings were further clarified.

On this basis, the logical connections among subcategories were explored through continuous comparison and iterative analysis. By examining the conditions, interactions, and underlying structures linking these subcategories, they were further integrated into broader conceptual groupings. As a result, six core categories were developed (see Table 3), providing a more structured understanding of the relationships within the data.

Table 3. Axial Coding Results

Core Category	Subcategory	Definition	Initial Categories
Streamer Attributes Composition	Attractiveness	The overall perceived appeal formed by consumers based on the streamer's style, personal traits, and external image, which influences viewing interest and initial favorability.	Personal Style
			Personal Attributes
			Image Construction
			Popularity
	Sincerity	Consumers' overall judgment of whether the streamer's expressions are authentic, motivations are trustworthy, and whether they act responsibly toward consumers.	Emotional Responsiveness
			Recommendation Objectivity
			After-sales Service Quality
			Explicit Sales Motivation
	Professionalism	The level of expertise demonstrated by the streamer in product knowledge, product selection, and matching products with consumer needs.	Product Explanation Depth
			Vertical Specialization
			Consumer Insight
			Product Selection Quality
	Interactivity	The sense of participation and responsiveness that streamers provide to audiences during live streaming.	Immediacy
			Effectiveness
	Value Provision	The functional and emotional value that streamers provide to consumers through content and interaction.	Added Value Attribution
			Emotional Needs Fulfillment
Product Evaluation System	Authenticity	Consumers' judgment of whether product information is reliable and truthful, including data, brand, and source credibility.	Purchase Data Evaluation
			Brand Effect
			Product Source Identification
	Safety	Consumers' perception of risk controllability and quality assurance during product usage.	Product Attribute Differentiation
	Practicality	The extent to which products meet consumer needs in terms of functionality, price rationality, and usability.	Price Consideration
			Functional Fit Evaluation
			Product Quality Priority
	Uniqueness	The differentiated appeal of products in terms of attributes, selling points, or scarcity.	Scarcity Creation
			Highlighting Selling Points
	Satisfaction	Consumers' overall evaluation of products and consumption outcomes based on expectations and actual experience.	Accumulation of Consumer Trust
			Expectation Management

Continuation Table 3. Axial Coding Results

Platform Institutional Assurance System	Consumer Protection	Institutional support provided by platforms in safeguarding user rights, handling disputes, and improving after-sales services.	Protection of User Rights
	System Regulation	Mechanisms through which platforms regulate products and content to ensure a standardized transaction environment.	Product Information Verification
			Platform Governance
	Algorithm Mechanism	Technical mechanisms through which platforms influence content distribution and user experience via data analysis and recommendation systems.	Usage Experience Optimization
			User Data Utilization
	Promotional Incentives	Strategies through which platforms enhance consumption willingness via discounts and incentive mechanisms.	Platform Identification Enhancement
	Industry Development Level	The overall maturity of the platform in terms of functional design and transaction mechanisms.	Consumption Stimulation
			Platform Affordances
Social Contextual Cues	Atmosphere Perception	Consumers' perceived experience of interaction climate, emotional tone, and overall environment in the live streaming room.	Live Streaming Industry Infrastructure
			Atmosphere Construction
	Identity Perception	Trust judgments formed based on the streamer's social image and social network relations.	Opinion Climate
			External Image Perception
	Information Perception	The process through which consumers obtain and integrate information about products and streamers from both within and outside the live streaming context.	Social Trust
			Non-live Content Exposure
Consumer Trust Transformation	Internal Adjustment	The psychological process through which consumers regulate risk perception, experience, and emotions during trust formation.	Pre-existing Knowledge Construction
			Dependence on User Reviews
			Risk Avoidance Psychology
	Behavioral Manifestation	Observable behavioral responses and decision-making changes driven by trust.	Trust Transfer
			Trust Accumulation
			Changes in Purchase Decisions
			Rational Evaluation of Controversy
Live Streaming Media Cognition	Media Attribute Cognition	Consumers' overall perception of live streaming as a media form in terms of experiential and informational characteristics.	Self-maintenance of Relationship
			Lifestyle Reshaping
			Shopping Enjoyment
	Risk Perception	Consumers' subjective judgment of uncertainty and potential information distortion in live streaming shopping.	Multisensory Experience
			Visual Intuitiveness
	Experiential Foundation	The accumulated experience and cognitive foundation formed through prior live streaming consumption.	Risk Perception
			Perceived Falsity
			Experiential Perception

4.3. Selective Coding

Based on the six main categories identified in the axial coding stage, this study further examined the relationships and interactions among categories and continuously compared them with the original data. Through this process, a core category was identified as the dynamic trust evolution mechanism of consumers in live-streaming e-commerce.

A theoretical storyline was developed to explain this mechanism. In live-streaming contexts, consumer trust is not static but evolves through a dynamic process of formation, regulation, and repair. Initially, consumers establish a baseline level of trust based on information obtained from social networks and their own preferences, forming preliminary judgments toward streamers, products, and platforms.

As positive consumption experiences accumulate, consumers gradually develop a stable sense of trust at the psychological level, which is reflected behaviorally in higher repurchase rates and proactive efforts to maintain trust relationships. During the regulation stage, trust in streamers, products, and platforms is interrelated and dynamically adjusted. In addition, consumers' prior experiences in live-streaming significantly shape their trust evaluations and overall perceptions of the system.

In the repair stage, when trust crises occur, consumers engage in attribution and evaluation processes, while appropriate responses and remedial actions from streamers or platforms can facilitate trust recovery. In some cases, successful repair may even strengthen consumer attachment, thereby initiating a new cycle of trust development.

4.4. Theoretical Saturation Test

The remaining two interview transcripts were coded following the same analytical procedures. Through repeated comparison, no new concepts or categories emerged. Therefore, it is concluded that the category system is sufficiently comprehensive, and the relationships among categories are stable, indicating that theoretical saturation has been achieved.

5. Mechanism Explanation of the Model

Based on the above storyline, a theoretical model was constructed (see Figure 1) to illustrate the relationships and interactions among categories. The model demonstrates the dynamic and evolving nature of consumer trust in live-streaming e-commerce contexts.

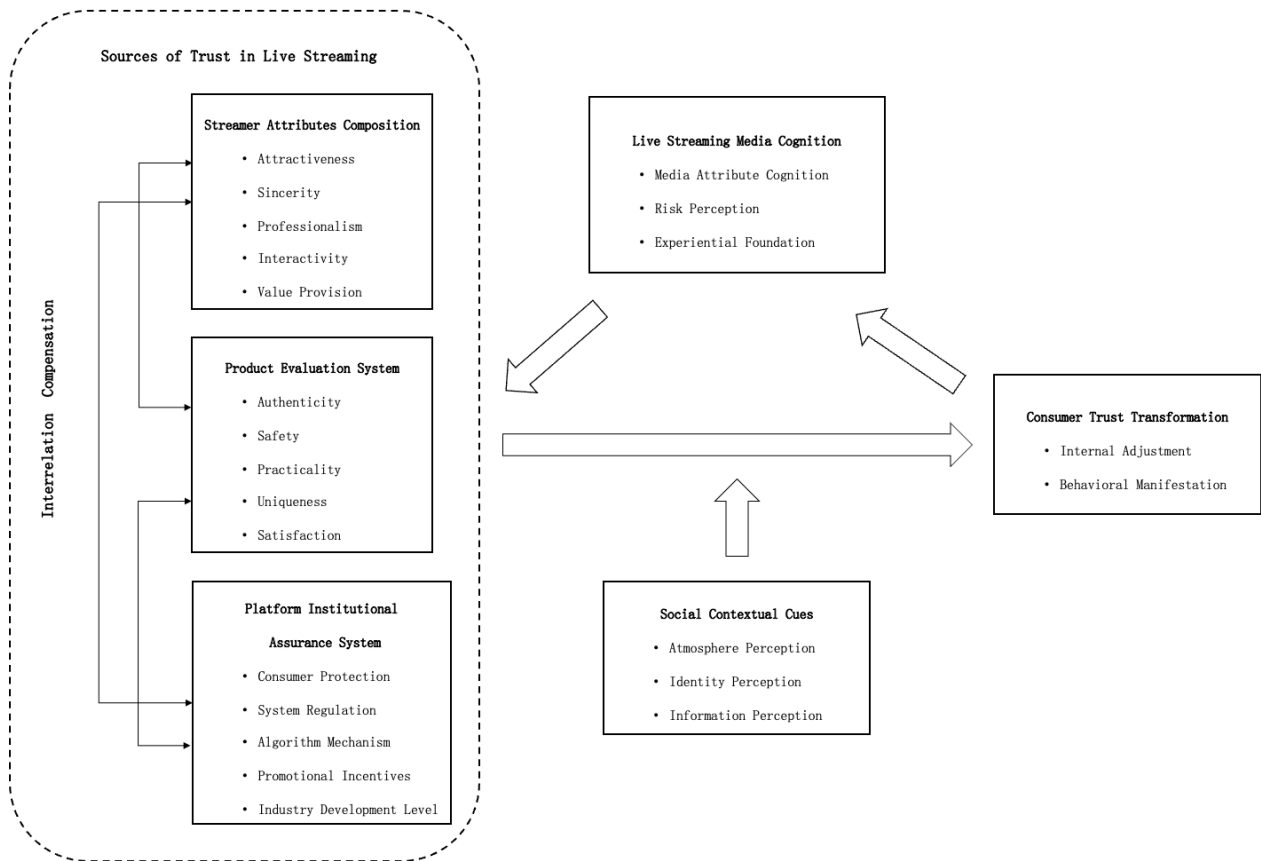


Figure 1. Dynamic Consumer Trust Mechanism Model in Live Streaming E-commerce

5.1. Internal Linkages of Trust Sources and Trust Transformation

Streamers, products, and platforms function as primary sources of trust in consumers' live-streaming experiences. While each serves as an independent basis for trust formation, they are also interconnected and jointly constitute a trust network. Differences in their performance within live-streaming contexts prompt consumers to make purchasing decisions through processes of trust transfer and integration.

Importantly, consumers' subjective perceptions play a decisive role in this process. Therefore, the interactions among streamers, products, and platforms should be understood in relation to consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses.

At the psychological level, trust transfer between streamers and products is particularly evident. Trust in streamers often translates into reduced skepticism toward the products they recommend. For example, participants indicated that a streamer's perceived authenticity and down-to-earth persona can lead them to assume that the products being promoted are equally reliable. Long-term trust relationships and recognition of a streamer's product selection ability further reduce consumers' defensive attitudes and increase their willingness to try unfamiliar products. Conversely, familiarity with certain products can also enhance trust in previously unknown streamers, contributing to perceptions of professionalism.

The relationship between streamers and platforms is characterized by mutual compensation of trust. Consumers who trust a specific streamer may be more willing to try unfamiliar platforms recommended by that streamer. At the same time, positive perceptions of a platform can enhance trust in its streamers, as institutional credibility and accumulated user experience are transferred to individual actors.

The relationship between products and platforms is more direct. Platform governance mechanisms, such as quality control and regulation, reduce consumers' uncertainty regarding product reliability.

As a result, once a platform is perceived as trustworthy, consumers are less likely to question the products offered within it.

At the behavioral level, established trust increases the likelihood of repurchase and improves decision-making efficiency. Consumers tend to make quicker purchasing decisions when interacting with familiar and trusted entities. In addition, even when negative public opinion arises, consumers often exhibit complex attitudes—rationally monitoring information while emotionally maintaining their trust relationships. This indicates that trust not only stabilizes transactional relationships but also enhances consumer loyalty. Furthermore, live-streaming provides emotional value beyond transactional functions, as consumers increasingly perceive it as a form of leisure and social engagement.

5.2. The Mediating Role of Social Environmental Cues

In addition to core elements of the live-streaming system, consumer trust is shaped by both internal and external environmental cues. These include streamer identity, social networks, and the live-streaming atmosphere. While some of these factors are objectively present (e.g., audience size, comments, and public evaluations), their impact depends on consumers' subjective perception.

In terms of identity perception, consumers' prior familiarity with streamers often originates from external social media interactions. Pre-existing exposure creates a sense of familiarity and emotional closeness, which enhances trust when consumers encounter the streamer in live-streaming contexts. Similarly, recommendations from friends or social networks serve as important reference points, reducing skepticism even in incidental encounters.

In terms of information perception, consumers often seek additional information from third-party platforms when encountering unfamiliar streamers or products. This behavior reflects an effort to reduce uncertainty and regain control over trust evaluation by accessing more comprehensive and less filtered information.

In terms of atmosphere perception, the visual and interactive environment of the live-streaming room plays a crucial role. A well-organized interface, positive audience interaction, and an engaging atmosphere enable consumers to quickly assess the credibility of the streamer and the overall quality of the live-streaming environment, thereby facilitating initial trust formation.

5.3. The Impact of Trust Transformation on Media Perception

Through repeated participation in live-streaming activities, consumers gradually develop perceptions of the medium itself. Many participants emphasized that live-streaming provides a richer sensory experience compared to traditional online shopping, integrating visual and auditory elements that enhance engagement and understanding of products.

At the same time, consumers' perception of risk evolves. Positive consumption experiences strengthen trust in specific streamers or platforms and extend to the overall live-streaming model. However, this does not eliminate rational judgment. Even with established trust, consumers remain aware of potential risks such as information asymmetry and continue to balance trust with caution when encountering new products or unfamiliar streamers.

5.4. The Feedback Effect of Media Perception on Trust Sources

Once consumers form a general perception of live-streaming as a medium, this perception feeds back into their evaluation of core trust sources. Consumers do not build trust from scratch in each new interaction; instead, they transfer prior experiences to new contexts.

Negative experiences, in particular, can lower the baseline level of trust in subsequent interactions, reflecting a spillover effect from individual transactions to overall media perception. This highlights the cumulative and path-dependent nature of trust in live-streaming environments.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

6.1. Research Conclusions and Implications

Based on grounded theory, this study explores the formation and evolution of consumer trust in live-streaming e-commerce from a consumer perspective. The findings indicate that trust is not static but is continuously constructed, adjusted, and reshaped through multi-actor interactions and accumulated consumption experiences. Overall, the trust mechanism follows a dynamic process of formation, regulation, and repair (see Figure 2).

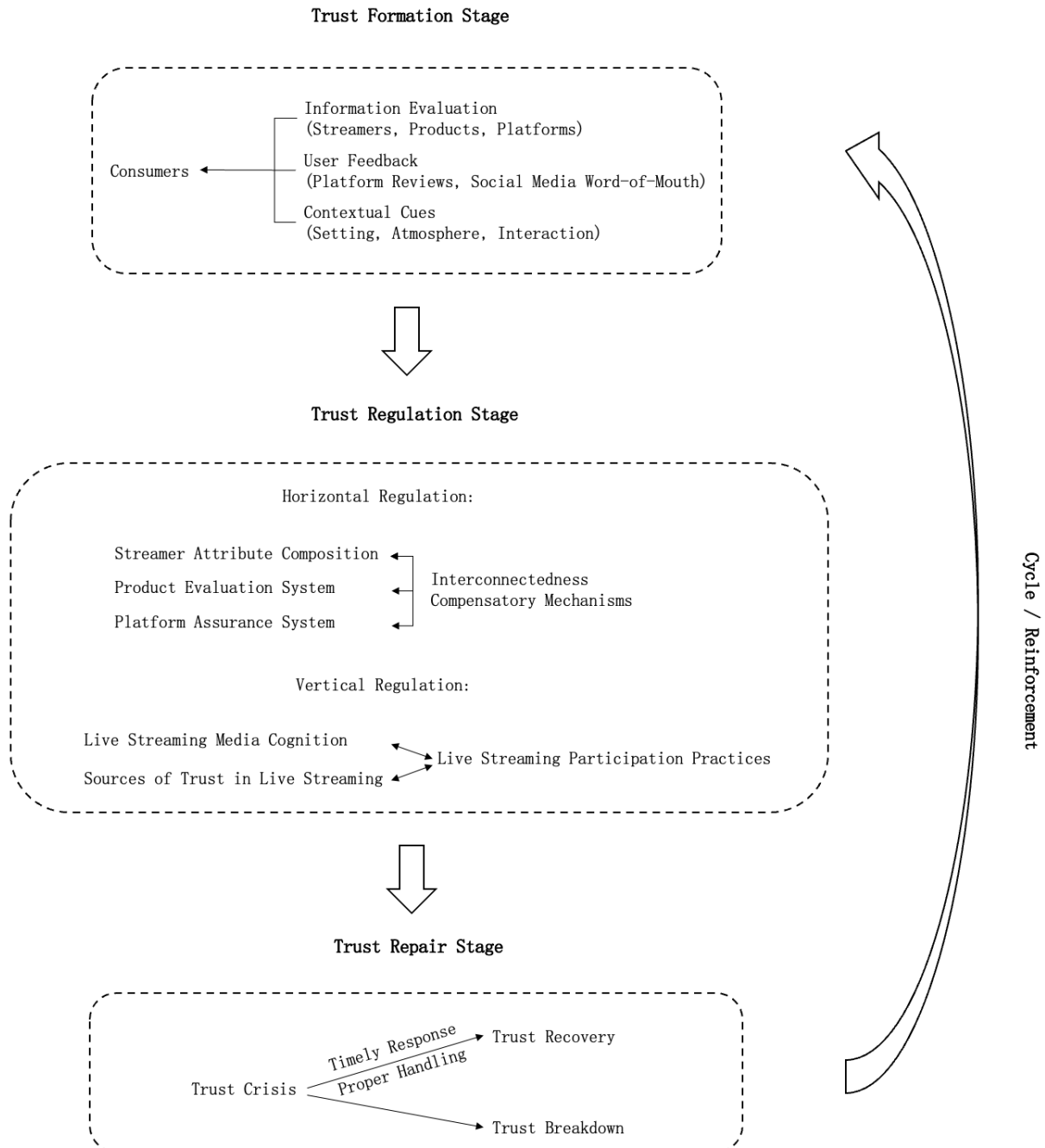


Figure 2. A Stage-Based Diagram of Trust Formation, Regulation, and Repair

In the stage of trust formation, consumers develop initial trust judgments toward live-streaming actors through multiple information sources. Product attributes, streamer evaluations, and platform institutional guarantees jointly provide the foundation for trust. Before entering a live-streaming session, consumers often acquire preliminary knowledge through user reviews, brand information, and social media discussions. During the live-streaming process, this information is further verified

through streamers' explanations, interaction styles, and presentation strategies. In addition, platform mechanisms—such as content regulation, after-sales services, and accumulated transactional credibility—offer institutional assurance, enabling consumers to form initial trust under conditions of information asymmetry. At this stage, trust can be understood as an initial structure grounded in information evaluation and expectation.

In the stage of trust regulation, consumer trust evolves dynamically through continuous viewing, interaction, and consumption experiences. This study identifies two key mechanisms: horizontal regulation and vertical regulation. Horizontal regulation refers to the compensatory and transfer relationships among different trust sources—namely, streamers, products, and platforms. Trust in one actor may be transferred to or compensate for trust in another. Conversely, negative experiences (e.g., poor product quality) may simultaneously undermine trust in both the product and the streamer, prompting consumers to reassess their evaluations.

Vertical regulation refers to the interaction between situational factors and consumers' prior experiences. On the one hand, real-time elements within the live-streaming environment shape trust perceptions toward specific actors and the overall system. On the other hand, consumers' accumulated experiences, general evaluations of live-streaming commerce, and perceptions of risk continuously influence their trust judgments in new situations. Therefore, trust is not determined by a single transaction but is dynamically adjusted within an evolving cognitive framework that balances trust and risk awareness.

In the stage of trust repair, trust relationships may be disrupted by negative consumption experiences or public controversies. The findings suggest that trust in live-streaming contexts is inherently fragile. When consumers encounter serious issues such as product defects, misleading promotion, or inappropriate streamer behavior, trust may decline sharply, leading to actions such as disengagement or switching to alternative streamers.

However, trust repair is possible. When streamers or platforms respond promptly and appropriately to crises, trust loss can be mitigated. In some cases, responsible and transparent responses may even strengthen consumers' emotional attachment, initiating a new cycle of trust development. Therefore, trust repair depends not only on the severity of the issue but also on the response strategies adopted by relevant actors.

Overall, consumer trust in live-streaming e-commerce is a dynamic, multi-actor process characterized by continuous construction, adjustment, and reconstruction. The mechanism can be summarized as follows: initial trust is established through information and institutional guarantees, dynamically regulated through horizontal and vertical mechanisms, and either repaired or disrupted under conditions of risk and controversy.

6.2. Theoretical Implications

This study conceptualizes trust as a dynamic process embedded in platform-based consumption contexts and proposes a three-stage mechanism of trust formation, regulation, and repair. By distinguishing between horizontal and vertical regulation, the study highlights the interactive tensions among different trust sources and the continuous adjustment of trust perceptions shaped by both prior experience and real-time engagement.

Through this multi-dimensional framework, the study extends existing research on consumer trust in digital platforms and provides a more nuanced understanding of how trust evolves in mediated consumption environments. It also offers a new analytical perspective for examining trust as a process rather than a static variable.

6.3. Practical Implications

The findings reveal that trust in live-streaming e-commerce is structurally fragile and highly sensitive to disruptions. As consumers actively respond to changes in trust-related cues, trust should not be treated as a stable psychological state but as a dynamic structure shaped by multiple interacting factors.

From a practical perspective, industry actors should move beyond short-term performance indicators such as sales conversion and traffic growth, and instead prioritize the long-term stability of trust structures. Platforms and streamers should establish transparent information disclosure practices and effective crisis response mechanisms, addressing public concerns in a timely manner to prevent trust breakdown.

Moreover, consumers evaluate streamers not only based on product recommendations but also on their overall persona, communication style, and value orientation. As public-facing communicators, streamers' discourse and behavior carry social meaning. Inconsistent or inappropriate expressions may be interpreted as a loss of authenticity, thereby undermining trust in their recommendations. Therefore, streamers should emphasize value consistency, ethical self-discipline, and social responsibility as part of their long-term trust-building strategies, rather than relying solely on short-term marketing tactics.

Overall, the sustainability of trust in live-streaming e-commerce depends on the coordinated efforts of streamer self-regulation, platform governance, and broader industry norms.

6.4. Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, it adopts a qualitative approach based on grounded theory, which is effective for theory building but lacks quantitative validation. Future research could develop measurement scales based on the proposed model and employ quantitative methods, such as structural equation modeling, to test the relative influence and relationships among trust dimensions.

Second, the sample primarily consists of young consumers with live-streaming shopping experience. Their media usage patterns and trust perceptions may reflect generational characteristics. Future studies could expand the sample to include more diverse demographic groups to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

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