

Stance and Construction of Persona in Live-streaming

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Abstract: Due to the advancement of technology and the development of the internet, more and more people are inclined towards online shopping. In recent years, shopping in live broadcasting rooms is very popular, through the explanation of the anchor, to attract potential customers to complete the purchase. In this process, the anchor builds up his or friendly and trustworthy persona, as well as objective and unbiased stance through a series language and behaviors, such as using address terms, fighting for customers' interest, answering questions posed by people in live-streaming and so on. And there are also different strategies for different groups based on audience design. This paper also mention the counter-examples which lead to distrust and loss of potential costumers.

1. Introduction

Live streaming e-commerce is the combination of live streaming and e-commerce, which has a strong economic empowerment. Live e-commerce, which was first launched by Taobao Live in 2016, is known as the first year of live e-commerce due to its rapid development in 2019, and it has made rapid progress in 2020, and head anchors, stars, hosts, star entrepreneurs, officials and so on have taken to the front stage to live with goods.

The third-party research institution QuestMobile has released the Annual Report on China's Internet Core Trends (2023). The report shows that in 2023, the number of monthly active users of China's mobile Internet has exceeded 1.224 billion, and the average monthly use time of the whole network is close to 160 hours. At the same time, the number of monthly active users of small programs on various platforms (WeChat, Alipay, Tiktok, Baidu) will reach 980 million after the re duplication. Under this scale effect, the prosperity of Internet application ecology continues to improve, and content is rapidly "fusing" in the form of online and offline applications, The size of the internet advertising market is expected to reach 714.61 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 7.6%. It is expected that this figure will exceed 780 billion yuan by 2024. The large scale of internet users provides a huge user base for live streaming e-commerce.

In 2020, affected by the COVID-19, the number of users and duration of online video applications will increase significantly. When offline marketing is hindered, live streaming sales have become an important force driving economic development.

Traditional e-commerce mainly displays product information through text, images, and videos, but for some products with complex parameters, it requires high cognitive abilities from consumers and is not friendly to older and less educated groups. Moreover, the traditional e-commerce information transmission method is too single, and consumers have weak immersion, making it difficult to fully visualize the display. For example, consumers cannot visually see the effect of the

upper body of the clothing.

Live streaming sales have changed the traditional e-commerce model of one-way transmission of product information through text and images, and instead showcased product attributes to consumers through highly interactive, on-site commentary, and demonstrations, with strong interactivity and entertainment. This makes live streaming sales fully meet the expectations and excitement needs of consumers.

E-commerce live streaming sales tend to be in the form of performances, which to some extent weakens consumers' attention to the actual value of the products themselves. Therefore, during the live broadcast process, the characteristics of the live-streamers themselves become an important factor affecting consumer purchases.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Study of Stance

In line with indexical theories of identity we consider stance to be the analytically primary category in studying persona as publicly presented self. The concept of "stance" was first proposed by Biber&Finegan (1988)^[2]. Since the linguistic phenomenon of stance has come into people's research field of vision, researchers have begun to adopt different research methods from different angles and seek for their own theoretical framework. There are three main perspectives of stance: Corpus linguistics perspective, Functional linguistics perspective and Sociological perspective. And the last one is our focus.

Liu(2017) said, The position research from the perspective of sociology begins to pay attention to the discourse context and social context factors in the activities of speakers and listeners, and advances from the subjective meaning of words to the interaction between subjects^[17].

Du Bois^[6] defines "stance" as 'a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means (language, gesture, and other symbolic forms), through which social actors simultaneously evaluate objects, position subjects (themselves and others), and align with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field' (Du Bois 2007:163). This definition regards position as a triangular behavior, and we can see that stance is not only regarded as a static language element or function, but as a kind of behavior constructed between the subjects of stance, which has the characteristics of dialogue and dynamics.

In domestic, Fang Mei and Le Yao (2018) conducted a systematic exploration of their stance^[12]. Liang Fengjuan(2019) reviewed and analyzed the latest development trend of position expression research at home and abroad from the definition and classification of position expression and main theoretical perspectives. Domestic research is mainly concentrated in the following aspects^[7].

A case study on the means of Chinese stance expression. First, vocabulary is one of the important means of expressing one's stance, and the research objects involve various parts of speech such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, interjections, and particles. For example, Pan Haifeng(2023) claims that modal adverbs are an important means of indicating the speaker's stance, serving as indices and markers provided by the speaker for various variables in the speech event. Second, A certain construction can express stance^[8]. For example, Zhu Jun(2014) indicates that the rhetorical format "X what X" has a negative stance expression function, which is manifested in four levels: reminder, surprise, rebuttal, and rebuke, with the latter two being the main ones, expressing the speaker's stance without considering the other person's "face" and showing their own power and status^[10].

The research on stance expression also involves cross linguistic and interdisciplinary comparisons, with a focus on second language learning. Dong jihua and Li Lixia(2014) find that Chinese students use fewer types of stance phrases than native language students, and there are

shortcomings in using complex interpersonal meanings and pragmatic functions of stance phrases.

Foreign scholars have studied “stance” from various angles and achieved remarkable results. They mainly study stance in written and academic writing, examining the use of stance in various discourse genres and apply the insights gained from the research to guide writing instruction. For example, Sawaki and Tomoko(2014) explores the function of expressing external viewpoints with stance-neutral frames in academic writing^[16]. Peacock and Matthew(2015) explore that stance adverbials play an important role in the construction of stance and classify stance into two categories: Limitation and Doubt and Certainty^[15]. Çiftçi, H. & Vázquez, C(2020) analyze oppositional stance in a single, extended interaction and shows how two interlocutors in an academic setting jointly construct oppositional stance^[18].

Although Chan, Ariel(2023) drew on the data from a Corpus of Mid-twentieth-century Hong Kong Cantonese, and explore how participants deploy two animal classifiers to express their negative stance towards another person, there are rare studies about stance in spoken language, especially related to the emerging live-streaming, so my paper mainly focus on this part^[4].

2.2 Previous Study of Live-streamers

Live-streamers play a vital role in the process of live selling goods. The characteristics of live-streamers themselves will have an impact on consumers' purchase intentions. Zhao Dawei and Feng jiaxin(2021) discuss the influence of the characteristics of e-commerce live-streamers as key opinion leaders on consumers' purchase intention to attract more consumers to watch and make purchases, it is necessary to strengthen the personal characteristics of e-commerce anchors^[5]. Wei jianfeng et al(2022) find that when consumers watch live e-commerce broadcasts, they will have an immersive and pleasant experience through the characteristic explanation of the live-streamers, and have trust in the live-streamers and products, resulting in impulse purchase intentions^[9]. Lyu W, Qi Y and Liu J(2022) examine how to influence live sales by increasing consumer live streaming viewing and converting it into purchasing, and provided practical guidance for selecting the right KOLs in live commerce^[11].

At present, however, the research mainly focuses on the direction of management and journalism and communication, and there are few discussion in the field of linguistics.

As for the discourse research on live-streamers, Wang Ning(2022) starting from the register theory, analyzes the purpose, style, method, and function of the discourse expression of live streaming sales hosts^[14]. Sun Mengyuan(2023) explores the phenomenon of uneven language expression ability in live streaming, in order to promote the standardization of language expression for live streaming sales hosts^[13].

3. Construct a Persona

According to Goffman (2008), individuals with certain social characteristics have a moral right to be evaluated and treated in an appropriate manner by others. The live broadcaster will change himself according to the image expected by the audience, even if the image expected is far from his real image. In this paper, I will classify the discourse techniques according to the texts collected in the live broadcast, so as to show how anchors use their superb speaking techniques to close the relationship with customers, achieve their own goals, and thus increase sales.

3.1 Address Term

After the 1980s, in addition to the study of kinship terms, which always occupy a large part in the field of address terms, social address terms have gradually become a new research topic, and the

phenomenon that kinship terms are used in social terms has been found. The use of kinship appellation in non-kinship communication is an important way of interpersonal communication to shorten the distance between people. In the live broadcast, the anchor will use some words to address the audience in the live broadcast room. Generally speaking, female viewer is referred to as: xiaojiejie(little sister), baobao(baby), baobei(baby); Male viewer is referred to as: xiongdimen(brothers), laotie(dude). Or most commonly, gender neutral: jiarenmen(family members). These forms of address have developed into a kind of discourse marker that need not identify an addressee, and more generally encodes the speaker's stance to his or her current addressee(s).

(1) Is there any student who has this Indian print? The teacher will tell you how to brighten it. The teacher will only tell it once. Listen carefully (maogeping beauty flagship store, December 27, 2023)

(2) Students, there are three more coupons in the link. Click in to have a look, and don't buy them at the original price (gongkaoliuge, December 27, 2023)

In the process of e-commerce live broadcasting, the purpose of communication is to facilitate the completion of transactions. The process of anchors choosing appropriate salutation to address the audience is actually the process of constantly guiding potential consumers in the audience to the direction of payment and purchase with sales words. This is a technique of identity presupposition. Live-streamers use these expression by presupposing that they are good friends or family members of audience, which lower one's mental guard.

We can see from the above examples that live-streamers address audience in an intimate way, even use some kinship terminology to connect live streamers and their audience more closely. By using such kind of kinship terms as "jiarenmen" (families), "jiemeimen"(sisters), and "baobaomen"(babies), live-streamers successfully invoke a stance of intimacy and closeness.

In example(3) the live-streamer constructs a new persona for himself through this expression on the Internet, and create a new situation, shifting from "buying and selling goods" to "recommending products", accordingly, the relationship between the two parties also shifts from "trading relationship" to "friendship". To establish an intimate relationship with the fans, virtually enhance the fans' joy and loyalty, so that the fans can feel that this is my bestie to recommend me good things, rather than a seller. They would accept suggestions and purchase more possibly.

The use of social identity presupposition in e-commerce live broadcasting is mostly to narrow the psychological distance between the two parties.

It also create a stance of alignment with audience. Normally, the live-streamer is a selling figure, in order to earn the audience's money, in this case, the anchor and the audience when communicating inevitably produced a "conflict", that is, in order to ensure the sale of examination materials, may say a false, not objective words. In order to avoid such situation, there is an agentive, even self-conscious shaping of the self through linguistic choice. The stance-taking chosen by live-streamers construct a friendly and reliable persona, that is, the one who really cares other people's interest. It can send such a message as "I'm your good friend, I'm your family, I'm really recommending things for you, not to make you money, I want you to be better", which reinforces the credibility of the anchor and what he says. So audience are more likely to conduct a purchase.

3.2 Welfare

By observing the words used by live-streamers, we can find that some patterns are often used, we can see some examples here:

(1) The anchor won the welfare price for everyone today, and now the order is reduced by 20 yuan. Please change the price right away. Just sell it cheaply this time. If you come back tomorrow,

there will be no such price. Sisters hurry to buy, and in other stores, it costs at least more than 200 (tianxiaotian women's clothing, December 27, 2023)

(2) Today, you are in my live studio. I will add an electric faucet for you. It's my treat. My husband won't let me do this. I'll give a welcome gift for us (Xinsheng International's window, December 27, 2023)

(3) The last few orders are sold out right away. If they are sold out, they are done. Who can still lucky enough to purchase them? Go and take them home. (Suixin, December 27, 2023)

Examples are representatives that the anchor utilizes people's desire to buy cheap things to promote transactions. Live-streamers construct an object and caring persona: They are there for the benefit of customers, so that customers can buy cheaper things. At the same time, they create a sense of urgency to show that they really hope customers can take advantage of it, can spend a small amount of money to buy things of the same quality. They show that they are unified with audience and the two parties are at the same stance. This can reduce the epistemic vigilance of audience and promote the conduct of transaction.

(4) You help me to make me a 50% discount coupon urgently now and you audience can get a discount after you send number 1 on the public screen, which means that reducing the money immediately. This is the product that we never give discounts. You will never get any discount when you go to the offline stores. This is the one of the most popular product in the stores. For those who interact in the live room, coupons will be issued directly to them by our staff. (December 27, 2023, taipingniao men's clothing)

Here, live-streamers talk to both sides simultaneously, the customers and merchants. They play the role of bargaining with the merchant: The original price of a certain product was very expensive, but the anchor helped the customer win a large coupon. By doing so, they construct a stance of closeness with their fans and audience, invoking a feeling that live-streamers are so nice and care for customers, and they are on the same side with customers. An agentive approach to stance also makes clear the role of audience design (Bell 1984, 2001) in constructing an reliable and thoughtful persona^[1].

Audience design is a model for explaining how and why speakers may choose different linguistic resources—including stancetaking strategies—to respond to different kinds of audiences (Bell 2001:145)^[1]. Live-streamers speak to their assistant and merchants in a less polite and direct way, to change the price and distribute coupons to audience. They want to express that they are trying their best to fight for interests of customers, even willing to fall out with merchants over customers. At the same time, they speak to audience in a friendly and intimate way to show their alignment with customers. Although the stance-taking moves themselves to use different genres to different parties, actually they both ultimately orient to the same audience, here, the potential customers.

But actually, we all know that they don't have such right to change prices, and the price was set before the live is stated. At the same time, there are other assistants in live stream, they would respond to what the live-streamer say. For example, when live-streamers say that they have strove for discount for audience, at that time, assistants would pretend to stop them so that create an illusion that they are selling at a price below cost to inducing customers to pay. By doing this, a thoughtful and nice persona is constructed through their utterance. Customers would think live-streamers are considering their interests but not for making money for themselves.

This situation also frequently occurs: By claiming that they subsidize how much money to fans to fight for the welfare, and then pretending to quarrel with brand owners, they take a stance with audience and against merchants.

(5) Merchant: What are you doing? Don't sell it! Don't sell it

Chen yiru: What's the matter with 39.9? Help me to add another 100 stocks for our audience. How about the last three seconds.

Merchant: He took the wrong goods. The price of plush is not this price, and 39.9 is the price of the goods without Plush.

Chen yiru: If we get it wrong, we will send it in a wrong way.

(Chen yiru live studio, December 27, 2022)

In the broadcast room, Chen Yiru pretended to mark the price wrong, thus arguing with the merchants next to him. Chen yiru and merchant are playing the roles of speaker and address, who is known, ratified and addressed, and audience present are playing the role of auditor, the known and ratified interlocutors. According to Bell (1984). The importance of speaker, addressee, and referent in pronoun selection is quite obvious. But the auditor/bystander can have nearly as strong an effect as the addressee^[1]. Auditors are important for the interpretation they may put on a speaker's utterances. Speakers may wish to ensure that auditors rightly understand what is being said. Actually, in the live-stream situation, audience are the true address, this is a play performed by live-streamers and merchants. What they are talking about are intentionally heard understood by audience, in order to construct a persona before customers online. Normally, the argument and quarrel between merchants and live-streamers are not acceptable, because it would leave a negative impression. But such quarrel is prepared for customers, so speakers are Chen yiru and merchant, and address is audience. In an excited atmosphere, customers are likely to be drawn into the scene, and tear down their mental guard, lower the epistemic vigilance and make an impulse purchase. So that, they can meet sales target. But many customers can recognize this acting style of selling goods, in fact, they will not buy, and even have a bad impact on the anchor himself, reducing the possibility of subsequent purchase in his broadcast room.

A typical and successful top live-streamer is Li Jiaqi, a well-known beauty anchor in China, widely popular due to his professional knowledge and unique live streaming style. One of the main reasons why he is famous is that he considers his customers and establishes intimate relationships with them beyond the seller-buyer relationship. He constructs a kind and thoughtful persona, taking every girl as his friend, thus created one consumer miracle after another, and also gained tens of millions of fans across the entire network. And his success can be traced through what we mentioned above.

Li Jiaqi also launched a variety show, *all girls' offer*. This program focuses on the negotiation table through variety shows. Li Jiaqi collected proposals from tens of thousands of customers based on street surveys, questionnaires, and other methods, representing "all girls" to sit at zero distance with well-known brands to discuss the offer of Double Eleven. The slogan of this program also reflects Li Jiaqi's personality: all girls come first, and offers come last. Both Li Jiaqi and Chen Yiru are bargaining with merchants, but their starting points are completely different. Chen Yiru had already negotiated the price with the merchants in advance and pretended to negotiate discounts for customers in the live broadcast room; However, Li Jiaqi recorded the process of negotiating discounts behind the live broadcast. Undoubtedly, once costumers recognize the intention of two live-streamers, they would realize who are in the same stance with them. In Li's show, he and merchants are interlocutor, speaker and addressee, without taking audience and potential customers as second-class addressee.

Audience cannot even be termed as "auditors", but "acquainted overhearers" (those a speaker knows personally, for whom the speaker may specifically design an utterance). Live streamers persuade the audience of the live room to wait until they get the coupon or get a discount before purchase. For the sake of the audience in the live room, live streamers talk the audience into consuming rationally from the perspective of "friends", rather than induce them to blindly purchase. This group, thus, gain the trust of the audience in the live room. The anchor's empathy discourse can make the audience produce emotional resonance, stimulate the audience in the live studio to complete the consumption behavior. Thus, live streamers successfully transform the

commodity connotation into the emotional connection between people, here between live streamers and potential consumers, and sublimate the emotional concentration, which becomes a social bond to maintain family, friendship and love. By doing so, costumer base will more likely to be founded, which is really helpful for the future sales, and potential costumers are more likely to become regular customers, who will probably introduce their friends to this live room, because they know this live streamer is “thoughtful”, “Don't care about money” friend who try his or her best to save money for his or her “online friends”.

3.3 Service

The live-streamers will always interact with customers in the live broadcast room. Due to network reasons, customers can only communicate by typing and cannot communicate through voice, which invisibly widens the distance between the two parties. Customers may feel inconvenient and reduce the likelihood of purchasing. So the anchor will continue to interact with the audience, such as solving questions raised by the audience. For example:

(1) Please sent your height and weight on the public screen. Let me recommend them to you babies (nerdy flagship store, December 27, 2023)

(2) Which product does you want to see, 1 or 2? Which product do you want more? Let's go first. (official flagship store of CK)

When purchasing goods offline, especially clothes, it is generally possible to try them on, but when purchasing online, customers cannot visually see the fabric of the clothes and whether they are suitable for wearing. So, the main task of the live-streamers is to dispel customer doubts and encourage them to make purchases. They will help customers choose clothes based on their height and weight. By doing so, a caring and thoughtful persona will be constructed through language.

During the "Double 11" in 2021, Li Jiaqi lectured 8 "lessons" to help girls to choose proper and right product. He divided the budget into "within 500 yuan", "between 500 yuan and 1000 yuan", and "over 1000 yuan". In each interval, he would provide detailed product introductions for different skin types such as "dry skin", "oily skin", and "mixed skin", all of which are to help consumers choose suitable products. He recommended a lipstick of 50 yuan in the broadcast room, and also recommended a lipstick of thousands of yuan, but he stressed to his fans, do not blindly pursue brands. By means of his kind and well-thought-out persona, millions of girls and women were attracted and this kind of attraction would turn to sales. People in his live-streaming could feel his sincerity and carefulness, because he was not constantly persuade people to purchase expansive products, he said: “It is neither pathetic nor shameful to use cheap things, and I would also recommend very cheap lipstick” . Although Li normally advertises for internationally renowned brands, he pays more attention to recommending affordable products that are cost-effective and suitable for mass consumption. Such recommendations make it affordable for more people and further strengthen his reliable and down-to-earth persona. Out of right audience design——knowing who is the prospective customers, he presents the stance of alignment with a group of ordinary people, especially ordinary females just entering the society, and this gave him a quick shot at fame, which certainly results in several new records for sales volume.

At the same time, answering questions in a logical and professional way can show their ability to the audience in the broadcast room further, stabilizing the professional persona of the live streamers, also invisibly increasing the trust of the audience in the broadcast room. When this kind of trust is generated, the audience's trust in the goods advertised by the live streamers will also change, and the audience's mental defense will be lower, which is conducive to promoting the consumption behavior of the audience in the broadcast room.

3.4 Phonetic Features

Higher pitch can make the live streamer's voice clearer and brighter, and it is easier to attract the audience's attention. At the same time, the high pitch can also make the voice of the live streamers more infectious, more able to convey the characteristics and advantages of the product. Most live streamer can maintain positive feelings during the live broadcast process, and when the voice is rich and passionate. But the most intuitive feeling of the audience in the live broadcast room is passive and weak, and they can not generate any desire to continue watching. In the process, live streamers mostly pay attention to the cadence of their voice. The live streamers normally have a short pause in the process of explaining the key selling points such as the specifications, quantity and price of the product, and then increase the volume of voice to highlight the key selling points of the product to attract audience's attention. After the explanation of key selling points, the anchor or his partner will immediately repeat the key selling points several times, and accompanied by the appearance of some modal auxiliary words, such as, um, wow, oh, etc.

Besides, one of the truly obvious aspects of the discourse of live streamers is that they speak very rapidly. Because in a live broadcast, there are a lot of goods that need to be explained, and the time to explain each product is limited, so the speech speed of the live streamers is very fast. Speaking faster allows anchors to deliver more information in a limited time, improving the efficiency of live broadcasts. At the same time, fast speaking speed can also make the live broadcast more lively and interesting, and can attract the attention of the audience. Live streamers, in the live broadcast process, show features of fast speaking speed and emotional excitement. For the audience in the live broadcast room, wanting to keep up with the speed of live streamer is actually not an very easy thing. The audience needs to devote a certain amount of attention to understand the content of the anchor, and the audience's ability to think rationally will be temporarily paralyzed. Combined with the "3, 2, 1, get on the cart", a kind of statement often used in the live broadcast process, as well as the reminder of the welfare lottery in the live broadcast room, it will naturally create a tight atmosphere, so that the audience of the live broadcast room will join the shopping spree.

4. Negative Example

Bucholtz (1999) proposed a framework for the classification of such practices^[3]. These linguistic indices are of two kinds: Negative identity practices are those that individuals employ to distance themselves from a rejected identity, while positive identity practices are those in which individuals engage in order actively to construct a chosen identity. In other words, negative identity practices define what their users are not, and hence emphasize identity as an inter-group phenomenon; positive identity practices define what their users are, and thus emphasize the intra-group aspects of social identity.

The examples given above demonstrate positive identity practices. But sometimes, some live-streamers forget the live-streaming situation and then fail to construct their kind and thoughtful persona. Sometimes, they probably would be criticized by customers for this. For example, in the process of live-streaming sales, Li Jiaqi argued with netizens because of the price of a domestic brand eyebrow pencil, and the emotional Li Jiaqi no longer called the netizens in front of the screen "beautiful ladies". On the contrary, anger against the bullet comment that thought the price of eyebrow pencil is too expensive.

Before this public crisis, Li Jiaqi was always praised for his down-to-earth and genial persona, having both emotional quotient and intelligence quotient. He used positive identity practice to push himself into ordinary people group, although he had realized financial freedom and become the top live-streamer in China. At that time, Li Jiaqi would distinguish products of the same kind but at

different prices to meet the needs of both wealthy women and ordinary girls. He would target the student population and advise girls with limited living expenses not to pursue luxury brands. He will stand between consumers and brand owners, doing the job of seeking benefits for consumers. Customers took Li as their stance, and trust him. They thought Li took an impartial and objective stance, and he always tried his best to get discounts and free gift for his fan. What he did before successfully helped him integrate the majority of customers and audience.

(1) "Where is it expensive? It has been at this price for so many years, don't talk nonsense with your eyes open... Sometimes you look for your own reasons. After all these years of salary increases, haven't you worked hard?" (September 10, 2023, Li Jiaqi's live broadcast room)

But this statement pulled himself out of this group, and destroys the positive persona he constructed for many years.

5. Conclusion

The objective of this thesis is to study the discourse uttered by live-streamers. The main finding is that live-streamers try their best to construct a considerate and caring persona, as if standing with costumers. It seems that they have an objective and unbiased stance, because they recommend products from consumers' perspective, answering questions posed by potential clients. Sometimes, they even pretend to argue with supplier and distributor to fight for more interests and discounts for audience, which is actually a script. Additionally, the persona projected should maintain in front of the public, otherwise there will be a great negative impact, will make the public lose trust, thereby reducing the purchase rate of goods.

The limitations and deficiencies are as follows: the first thing is methodology. I only theoretically analyze discourse, without any statistical analysis, which lacks sufficient support and credibility to my paper. Second, the corpus is not large and systemic enough. Thus, the enlargement of the corpus and more various types of ads are needed in future studies. Besides, the corpora don't come from official websites, which lacks authenticity and traceability.

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