

From “Spectating” to “Decision-Making”: Uncovering the Pathways to Awakening Purchase Intentions for Educational Products in Live Streaming: A Grounded Theory Approach

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Abstract: In recent years, the rapid growth of live-streaming e-commerce has boosted online consumption, with major edtech firms entering the space and creating a new type of “educational livestreamer.” Using grounded theory, this study interviewed 16 industry professionals. Through coding and analysis, it builds a theoretical model explaining how educational livestreaming influences consumer purchase intentions. The study defines the roles and pathways of key variables, livestreamer traits, consumer state, product value, situational factors, community atmosphere, operational mechanisms, and purchase intent. It offers a cross-disciplinary (communication and management) view of why educational livestreaming drives buying behavior, providing practical guidance for edtech companies, livestreaming teams, and platforms.

Keywords: Live-streaming e-commerce; Grounded theory; Consumer purchase intentions

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1. Introduction

Livestream e-commerce is a new model where hosts showcase products in real-time via platforms like Taobao Live and TikTok Live, engage in communication to build trust, and influence purchase intention. As livestream e-commerce grows rapidly, industries show distinct traits and paths. With upgrading consumption and growing demand for education, educational products (e.g., online courses) have become an emerging segment. Unlike traditional fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), educational products are characterized by **high decision-making costs and long decision-making**. Their main decision-makers are usually parents, who need to comprehensively evaluate multiple rational dimensions before purchasing, including the professionalism of course content, the qualifications of educational institutions, and expected learning outcomes, rather than relying solely on price or the appeal of the host. This makes the consumption decision logic of educational

products significantly different from impulsive and experiential consumption, placing greater emphasis on **value recognition and trust-building**.

2. Theoretical foundation and literature review

Livestream e-commerce can enhance consumers' psychological expectations of products by presenting attractive, professional, and credible product information, thereby influencing their purchase intention. Most existing studies on consumers' purchase intention in livestream e-commerce focus on general models.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) holds that behavioral intention stems from attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, but assumes rational decisions while overlooking immediate sensory/emotional arousal in livestreams. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) stresses perceived usefulness/ease of use shape usage intention via attitude. Extended versions (TAM2, UTAUT) add variables like subjective norms and performance expectancy, fitting digital platforms ^[1]. Yet in educational livestreaming, TAM-family models overstress instrumental value, ignoring direct effects of educational content professionalism, perceived learning gains, and emotional bonds on purchase intention.

Most studies treat consumers as homogeneous, making existing rational models less applicable. Thus, this study aims to build a "Consumer Purchase Intention Arousal Model in Educational Livestreaming" to fill gaps in scenario specificity, theory integration, and mechanism identification.

3. Research methods and data sources

3.1. Research methods

For the online purchase intention of consumers of educational products, there are no mature theoretical hypotheses regarding variable categories, measurement tools, and influencing paths at present. In addition, as sorted out in the literature review, although the academic community has conducted relevant research on internet anchors and livestreaming e-commerce, there are few studies on segmented fields and their subsequent influencing effects. Therefore, this paper adopts the Grounded Theory research method to construct a "Wake-up Path Model for Educational Product Consumers' Purchase Intention".

3.2. Data sources

To better achieve the research objectives, this study combines in-depth personal interviews with auto-ethnography. From July to November 2025, the author conducted a 5-month ethnographic study in the research and study team of an educational technology company as an intern anchor ^[2]. During the internship, anchor partners and operation teachers were invited for interviews, with a total of 16 people participating in in-depth interviews, and each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Summary of basic information of research subjects (host, operators, live directors)

Serial number	Name	Gender	Occupation	Work experience
01	Si Yang	Female	Anchor	Education Anchor
02	Xiao Fan	Male	Anchor	President Assistant, E-commerce Live Streamer, Self-media Blogger
03	Da Qi	Male	Anchor	Drama Actor, E-commerce Live Streamer
04	Xiao Yi	Female	Anchor	Education Anchor
05	Xiao Han	Female	Anchor	Host, Education Anchor
06	Xiao Ma	Male	Operator	Education Anchor, Live Streaming Operator
07	Xiao Yu	Male	Operator	Live Streaming Operator
08	Brother Zeng	Male	Operator	Head of Training & Enhancement
09	Bo Wen	Male	Intern Operator	Live Streaming Operator, HR of Major Internet Company
10	Yu Cong	Female	Intern Operator	Live Streaming Operator, Influencer Operator of Major Internet Company
11	Si Tong	Female	Intern Operator	Live Streaming Operator
12	Bao Yue	Female	Intern Operator	Live Streaming Operator
13	Tong Yu	Female	Intern Anchor	Education Anchor, Singer
14	Xue Lun	Female	Intern Anchor	Education Anchor
15	Zhuo Ran	Female	Intern Anchor	Education Anchor, Teacher
16	Bao Li	Female	Intern Anchor	Education Anchor, New Media Operator

3.3. Paradigm refinement and model construction

3.3.1. Open coding

In the process of primary coding of interview data, it advocates letting the original textual data “speak for itself”, searching for conceptual categories from the collected textual materials, extracting and naming keywords, and conducting conceptualization processing. Finally, 44 open codes were refined, as shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Concepts and initial categories formed by open coding

Initial category	Original statement example
A1 Anchor Affinity	Anchors are required to make the audience feel that this person is very approachable at first sight.
A2 Anchor Credibility	I think for commodities with relatively high unit prices, trust is established with users through the anchor’s professional explanation, and buyers will feel that the money is well spent.
A3 Anchor Attractiveness	For products like high-heeled shoes, anchors must think about how to create effects. Or use some abstract and novelty-seeking ways.
A4 Anchor Professionalism	Anchors have a persona in their live broadcast rooms, maybe senior teachers.
A5 Anchor Live Broadcast Status	No matter whether the mood is good or bad today, professional anchors will be very passionate once they start broadcasting, which can drive the atmosphere of the live broadcast room.
A6 Matching Degree Between Anchor and Product	Anchors need to find suitable categories for themselves, in other words, they must have a matching degree with the products.
A7 Anchor Display Behavior	I am an anchor of learning machines. In the live broadcast room, I will show you the learning machine, and draw key points on the black-and-white PPT at the back while explaining.
A8 Anchor Uniqueness	Both E-commerce live streamer and entertainment anchors need to find their own personal positioning.
A9 Anchor Empathy	Users will definitely consider which anchor provides the most considerate service, can really solve their problems, and empathize with them the most.

Table 2 (Continued)

Initial category	Original statement example
A10 Anchor Makeup (Visual Impact)	For live broadcast rooms with entertainment nature, the anchor's makeup and dress are very important.
A11 Anchor Discourse Expression	If your consumer group is parents, the anchor can build a sense of picture by depicting the scene of children going to the Forbidden City, so that mothers can know that their children will also have classes in such a scene.
A12 Anchor Personality	The anchor's own personality is very important.
A13 Anchor On-site Response Ability	Salespeople must have a good temper with customers, and have a good attitude to solve problems even when encountering deliberately difficult users. I think another thing is the anchor's ability to adapt to changes, and be able to comprehensively answer various questions from consumers.
A14 Anchor Sincerity	I think the most important thing is altruistic words.
A15 Anchor Emotion	I think the anchor's emotions can also mobilize consumers' emotions and make consumers enter a happier state.
A16 Anchor Logic	Anchors can explain the story background, the theme of the course, and what students can learn clearly to form a complete logic. In this case, parents will think this is a very good product that can help their children improve.
A17 Anchor Communication Ability	I think improvisation and communication skills are quite important. Whether you can convey your ideas to consumers when chatting with them, and finally win their favor.
A18 Anchor Emotional Intelligence	I think emotional intelligence is also quite important.
A19 Consumer Cognition	Parents with high cognition in first-tier cities will think this product is useful for their children after listening to the anchor's explanation, including that parents first have certain economic capabilities.
A20 User Consumption Capacity	Actually, I think it is also related to parents' consumption capacity.
A21 Consumer Characteristics	I think what anchors need to do is to cater to the audience's style.
A22 Consumer Demand	Users who stay to watch for a long time show that they have certain needs. But whether the demand is strong or not depends on the individual situation of consumers.
A23 Consumption Psychology	First of all, I think anchors must consider problems from the perspective of parents.
A24 User Emotion	Live broadcasts must create a certain sense of anxiety and urgency to mobilize consumers' emotions.
A25 Product Price	First of all, the price of the commodity determines the user portrait, which is targeted at petty bourgeoisie mothers over 30 years old.
A26 Product Quality	Consumers will rest assured to consume only if they think the quality is no problem. Product quality is definitely the most important.
A27 Product After-sales Service	There will be specially designed words in the live broadcast room: unsatisfactory can be returned without reason within seven days.
A28 Product Extras	Actually, as a consumer, putting myself in the role of a mother, I may pay more attention to the price of the commodity and the benefits and gifts it brings me.
A29 Product Guarantee	For example, if my live broadcast room sells educational research study products, the users it attracts more may be because the institution behind the product is a large company.
A30 Product Scarcity	If the anchor does not create a sense of product scarcity for them at that time, their enthusiasm may disappear immediately, and they cannot make an immediate purchase.
A31 Product Category	Different products greatly affect the anchor's sales volume.
A32 Product Value	Consumers will struggle with whether the product is valuable.
A33 Product Content	What the product is and what it contains, as an anchor, you have to explain it clearly to the people in the live broadcast room.
A34 Live Broadcast Scene	Different live broadcast scenes also affect the live broadcast effect. When I broadcast live at the Forbidden City, many offline tourists come to listen.
A35 Atmosphere Rendering	More orders can be converted intensively when the live broadcast room atmosphere is good.
A36 Live Broadcast Scene Layout	Before the live broadcast, we will arrange the background of the live broadcast room and green screen.

Table 2 (Continued)

Initial category	Original statement example
A37 Live Broadcast Picture Quality	In a live broadcast room, the camera picture quality is very clear, and the overall picture makes consumers feel good, which can increase the user's retention time.
A38 Comment Display	The comment section below the live broadcast room is very crucial. Anchors should often interact with comments.
A39 Teaser Video	We shot a video of the Temple of Heaven research study class . The short video can reflect the quality of our teaching teachers and the rationality of our curriculum arrangement.
A40 Account Operation	As a E-commerce live streamer , we should do a good job in background reply simultaneously.
A41 Live Broadcast Time	Another thing is the timing of broadcasting. Different products have peak and off-season seasons, and we need to find the prime time when the products sell best.
A42 Community Interaction	Some anchors not only need to reply to comments in the live broadcast room and provide point-to-point service during broadcasting, but also answer questions for parents after broadcasting, teach users how to use products, and have very strong interactivity.
A43 Platform Subsidies (Coupons)	Now there are many coupons on various platforms.
A44 Online Ordering Intention	After the anchor explains that the product can meet my needs, I will first check if there are coupons, claim them and place an order directly.

3.3.2. Axial coding

Axial coding aims to further distinguish main categories and subcategories on the basis of open coding, and classify similar categories according to their interconnections and logical relationships. This paper merged new codes from 44 open codes to form 15 subcategories, as shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Main categories and corresponding sub-categories formed by axial coding

Main category	Sub-category	Initial category
C1 E-commerce Anchor Attributes	B1 Core Traits	Anchor Display Behavior
		Anchor Makeup (Visual Impact)
		Matching Degree Between Anchor and Product
		User Consumption Capacity
		Consumer Characteristics
		Consumer Cognition
		Consumer Demand
	B2 Professional Competence	Consumption Psychology
		User Emotion
		Product Category
		Product Content
		Product Price
	B3 Visual Focus	Product Quality
		Product Value
		Product After-sales Service
		Product Extras
		Product Guarantee
		Product Scarcity

Table 3 (Continued)

Main category	Sub-category	Initial category
C2 Consumer Status	B4 User Characteristic Dimension	Live Broadcast Scene
		Atmosphere Rendering
	B5 Cognitive Demand Dimension	Live Broadcast Picture Quality
C3 Product Value	B6 Psychological and Emotional Dimension	Live Broadcast Scene Layout
		Comment Display
	B7 Basic Attributes	Community Interaction
C4 Situational Factors	B8 Core Selling Points	Teaser Video
		Live Broadcast Time
	B8 Core Selling Points	Account Operation
C5 Community Atmosphere	B8 Core Selling Points	Platform Subsidies (Coupons)
		Online Ordering Intention
	B10 Scene Atmosphere	Anchor Display Behavior
C6 Operation Mechanism	B10 Scene Atmosphere	Anchor Makeup (Visual Impact)
		Matching Degree Between Anchor and Product
	B11 Technical Quality	User Consumption Capacity
C7 Consumers' Online Purchase Intention	B11 Technical Quality	Consumer Characteristics
		Consumer Cognition
	B12 Interaction Clues	Consumer Demand
C6 Operation Mechanism	B12 Interaction Clues	Consumption Psychology
		User Emotion
	B13 Account Management	Product Category
C7 Consumers' Online Purchase Intention	B13 Account Management	Product Content
		Product Price
	B14 Platform Mechanism	Product Quality
C7 Consumers' Online Purchase Intention	B14 Platform Mechanism	Product Value
		Product After-sales Service

3.3.3. Selective coding

Selective coding is an in-depth condensation of the results from axial coding, the functional paths of each supporting category are shown in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Typical relational structure of main categories

Driving path	Typical relational structure
Direct Driving Path	E-commerce Streamer Attributes (S) → Perceived Trust → Consumers' Online Purchase Intention (R)
	Product Value (S) → Perceived Usefulness → Consumers' Online Purchase Intention (R)
	Community Atmosphere (S) → Social Presence → Perceived Trust → Online Purchase Intention (R)
	Operation Mechanism (S) → Incentive Mechanism → Consumers' Online Purchase Intention (R)
Indirect Driving Path	Consumer State (O) → Perceptual Filtering → Consumers' Online Purchase Intention (R)
Moderating Factors	Situational Factors (S) → Perceived Ease of Use → Consumers' Online Purchase Intention (R)

3.4. Theoretical saturation test

Post three-level coding, 2 of 16 transcripts were randomly selected as test samples for a retest; no new concepts/categories emerged. Two live-streaming e-commerce experts validated the coding results and theoretical model, confirming its high reliability and validity.

4. Explanation of the mechanism

4.1. E-commerce streamer attributes: The core variable of external stimuli (S)

E-commerce streamer attributes are key stimulating factors (S) in the live-streaming e-commerce context, which directly affect consumers' perceived trust (O) and purchase intention (R) ^[3]. Streamers' **professionalism**, can improve consumers' **perceived usefulness** of products, thereby enhancing purchase intention.

4.2. Product value: The core anchor of consumer decision-making

Product value serves as the core basis for consumers' purchase decisions and belongs to key stimulating factors (S). It also acts as a mediating variable (O) that connects streamer attributes (S) and purchase intention (R). Streamers' recommendation behavior can strengthen consumers' perception of product value and further improve purchase intention.

4.3. Community atmosphere: The catalyst for emotional resonance

Community atmosphere constitutes the emotional environment (S) of the live-streaming room, belonging to external stimuli (S). It affects purchase intention (R) through social presence and sense of belonging ^[4]. A lively bullet-screen atmosphere can induce **herd mentality** and promote consumers' purchase decisions.

4.4. Situational factors: The adjustment switch of consumption decisions

Situational factors are environmental cues (S) of the live-streaming scenario, belonging to external stimuli (S). They influence purchase intention (R) as moderating variables (M) ^[5]. For example, 8:00 p.m. is a relaxing period after work; live streaming at this time can capture consumers' attention.

4.5. Operation mechanism: The booster of behavioral transformation

Operation mechanism refers to the rule design of live-streaming e-commerce, belonging to external stimuli (S), which directly affects consumers' purchase decisions (R). According to consumer behavior theory, operation mechanisms (e.g., time-limited discounts, full-reduction promotions, pre-sale models) influence purchase intention through incentive or trust mechanisms.

4.6. Consumer state: The internal variable of individual differences

Consumer state refers to consumers' psychological and physiological states (O), belonging to the organism's internal state (O), which directly affects purchase intention (R). a happy mood makes consumers more inclined to impulse buying, while sadness may reduce purchase intention ^[6].

5. Conclusion

Using grounded theory's selective coding, this study identifies consumers' online purchase intention as the

core category and confirms its explanatory power in e-commerce live-streaming. It integrates key variables, streamer attributes, product value, community atmosphere, situational factors, and operational mechanism, to form a localized SOR-based interpretation model. Current research has limitations: it lacks cross-platform comparison, omits the low-tier market, neglects long/short-term effect differences (interaction vs. impulse buying), and overlooks policy/regulatory impacts on streamer trait effectiveness. Future work can use NLP to predict conversion effects, offering theoretical and innovative practical support for live-streaming e-commerce sustainability.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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