

# Reflections on Influencer Communication Operations Affecting Consumer Psychology and Buying Choices in Short-video Track

Ziyue He

School of Business, Lingnan University, Hong Kong SAR, China

---

**Abstract:** The behaviour of the public has been changed by the activities of online celebrities. By the end of 2025, there will be about 1.074 billion short-video users and 813 million live-streaming users in China. This paper studies how online celebrities affect consumers' consumption psychology and purchasing behaviour at the individual level, and finds that their operations mainly influence consumers' psychology through three paths: the formation of quasi-social relationships, emotional arousal and scene creation, and thus change purchasing decisions. Online celebrities present professional knowledge and maintain frequent interactions at the trust level to reduce perceived risks; at the consumption-driven level, time-limited discounts, herd behaviour and emotional connections lead to impulse buying. At the same time, due to problems such as false advertising and excessive commercialization, consumer trust has also been eroding; by 2025, the national consumer associations had received about 159,000 complaints of false advertising and inflated the proportion of such complaints to 7.88% of all complaints. There are both strengths and weaknesses in the changes to consumer behaviour for the operation of short-video influencer marketing; new consumption scenarios and simplified decision-making have been created, but at the same time, the risks of information overload and trust issues have also risen. At the same time, the regulation of industrial operations and an improvement in the rationality of consumers need to be carried out.

**Keywords:** Short video platforms; Influencer marketing; Consumer psychology; Purchase decisions; Trust mechanism.

---

## 1. Introduction

The spread of mobile internet has made short videos a popular medium in recent years. According to the "Report on the Development of Online Audio-Visual Media in China (2025)", the user base and use time of short videos are higher than those in other areas. By the end of December 2025, the number of users of short videos was about 1.074 billion, and they made up 95.4% of all internet users. Short videos have altered the method by which information spreads and are changing people's consumption habits of information and goods.

The main components of the commercial ecosystem for short videos are production and operation driven by influencers. According to the "China Online Performance (Live Streaming and Short Video) Industry Development Report (2025-2026)" by the China Performing Arts Industry Association, as of May 2025, the total number of live-streaming accounts opened by hosts across all platforms without repetition reached about 211 million, and the number of active live-streaming accounts per month was approximately 37.59 million. Influencers attract the trust of their fans through content production and earn money by hosting live-streamed sales, participating in brand collaborations and placing advertisements, thus forming a closed loop of "content appeal - trust building - transaction completion". According to the survey of iiMedia Research, 79.32 per cent of the short-video and live-streaming users have demonstrated platform consumption behaviour, and among them, 51.80 per cent have been involved in shopping.

However, not all of the effects of online celebrity management for consumers are positive. As this industry has been growing in recent years, some issues have gradually arisen, such as false advertising and deceptive promotions [1].

In 2025, the national consumer associations received 2,016,400 consumer complaints, and about 159,000 of them were related to false advertising at a rate of 7.88%. The 2025 annual theme survey of "Building Satisfactory Consumption" by the China Consumers' Association also showed that, among all categories of service consumption, the dissatisfaction rate with live-stream marketing was the highest at 17.0%. It shows that although short-video online celebrity operations increase the speed of consumer decisions, they have also given rise to new problems of information asymmetry and trust risks.

The practice of communication operation for short-video online celebrities will be used in this paper to study how it affects consumer consumption psychology and purchasing behavior; at the same time, the mechanisms and scope of this impact will also be investigated, along with relevant suggestions.

## 2. Current Development Status and Basic Characteristics of Influencer Promotion Operations

The promotion activities of short-video influencers have changed from individual creation in the beginning to a full-fledged industrial model. By December 2025, the number of short-video users had reached 1.074 billion and accounted for 95.4 per cent of all online users; the number of online live-streaming users was 813 million, accounting for 72.3 per cent. Data from iiMedia Research shows that 69.57% of the users are in the long-term active viewing group, and the proportion of people who watch it 4-5 times a day is 43.82%. A relatively large number of users and their frequent use have provided a good base of recipients for the influencer promotion work [2].

Platforms are dominated by a few large enterprises at the

top. Douyin has the highest user preference rate at 39.40% and is the first. Its "content + consumption" closed-loop model has put "purchase convenience" at the core of the driving force for consumption and accounts for 39.56%. Kuaishou is another platform that has made the claim of being a "trusted e-commerce platform" and uses mechanisms such as "trusted purchase" to foster trust among hosts and their fans. Although the two platforms have different reasons for being established, both use algorithms to deliver personalised content and need to cultivate users' trust through the dissemination of social networks in order to reach consumers.

The three main kinds of spread for internet celebrities at present can be categorized as follows. The persona-driven type is a particularised personal image (such as knowledge-based, lifestyle-based, funny-type) that attracts the audience, and then provides product recommendations according to this persona [3]. Dong Yuhui started as a "knowledge host" in live-streaming e-commerce. In 2025, the live-streaming room "Yuhui Tongxing" held 421 sessions, averaged about 50-75 million yuan in sales per session, and reached a total of more than 21 billion yuan in annual sales. The scene embedding type adds the promotion of products in daily life scenarios and emotional elements to the scene. In the 618 promotion in 2025, Li Baobao had as few as 1.9 million followers and set up a live-streaming room at her wedding venue; however, she achieved over 150 million yuan in sales in a single day and ranked first among Douyin sellers. Matrix operation type implements multi-account collaboration and traffic interconnection in a family-like and team-like manner, and uses scale to expand the communication effect.

The three models have a common feature: these internet celebrities are no longer merely product promoters but also perform the roles of content creators, emotional companions and consumption guides.

### **3. The Internal Mechanism by Which Online Celebrities' Dissemination and Operation Influence Consumers' Psychology**

The superposition of the three roles mainly affects consumers' psychology in three ways: quasi-social relationships, emotional arousal and cognitive simplification.

A quasi-social relationship is a one-sided sense of closeness that the audience has with media figures. Influencers can build a sense of closeness with the audience in short videos and live-streamings by interacting frequently, sharing their daily lives genuinely, etc., making people feel that they "know this person" and "he understands me". Although this relationship is one-way, the audience is willing to view the influencers as trustworthy friends in their minds. Based on the theory of quasi-social relations, when consumers view influencers as "their own people", the recommended products are no longer seen as commercial advertisements but rather as recommendations from friends, and thus the trust barrier is reduced.

The other two are that people feel emotions and are immersed in their lives. The content forms of short videos and live-streaming shows are naturally more emotionally resonant. Influencers can trigger various emotions in the audience, such as joy, sadness or excitement, through alterations in the speed of speech and design of interaction. According to the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, the quality of information, the attractiveness of the host, the entertainment

value of the content and a price discount can all boost a person's sense of flow and, consequently, stimulate an impulse to buy [4]. Such impulsive purchases are usually made in a short time due to emotions and are more frequent among young people. The Design of the platform, its content and the psychology of consumers are all related. Influencers create immersive environments for consumers to experience a brand emotionally and, thus, reduce the need for rational consideration.

At the level of cognitive simplification, a large number of products have caused information overload and left consumers with insufficient cognitive resources. Influencers spread and disseminate information in a way that is convenient for consumers to learn; therefore, they do not need to collect and compare product information themselves but can be persuaded to buy based on the "trust in the influencer". Thus, the decision-making cost is relatively low; it may be that consumers have given in to personal desires or commercial interests [5]. Limited-time promotions, stock alerts, real-time transaction information, etc., are all used to create a sense of urgency. With prompts such as "limited-time offer" and "lowest price in the network", many people have been buying in a hurry.

In short, the effect of influencer spread and operation on consumers' psychology is to replace the traditional "rational evaluation" of consumption decisions with "emotional trust".

### **4. The Specific Impact of Influencer Promotion and Operations on Consumers' Purchase Choices**

A Change in People's Minds will Lead to Different Buying Behaviours. The effects of Internet celebrities' activities on consumers' purchase decisions can be classified into three types: promoting the demand for consumption, improving the efficiency of decision-making, and extending the range of consumption.

First of all, purchase intentions. Influencers generally stimulate the demand among consumers by "planting the seed". According to data from iiMedia Research in 2026, KOL and influencer review videos have been designated as first-tier channels for consumer influence. Influencers are not brands themselves; therefore, they will present products by unboxing, trying out, comparing and analyzing them in detail to reduce the perceived risk for consumers. In the vertical areas of electronics and beauty/home appliances, professional review influencers' posted content now provides a reference for many consumers in their purchasing decisions.

Live-streaming e-commerce has reduced the time from when consumers learn about it to when they buy through the creation of a sense of urgency and group pressure. Practices such as "limited-time discounts", "limited release" and "countdown to link" in the live-streaming rooms create a sense of scarcity and tension [6]. The scrolling display of transaction records and the prompt "XX people have placed orders" on the page also affect herd behaviour. The popularity, personal appeal and overall atmosphere of the live-streaming rooms all promote impulsive consumption. In the 2025 Double Eleven period, Dong Yuhui's live-streaming room had more than 20 million average viewers and sales of over 100 million yuan on average. The traffic quickly turned into transactions in a short amount of time.

The operation of online influencers has also shifted the original scope of consumption for consumers in terms of

category boundaries. In the early days of e-commerce, users had to manually search for goods, and the number of categories available was also relatively small. Algorithms for short videos and influencer-led content recommendations have increased people's exposure to a large number of products that they would not have been interested in otherwise [7]. Changes in the category of Dong Yuhui's live-streaming have provided a reference for observation: In 2024, the category with the highest sales was food and beverages, and smart home products ranked third; in 2025, smart home products moved up to the top of the sales list. It is due to changes in consumer demands that online influencers' content has introduced new products for the public through learning by example.

Online influencers are no longer the sources of good behaviour for people's consumption habits. If the recommended products do not meet the actual needs of the consumers, or if the products themselves have quality problems, then the purchasing decision will not be rational. In the food-related complaints of live-streaming e-commerce in 2025, more than 40% involved mismatched goods, non-fresh ingredients, unlicensed operations and false advertising. Stimulate people's willingness to buy and, at the same time, ensure that the recommended products are reasonable and safe. At the root of the above problems is a lack of trust.

## **5. Trust Building and Trust Dissolution in Online Celebrity Promotion Operations**

The first link in the chain of effects of online celebrity promotion on consumers' purchasing behaviour is trust. Its Construction and Dissolution are always in a dynamic state.

Trust building takes three main ways. Firstly, it should be professional. The online celebrity continuously produces content in a particular field and is well-known for their professional skills. A relatively high degree of professionalism will be more trusted by the public. Secondly, it should be real. The online celebrity shares their own life, expresses genuine emotions, admits shortcomings, and thus forms an "authentic and trustworthy" image. Affability moves the audience to purchase and also inspires trust in the brand [8]. The third is Interactivity. The online celebrity regularly engages in comment interactions, hosts live-streamed Q&A sessions, and organises fan groups to create a two-way interaction system rather than just one-way communication and strengthen the emotional connection with fans.

There is also a loss of trust. The Commercial Interests and the Quality of the Content are in conflict. After an influencer promotes unfamiliar or unapproved products for money, the people will be unable to verify the truth of that content. Worse still, some influencers use "sympathy marketing" techniques, fabricate scenes and exaggerate the effects to promote consumption, causing harm to public trust [9]. In 2025, among the complaints received by the national consumer associations across the country, the proportion of counterfeit issues was 3.48%, which was higher than that in 2024. In collaboration with the 16 provincial consumer associations, joint investigations have found that about 49.66% of consumers have fallen victim to deceit or exaggeration in promotional activities for private-domain live-stream shopping. Therefore, these data show that the erosion of trust is no longer a problem in one part of the industry.

A decline in the public's trust will reduce the influence of

these individual accounts and thus decrease the overall market volume. Repeatedly failing to find the promoted goods has led to a loss of trust in the influencer's recommendations among the public. According to the 2025 China Consumers' Association survey, over 60 per cent of consumers believe that the consumption environment has been improving; however, among all the problems they face, "after-sales service guarantees" have been at the top of the list consistently. Therefore, although people are willing to be inconvenienced by this new convenience, they are always concerned about after-sales risks and information authenticity.

The construction and breakdown of trust are in fact contradictions of content logic and commercial logic. The purpose of content is truth and education; the aim of commerce is sales. The two need to be in harmony, otherwise the online celebrity promotion operation will not run smoothly for a long time.

## **6. Thoughts on Regulating Online Celebrity Promotion Operations and Guiding Rational Consumption**

Based on the analysis in the previous text, this problem has multiple forms, and countermeasures need to be taken at the same time in three areas: platform governance, self-discipline among practitioners, and consumer literacy.

The two types of roles in the platform are content organisers and function organisers. Douyin E-commerce held a special campaign against false advertising in 2025. Although the platform has about 193 million live-streaming accounts in total, the size of the violation problem has far exceeded that of enforcement efforts [10]. The algorithms and people will need to work together more effectively in the process of reviewing the items. A tiered penalty system will be implemented for the behaviour of exaggerating efficacy and fabricating data. Post-sale guarantees should also be considered; according to a survey by the China Consumers' Association, "post-sale guarantees" have been one of the five main reasons for consumer concern for five consecutive years, and if there are problems with the channels for exercising rights, consumers will lose confidence in the platform and be less likely to purchase again.

The conflict between the commercial demands for good deeds and the intention to do good is unavoidable for most internet celebrities at present [11]. According to the above research, a higher professional level of online influencers is associated with better restraint of people's impulsive spending and the promotion of purpose-driven consumption. Therefore, as shown above, to ensure the long-term stable development of the business of online influencers, they should move away from highly visual product introductions and concentrate on building trust through expert knowledge and high-quality daily life videos. Some scholars have also pointed out that if the hosts continue to strive in terms of aesthetic taste and knowledge accumulation, the quality of the live-streaming content will gradually improve, and the purchasing intention of consumers will also become more stable. Professionalised Operation will promote rational choices by consumers and support the long-term development of influencers.

Media Literacy and Decision-Making Ability at the Consumer Level are Protective Factors. Algorithms of recommendations are likely to create an information bubble. Users are repeatedly exposed to the same flow of content provided by the platform and thus have a reduced selection

scope. Know that the online influencers' recommendation purposes are commercial, and therefore should not be trusted unconditionally. Before placing an order, I will read all the comments left by users on many different websites to compare the specifications and prices of the same products, and be more cautious about whether they have been recommended by influencers.

Consumption in the era of short videos is no longer limited to purchases; rather, it has gradually turned into a kind of experience for people to enjoy, express emotions, and be instantly gratified by. Shopping is now more convenient and personalised to people's wishes, but it is also more prone to emotional influence and has more fragmented information. Promote the healthy development of the industry by making continuous adjustments to both innovation and regulation, and consumers need to be cautious.

## 7. Conclusion

Diffusion and Operation by short-video influencers are affecting the consumption psychology and purchase behaviour of consumers. The three psychological channels for the above results are as follows: Quasisuical relationships lead consumers to view the influencer as a trustworthy role model; emotional arousal lowers the need for rational thought at the time of purchase; and cognitive reduction spreads trust by avoiding the accumulation and analysis of a large amount of information. Together, the three mechanisms will improve the impact of consumption choices and add a certain level of emotion.

According to the data, 79.32 per cent of the users have been involved in consumption behaviour on the platform. Dong Yuhui's annual sales reached 21 billion yuan, and Li Baobao achieved single-day sales of over 150 million yuan; therefore, online influencers have promoted consumption among the public. However, another problem is that in 2025, there were about 159,000 cases of false advertising, and the dissatisfaction rate of live-streaming marketing services reached 17.0%. A significant loss of trust in the available funds will cause the entire business model to collapse; at this time, people will lose faith in the suggestions provided by online influencers and thus lose their income source.

This paper will analyze the mechanism at the level of communication and operation, and will use publicly available data and typical cases as the basis for its discussion. The industry data are released at different times, and the statistical standards for different platforms are not uniform; therefore, accurate quantitative analysis cannot be carried out at present, and subsequent empirical studies need to be conducted to determine causality.

At the level of governance in the chain of platforms, influencers and consumers, platforms are the rule-setters and should actively build a review mechanism and after-sales guarantee; influencers need to consider the long-term effect

of their short-term gains on trust; and consumers should be reasonable and practical in their consumption. The interaction mode of the three parties directly affects whether this model will be changed from short-term traffic conversion to long-term trust accumulation.

## References

- [1] Ekinci, Y., Dam, S., & Buckle, G. (2025). The dark side of social media influencers: A research agenda for analysing deceptive practices and regulatory challenges. *Psychology & Marketing*, 42(4), 1201–1214.
- [2] Yang, Y., & Ha, L. (2021). Why people use TikTok (Douyin) and how their purchase intentions are affected by social media influencers in China: A uses and gratifications and parasocial relationship perspective. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 21(3), 297–305.
- [3] Zhang, R., Mercado, T., & Bi, N. C. (2025). “Unintended” marketing through influencer vlogs: Impacts of interactions, parasocial relationships and perceived influencer credibility on purchase behaviors. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 19(1), 5–18.
- [4] Lee, C. H., & Chen, C. W. (2021). Impulse buying behaviors in live streaming commerce based on the stimulus-organism-response framework. *Information*, 12(6), 241.
- [5] Zheng, L., Huang, B., Qiu, H., & Bai, H. (2024). The role of social media followers' agency in influencer marketing: A study based on the heuristic-systematic model of information processing. *International Journal of Advertising*, 43(3), 554–579.
- [6] Kong, D., Zhan, S., & Zhu, Y. (2025). Can time pressure promote consumers' impulse buying in live streaming E-commerce? Moderating effect of product type and consumer regulatory focus. *Electronic Commerce Research*, 25(4), 3223–3259.
- [7] Wang, F., Zhang, C., Lin, F., Chi, M., & Zhao, J. (2024). Understanding the effectiveness of influencer recommendation information on social media platforms. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 23(5), 2163–2177.
- [8] Duffek, B., Eisingerich, A. B., Merlo, O., & Lee, G. (2025). Authenticity in influencer marketing: How can influencers and brands work together to build and maintain influencer authenticity? *Journal of Marketing*, 89(5), 21–46.
- [9] Reinikainen, H., Tan, T. M., Luoma-Aho, V., & Salo, J. (2021). Making and breaking relationships on social media: The impacts of brand and influencer betrayals. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 171, 120990.
- [10] Ershov, D., & Mitchell, M. (2020). The effects of influencer advertising disclosure regulations: Evidence from Instagram. In *Proceedings of the 21st ACM Conference on Economics and Computation* (pp. 73–74).
- [11] Antoniou, A. (2024). When likes go rogue: Advertising standards and the malpractice of unruly social media influencers. *Journal of Media Law*, 16(1), 74–117.