

A Conceptual Framework for Livestreaming on Behavior Outcomes: The Role of Influencers

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Abstract

Livestreaming is characterized by its immediacy, authenticity, and the ability of the audience to interact with the creator or streamer during the stream. Live streaming activity achieved tremendous popularity from the availability of diverse platforms. During livestreaming activity, influencers are considered to be powerful marketing tools due to their perceived credibility, authenticity and relatability. Firstly, this paper defines livestreaming and influencers. Then, from literature review, we developed the conceptual framework which proposes the following propositions: atmosphere and presentation skills are positively related to product brief; product belief is positively related to consumer choice, consumer trust and consumer identity; consumer identity, consumer trust are positively related to consumer satisfaction; sales promotion is positively related to consumer satisfaction but negatively related to consumer trust. The discussion and conclusion are concluded.

Key words: Livestreaming; Influencers; Product brief; Consumer trust; Consumer identity; Consumer satisfaction

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1. INTRODUCTION

Livestreaming allows individuals to publicly broadcast live video streams, accompanied by a shared chat room for user communication (Hamilton, Garretson, & Kerne, 2014). Compared with recorded content, the key benefits of livestreaming are its immediacy, authenticity, and the ability of the audience to interact with the creator or streamer during the stream (Hu et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2021; Cong et al., 2021). Livestreaming activity has witnessed its prosperity since the availability of diverse platforms such as Twitch and YouTube Live (live streaming service of YouTube) (Smith, Obrist, & Wright, 2013). Twitch has seen over 300% monthly audience growth from 2015 to 2018 (Iqbal, 2021). By the end of 2021, there were approximately 703.4 million livestreaming users in China, representing a penetration rate of 68.2 percent among internet users (Thomala, 2022). This interactive approach in real time to entice shoppers is growing in popularity thanks to a mixture of factors including the near-ubiquity of smartphones, and speedy internet connections.

Livestreaming e-commerce has gained traction in China since the outbreak of COVID-19, as tens of millions of Chinese were confined indoors and moved shopping online due to restrictions on large gathering and travel. COVID lockdowns propelled livestreaming even further, quickly turning from novelty to necessity. Livestreaming is like Home Shopping Network, but with charismatic, trendy anchors. It's also been described as part infomercial, part variety show. Bridging entertainment and online shopping, livestreaming has the huge potential to change the status quo and become the new norm for

e-commerce in China, attracting Chinese technology tycoons and the short-video sharing unicorns.

Alibaba's Taobao Live, has the lion's share of live-streaming in China at around 80%. Other large Chinese tech and e-commerce players, like Baidu and JD.com, have jumped in. Douyin, the Chinese version of Tik Tok and its competitor Kuaishou in partnership with JD.com, have shoppable livestreams within the apps, as does the leading fashion platform, MOGU (Greenwald, 2020). One in 2020 from the National Bureau of Statistics in China, where influencers gained prominence earlier than in the West, estimated its contribution to the economy at \$210bn, which is equivalent to 1.4% of GDP.

Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hangzhou, cities in China have begun to take the shape as e-commerce livestreaming bases. Livestreaming E-Commerce is promoting and selling goods through influencers' streams on their own social media channels. Top influencers have gained huge traffic volumes from the public. Consumers, intermediaries corporate brand owners all benefit from influencers.

For consumers, influencers are at once both a walking advert and a trusted friend. For intermediaries that sit between them and brands, they are a hot commodity. For the brands' corporate owners, they are becoming a conduit to millennial and Gen-Z consumers, who combined will be responsible for 70% of the \$350bn or so in global spending on bling by 2025 (the Economists, 2022). Teenagers and 20-somethings who prize authenticity while influencers with their girl- or boy-next-door charm, offer this in spades—for a fraction of the fee of a big-name star (the Economists, 2022). In addition, Influencers can repackage a brand's message in a way that is harmonious with their voice, their followers' tastes and their platform of choice.

EMarketer estimated that 75% of American marketers would spend money on influencers in 2022, up from 65% in 2020 (The Economists, 2022). Brands do not ignore the market power of influencers, and brands' global spending on influencers may reach \$16bn in 2022, more than one in ten ad dollars spent on social media. Research and Markets, an analysis firm, reckons that in 2021 the middlemen made \$10bn in revenues globally, and could be making \$85bn by 2028. The ranks of firms offering, "influencer-related" services rose by a quarter last year, to approximately 19,000.

Social media provides a megaphone for influencers. (McQuarrie et al., 2013). Influencers are considered to be a powerful marketing resource due to their perceived credibility, authenticity and relatability (Abidin, 2015a; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Marketers have capitalised on the popularity of influencers, turning to them as trusted tastemakers to endorse products and brands to their followers (De Veirman et al., 2017). Brands can profit from influencers, including enhanced

brand awareness and purchase intentions (Hughes et al., 2019; Ki & Kim, 2019; Lou & Yuan 2019; Martínez-López et al., 2020; Reinikainen et al., 2020). This paper first defines livestreaming and influencers, highlighting some important facts of the two streams. Then we review the literature in the two streams, including atmosphere and presentation skills, Product belief, consumer choice, consumer trust towards, Consumer identity, Sales promotion, consumer satisfaction and consumer trust. Several propositions have been invented and the discussion and conclusion are followed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND PROPOSITION DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Livestreaming in E-Commerce

Livestreaming is the practice wherein online influencers market brands and wellness products by introducing their benefits through video conversations over the internet. Livestream retailing augments traditional go-to-market strategies by reaching consumers via screen-mediated sales presentations for a variety of products. Amazon Live, Facebook Live, Taobao Live, and QVC serve as prominent exemplars.

Livestream retailing blends technology and marketing. The marketing combines entertainment and retailing, enhances reach via influencer marketing, shortens the purchase journey to the duration of the sales presentation, and permits value capture via innovative payment plans, efficient delivery and hassle-free returns.

In a typical video sales pitch, a host (salesperson) nudges a prospective customer through the purchase funnel by building awareness of an items features, benefits, price, discounts, and instills an urgency to buy. The live-streaming retailer helps users understand the product through a variety of methods such as the hosts personal trial and interactive answer. On the basis of traditional interactive methods, it improves the real-time and interactivity, while giving the audience a sense of real shopping.

Livestreaming has attracted the participation of cross-border anchors, including film and television stars, corporate executives, and Internet celebrities. According to BCG statistics, the penetration rate of social media in China exceeds 97%, and 69% of consumers have shared their online shopping links on social media. Livestreaming is a great way to reach new markets as it is appealing to a modern audience. In addition, as livestreaming communities reach consumers through live videos which convey the message to the audience more easily and efficiently, the retention rate increases when the same information is paired with relevant visuals. Livestreaming is beneficial for creating a personal relationship with target audience. As a live streamer often

communicates with audiences in an authentic and raw way, the audience believes they are taking part in a more genuine engagement. It is much more genuine than pre-made videos that are pre-scripted. In this way, brands can improve their trustworthiness and reliability by leveraging live broadcasts. This helps to drive a great exposure across the globe and better sales when promoting offerings. Livestreaming content can be exciting to watch as the audience is not aware of what will happen in the live videos. Brands can take their viewers on a journey that is unique, like attending an event, displaying new products, hosting Q&A sessions, or streaming interviews.

Audiences can gain the sense of urgency, unpredictability, and excitement while watching a live unscripted video. The study by Teixeira, Wedel, and Pieters (2012) showed livestreaming automatically extracted the emotions of joy and surprise that viewers experience when watching television commercials, and then relate them to attention and ad avoidance behavior. They found that surprise and joy effectively concentrate attention and retain viewers. However, importantly, the level rather than the velocity of surprise affects attention concentration most, whereas the velocity rather than the level of joy affects viewer retention most (Teixeira et al. 2012).

2.2 Atmosphere

The increasing focus on customer experience arises because customers now interact with firms through a myriad of touch points in multiple channels and media, resulting in more complex customer journeys (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). The retail atmosphere whether established in the store or through various retail touchpoints, influences customers' overall perceptions of the retailer and choices. Thus, retailers invest heavily to establish the atmosphere with the aim of conveying and engaging customers, during all stages in their shopping journey.

Roggeveen et al (2020) recognize that customer experience takes place as part of a long journey as elements appear on the retailer's websites, Apps, shipping or packaging materials, and other touchpoints. They propose the DAST framework of retail atmospherics, referring to *design-ambient-social-trialability* factors.

In their notion, "design" pertains to visual elements, where in store, online or on other retailer-controlled touchpoints. It includes the layout and style of the store, websites or flyer impact. Design factors "exist at the forefront of our awareness". Online merchandise displays and dynamic presentation formats increase preferences for and valuations of hedonic options (Roggeveen et al. 2015).

Different website visual elements, (product feature crop, lifestyle photo, photo size, product video) affect the customer experience, according to the type of customer experience being emphasized (i.e., social, sensory, informative, or entertaining) (Bleier et al 2019). Visual

elements accompanied by corresponding sounds improve memory performance accuracy, relative to the sole presentation of visual elements (Murray et al. 2004).

"Ambient" aspect is outlined, in part, by Knoferle et al. (2012) who found that music with a slow tempo and minor mode results in increased department store sales. A meta-analysis reveals that music results in enhanced pleasure, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions, seemingly because "musical stimulation may be seen as a pleasure-inducing substitute for distracting in-store sounds, which will enhance the shopping experience" (Roschk, Loureiro, and Breitsohl 2017, p. 234).

"Social" encompasses the people: other customers in the store, store employees or service agents, and reviews posted by others online (Roggeveen et al, 2020). The mere virtual presence of others can affect brand evaluations and purchase intentions. Wang et al. (2007) investigate another type of virtual presence and show that avatars can increase perceptions of the social element of a website, which influences consumers' affect and shopping value.

"Triability" refers to the ease with which a customer can try a new product or service (Roggeveen et al, 2020). In a store, a consumer can taste a food sample or try on clothes; online customers might use digital equivalent technologies, achieved through augmented or virtual reality, to explore products.

One interesting piece of research was completed by Wilcox, Roggeveen, and Grewal (2011) which showed that if favorable information appears before the sampling opportunity, consumers evaluate the product more positively, but if that favorable information appears after their sampling experience, they express more negative evaluations (cf. if they saw unfavorable information). Roggeveen et al. (2020) assert that DAST factors might work in conjunction: consistency and congruity and experience and involvement. Grewal and Baker (1994) demonstrate that when ambient (music, lighting) and design (store layout, organization of merchandise) cues are congruent, it evokes in higher price acceptability and greater perceptions of price fairness.

Proposition 1: Atmosphere is positively related to product brief.

2.3 Interpersonal Communications: Neutral Expressions, Authenticity

In interpersonal communications, people often display smiles when they intend to form cooperative relationships (Mehu and Dunbar 2008) or seek interpersonal rapport (Hennig Thureau et al. 2006). From an observer's perspective, smiles are thus often interpreted as signaling an intention to build a friendly relationship ("Let's be friends"; Fridlund 1994). The interpersonal benefits of smiles may lead one to believe that smiles always convey positive information, people perceive individuals with babyish facial configurations (i.e., large round eyes, small

nose and chin) as honest and approachable (Berry and Brownlow 1989).

Another line of research finds that when a salesperson's face is blended with features of a celebrity face, consumers perceive the salesperson as more trustworthy and report higher purchase intentions (Tanner and Maeng 2012). While other research advocates "service with a smile," Han (2021) suggests selling with a straight face, as smiling may be off-putting as it lacks authenticity (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2006), reducing trust of the seller (Cheshin, Amit, and van Kleef 2018).

Han (2021) unobtrusively collected data on face presence and emotional displays and found that facial expressions, including happiness, adversely impact sales. Han's finding suggests that salespersons should sell with a straight face. In other words, livestream salespersons should broadcast their pitch with a stoic expression akin to that of news anchors. Genuine interactions involve less emotional and more neutral expressions, salespersons can make emotional connections with the audience with neutral expressions and lessen the insidious effects of sales resistance.

Han (2021) observed that the negative effects spread uniformly across the six emotions, exhibit U-shaped dynamics over an item's presentation span thus revealing that the largest sales resistance occurs during the middle of the presentation. This U-shaped sales resistance curve provides actionable guidelines for the streamers who may make the emotional displays at the beginning and end of presentations to help engage consumers and build rapport. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006) manipulated authenticity (i.e. surface or deep acting) and emotional intensity in simulated service encounters (i.e. actors played the role of employees) with 223 consumers to understand the effects on customer satisfaction, customer/employee rapport and loyalty intentions. They found that authenticity rather than intensity influences customers' reactions. Thus, we propose:

Proposition 2: Presentation skills are positively related to product belief.

2.4 Product Belief, Consumer Choice, Consumer Trust

Atmosphere and presentation skills invented by live streamers shape the product belief which can be seen as the initial trust in the digital conception. Product belief or initial trust is consumers' product perception which is often biased by preconceived ideas about product properties and is affected by the consumer's judgmental frame of reference.

If these preconceived ideas are concerned with what the product is, they are called perceptual or analytical expectations or product beliefs. If these ideas relate to whether a consumer expects to like the product, they are called hedonic or affective expectations or product attitudes. Product belief and product attitude are formed

on the basis of information provided by friends and family (word-of-mouth communication), the producer (advertising, product package), the government, and third parties like consumer organizations and pressure groups (publicity in the media) (Schifferstein, 2001).

Product belief reduces consumers' choice loads and lead to higher decision quality and satisfaction. Live streamers provide customers with shopping advice that is particularly helpful for complex products, such as cameras, computers and cars. Without proper support, consumers may be limited in their ability to evaluate products. The challenge of choosing a complex product the Web can be alleviated by an interface that informs and directs customers choices (Grenci and Todd, 2002).

Consumer trust develops when they gain knowledge about live streamers. This trusting belief that is formed after consumers first experience of a live streamer. Komiak and Benbasat (2006) and McKnight et al. (2002). RA, (internet-based software), provides advice based on users' needs, preferences, profiles, and previous shopping activities) and concludes one's perceptions about the RA'S competence, benevolence and integrity. We argue that the trusting belief of the RA can also apply to the live streamers. Following the notion of McKnight et al. (2002),

- competence belief is a consumer's perception that a live streamer has the ability, skills, and expertise to perform effectively in specific domains;
- benevolence belief is a consumer's perception that a live streamer cares about the consumer and acts in the consumer's interest; and,
- integrity belief is the perception that a live streamer adheres to a set of principles (e.g., honesty and keeping promises) that are generally accepted by consumers.

Consumers may intentionally choose products to reflect who they are or how they would like to be seen (e.g., they buy a Jeep to express a rugged identity). Consumers also infer others' expertise, strength of preference, and authenticity from observing the variety in their choices. From seeing someone select a varied assortment of chocolates, for instance, an observer may infer that the chooser is a chocolate expert (Sela et al. 2019). Thus, we propose:

Proposition 3a: Product belief is positively related to consumer choice.

Proposition 3b: Product belief is positively related to consumer trust.

Proposition 3c: Product belief is positively related to consumer identity.

2.5 Consumer Identity, Consumer Trust and Consumer Satisfaction

An individuals' social identities are meant to satisfy important needs and values, including self-esteem, security, and belongingness (Pratt, 1998; Tajfel, 1978). That is, individuals want to feel good about themselves, and one way many people attempt to do this is to associate

with collectives that are held in high regard by themselves and/or others.

The desire for positive self-esteem is fundamental to social and group identities and as such, group categorization involves a process of differentiation in which an “in-group” is favorably distinguished from relevant “out-group” (Abrams & Hogg, 1998). This social identification process is mainly served as a self-defining way to achieve self-consistency, self-esteem, and self-enhancement (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). In consequence, to maintain their favored social identities, people’s deep identifications with groups, organizations or other human aggregates lead to in-group favoritism and corresponding results such as enhanced commitment, intragroup cohesion, product and service preference, and group support behaviors (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003).

Live video streaming service distinguishes itself from other social media forms via the existence of broadcasters/streamers (Smith et al., 2013). Accordingly, the individual-based identification aspect is manifested as identification with broadcasters on live streaming platforms. Kelman (1961), defines this kind of identification with an individual as “classical identification” which means a person “attempts to be like or actually to be the other person”, and desires to “appease, emulate, and vicariously gain the qualities of others”. Identification with a person is similar to identification with a group (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). However, personal identification incorporates other essences including liking and admiration, perceived similarity, attitudes and beliefs adoption (Basil, 1996; Brown & de Matviuk, 2010; Brown, 2015; Katz & Liebes, 1990). Through social interaction, a member may identify with other audiences if he/she perceives the fit of values and beliefs between the group and him/herself. Users from the same audience group interact with each other mainly via text-based dialogues (Hamilton et al., 2014).

Consequently, the internalization of collective values, meanings, and standards, means viewers come to see themselves somewhat through the eyes of others and construct more or less stable self-definitions and a sense of self-esteem. A viewer’s identification with a broadcaster takes place when a viewer takes a broadcaster as self-referential in belief, personality, competence, and other aspects (Hu et al, 2017). Badrinarayanan et al. (2015) also indicate that identification with other members will lead to sustained participation and interaction on virtual communities. The sense of identity and interaction that sharing brings to other people will stimulate positive emotions and bring positive emotional experiences to users.

Accordingly, a viewer’s identification with a broadcaster takes place when a viewer takes a broadcaster as self-referential in belief, personality, competence, and other aspects. Meanwhile, audiences will subtly deliver their identity-related information and perceive

others’ identities in a form of collective group identity. In consequence, a member may identify with other audiences if he/she perceives the fit of values and beliefs between the group and him/herself. During their communication, audiences can exchange their ideas and thoughts about streams, broadcasters, and even issues unrelated to stream contents.

During this public construction of the self, stage-related and performance-related practices (Gofman 1959, Leban et al 2021) offers us alternative perspective. Stage-related consumption practices include the choice of props (consumption objects) and scenery (consumption venues). They support the symbolic construction of the self through the integration of more or less idiosyncratic symbolic meanings pertaining to the current surroundings (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2012) or through the classification of the self to others by displaying shared consumption symbolism (Belk, 2013). Performance-related consumption practices include the choice and enactment of scripts (consumption roles and behaviors) and discursive acts that facilitate a trustworthy staging of the self and interaction with others (Dion and Arnould 2016; Gofman 1959).

Connecting this framework with the hyper-public setting of social media influencers, we argue that the presented self needs to be reconciled not only on the individual level but also in the public eye. In the social media, including livestreaming, personal nature of influencers and the individual personality that characterizes the content. As Duffy (2017) argues in her book, “(Not) getting paid to do what you love”: Gender, and social media, bloggers’ success centers on their ability to position themselves as real and authentic, giving audiences a feeling that bloggers are “just like us” (p. 98). Because they are “just like us” and theoretically offer an amateur, self-taught perspective, bloggers occupy a space within the fashion industry that “simultaneously align[s] themselves with and against mainstream fashion culture” (p. 104).

Proposition 4a: Consumer identity is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Proposition 4b: Customer trust is positively related to customer satisfaction.

2.6 Sales Promotion, Consumer Satisfaction and Consumer Trust

Chandon et al (2000) define the benefits of sales promotion as the perceived value attached to the sales promotion experience, which can include both promotion exposure (e.g., seeing a promotion on a product) and usage (e.g., redeeming a coupon or buying a promoted product). Following the multi-benefit framework presented by Chandon et al (2000) we conceptualize six consumer benefits of sales promotions in livestreaming.

Monetary savings (*the saving benefit*) is one of the benefits of sales promotions for the consumer, for instance

by lowering the unit price of the promoted product, offering more of the same product for free, offering free gift packages etc. Sales promotion may also enable consumers to upgrade to higher-quality products by reducing the price of otherwise unaffordable products—that is *the quality benefit* (Chandon et al, 2000). Live streamers' recommendations often seem more reliable to consumers than conventional advertising and ultimately promote brand loyalty.

Because influencers in live streaming signal the availability of the brand at the point of sale and advertise its promotional status, sales promotions can reduce consumer search and decision costs and therefore improve shopping convenience.

In Chandon et al' words, *the convenience benefit*. Saving, quality and convenience benefits of sales promotion can be tentatively classified as utilitarian, because they help consumers increase the acquisition utility of their purchase and enhance the efficiency of the shopping experience and find and buy the best products (Chandon et al, 2000).

Sales promotion also can enhance consumers' self-perception of being smart or good shoppers which provides an opportunity to reaffirm their personal values and moral satisfaction—*the value benefit*, which can be classified as an intrinsic or hedonic benefit which provides intrinsic stimulation, fun and self-esteem. On the other hand, buying a promoted product can be means of increasing shoppers' prestige and achieving higher social status or group affiliation (e.g., becoming a recognized smart shoppers).

Because they create an ever-changing shopping environment, sales promotions can also provide stimulation and help fulfill consumers' need for information and exploration—*the exploration benefit*. In China, influencers' ability to steer consumers toward certain products is often referred to as zhongcao, or "planting seeds." For smaller brands, zhongcao offers *the chance of levelling the playing field against the top firms, since a product with comparatively little brand recognition can break through to a new audience through just a couple of endorsements from top stars*.

Finally, sales promotions are often simply fun to see or use—watching their favorite influencers' live stream became an important entertainment approach for young people in China—*the entertainment benefit*.

Sales promotion is a diverse collection of incentive tools, mostly short-term, designed to stimulate quick sales and/or greater purchases of particular products/services by consumers or traders (Blattberg and Neslin 1990). From the marketers' perspective, the most obvious benefit of a price promotion is that it can increase sales (Blattberg and Neslin 1990). The influencers in live streaming often convey sales promotion in the way that only limited quantities are available, counting down the time remaining

on the item before the next item is to be introduced and injecting such calls to action as "grab it before its gone."

Price discount promotions involving a limited purchase time are considered useful because "customers will feel regret if they do not buy within the limited purchase time" (Tykocinski and Pittman 2001). If customers make decisions within a modest time limit that does not cause them to experience time pressure, purchase intention may be enhanced as a result of "opportunity cost perception" (Tykocinski and Pittman 2001). However, if customers must make decisions within a time limit that triggers a sense of time pressure, anxiety, and worry, decision-making quality will be negatively affected (Payne et al 1998, Payne et al 2007).

It is in line with the prior research that price promotions can reduce perceived product efficacy (Shiv, Carmon, and Ariely 2005) and negatively influence consumers' enjoyment of post purchase consumption (Lee and Tsai 2014). More recently, Franklin and Lee (2020) showed that mere exposure to price promotions can cause consumers to act more impatiently in unrelated domains. Thus, sales promotions may entail potential long-term risks for firms, such as leading to brand switching, in which consumers switch to promoted brands of higher quality (Bell, Chiang, and Padmanabhan 1999). Consumers trust of brand is based on their conviction that the brand has specific qualities that make it consistent, competent and honest." (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001). Frequent promotion events may increase consumers' price sensitivity (Mela, Gupta, and Lehmann 1997) and may also undermine firms' brand equity (Yoo, Donthu, and Lee 2000).

Proposition 5a: Sales promotion is positively related to consumer satisfaction.

Proposition 5b: Sales promotion is negatively related to consumer trust.

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

"E-commerce live streaming" is regarded as the latest trend of e-commerce, and impulse buying is regarded as a key factor in the success of transactions. Many influencers manage their production in ways that traditional ambassadors never could. They are video editors, scriptwriters, lighting specialists, directors and the main talent wrapped into one. This production value, combined with access to the influencers' audiences, translates into value for the brands. The resulting "media impact value" (MIV) reflects how much a brand would need to spend to gain a given degree of exposure—itsself indicative of the expected return from a marketing drive. From the consumer perspective livestreaming offering on-demand, convenience, interactivity, and playfulness which positively stimulates consumers' perceived enjoyment. Their perceived enjoyment directly drives their intention to impulsively purchase (Lin, 2022).

According to the economists (2022), as well as new opportunities, influencers present new risks, especially for brands whose luxury identities rely on price discipline and exclusivity. Influencer-led live-streamed shopping events in China by Louis Vuitton and Gucci were ridiculed for cheapening their brand. There are more indirect costs to consider, too. A host of younger and more unpredictable brand ambassadors are harder for brands to control than one or two superstars on exclusive contracts with good-behaviour clauses. Though influencers' shorter contracts make them easier to replace should they step out of line, untoward antics can be costly. Before the latest clampdown Chinese authorities had already forced 20,000 influencer accounts to be taken down last year on grounds of "polluting the internet environment". Brands are reportedly cutting their influencer spending in China in response. Regulators around the world, as well as some social-media platforms, are beginning to clamp down on influencers who do not tag their content as advertorials.

While some luxury houses such as Hermès, the French purveyor of scarves and Birkin bags, maintains a social-media presence that is conspicuously influencer-free. But more feel the benefits outweigh the costs. Despite Louis Vuitton's and Gucci's live-streaming flops, LVMH and Kering, the brands' respective owners, continue to rely on influencers to create social-media momentum. Brand owners may be aware that they have to know how to play the digital game. If don't, "you are not going to be top ten for very long" (The Economists, 2022).

Top influencers are still enjoying strong bargaining power when negotiating with brands and manufactures, but in some regions, such as China, they are in a relatively precarious position due to various regulations and restrictions imposed upon them by the state, platforms, and industry associations. The influencers are frequently targeted in China's internet governance campaigns "for a more sanitary internet" and coerced to participate in social governance "for the creation of a better socialist society." The position of influencers in this governance regime has consequently enabled their creativity, flexibility, and resilience to "play on the edge" of recurring platform crackdowns and capricious government policies to survive in the ever-changing influencer industry (Xu, et. al, 2022). It is believed that the coevolution of regulatory policies and focuses, and the shifting performativity of influencers in China, also makes influencer culture fast evolving and the governance itself more complex than elsewhere.

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