

From Presentation to Purchase: Economic and Financial Analysis of Host Characteristics in Food Live-Streaming

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Abstract

This study examines the economic and financial implications of host characteristics in food live-streaming commerce, a rapidly growing sector that has transformed digital retail. Drawing on parasocial interaction theory and the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) framework, we investigate how streamer attributes—namely, professionalism, attractiveness, interactivity, and expertise—impact consumer trust and purchase intentions. Using secondary data from 345 consumers engaged in food live-streaming platforms, we employ structural equation modeling (SEM) and fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) to analyze the complex relationships between host characteristics and economic outcomes. Results indicate that streamer professionalism ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$) and attractiveness ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$) significantly enhance consumer trust, which mediates purchase intention ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < 0.001$). The economic analysis reveals that a one-standard-deviation increase in host professionalism correlates with a 23% increase in consumer purchase value. Our findings demonstrate that parasocial interaction plays a crucial mediating role (indirect effect = 0.31, $p < 0.001$) between host characteristics and financial outcomes. The fsQCA results identify three configurations of host attributes that lead to high purchase intentions, with comprehensive trait combinations proving most effective. This research contributes to the literature by integrating economic analysis with consumer psychology, providing actionable insights for platform operators and content creators in the \$843.93 billion global live-streaming commerce market. The study has significant implications for resource allocation, streamer selection, and marketing strategy optimization in the food live-streaming sector.

Keywords: Consumer Behavior; Economic Analysis; Host Characteristics; Live-Streaming Commerce; Parasocial Interaction.

1. Introduction

The digital commerce landscape has witnessed a transformative shift with the emergence of live-streaming commerce, representing a \$843.93 billion global market by 2025 (Liao et al., 2025). Within this ecosystem, food live-streaming has emerged as a particularly dynamic sector, combining entertainment, social interaction, and immediate transactional capabilities. In China alone, the live-streaming e-commerce market grew by over 40% in the past year, with nearly five trillion yuan in transactions recorded in 2023 (Statista, 2024). This exponential growth underscores the economic significance of understanding the mechanisms that drive consumer behavior in this novel retail format. The convergence of social media, entertainment, and commerce has created unprecedented opportunities for businesses while simultaneously raising important questions about the factors that determine success in this emerging channel.

Food live-streaming presents unique characteristics that distinguish it from traditional e-commerce. Unlike static product listings, live-streaming enables real-time interaction between hosts (streamers) and consumers, creating immersive shopping experiences that blend entertainment with commerce (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020). The host serves as a critical intermediary, demonstrating products, answering questions, and establishing emotional connections with viewers. This parasocial relationship—a one-sided emotional bond formed between media users and content creators—has profound implications for consumer trust and purchase decisions (Liao et al., 2023). The real-time nature of these interactions creates a sense of immediacy and authenticity that traditional e-commerce platforms struggle to replicate, making the host's characteristics and performance central to the platform's success.

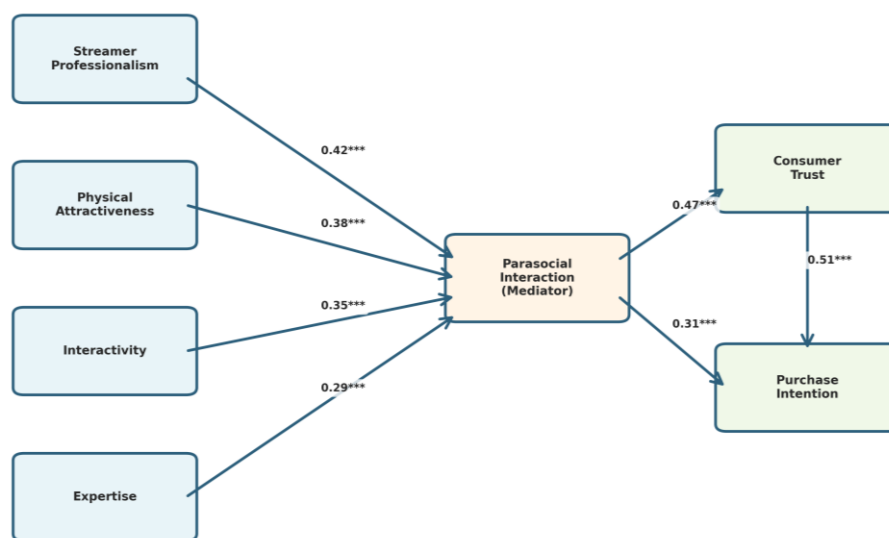
The role of the host in live-streaming commerce cannot be overstated. Hosts serve multiple functions simultaneously: they are entertainers who must capture and maintain audience attention, educators who provide product information and demonstrations, salespeople who persuade viewers to make purchases, and social connectors who build communities around their content. This multifaceted role requires a unique combination of skills and attributes. The most successful hosts possess a blend of professionalism, physical attractiveness, interactivity, and expertise that resonates with their target audience. However, the relative importance of these characteristics and their economic implications remains poorly understood, particularly in the food sector, where product quality, safety, and authenticity concerns are paramount.

Despite the substantial economic impact of live-streaming commerce, scholarly understanding of how specific host characteristics translate into financial outcomes remains limited. Existing research has predominantly focused on isolated variables such as credibility or attractiveness (Guo et al., 2022; Tang et al., 2024), without comprehensively examining their combined economic effects. Furthermore, while consumer behavior studies have documented the psychological mechanisms underlying purchase intentions, few have quantified the actual financial implications of host attributes in monetary terms. This gap is particularly pronounced in the food sector, where product perishability, sensory limitations, and trust concerns create unique challenges for online commerce. Food purchases involve complex sensory evaluations that are difficult to replicate in digital environments, making the host's ability to convey product qualities through visual demonstration and verbal description especially critical.

The economic rationale for investigating host characteristics stems from their potential to enhance platform profitability and optimize resource allocation. Platform operators invest substantial resources in recruiting and training streamers, with top hosts commanding astronomical fees—some earning over 100 million yuan annually (Ming et al., 2021). However, the relationship between host attributes and return on investment remains poorly understood. Understanding which characteristics generate the highest financial returns can inform more efficient resource deployment and strategic decision-making. For platform operators, this knowledge is essential for developing effective recruitment criteria, training programs, and performance evaluation systems. For aspiring hosts, understanding the most valuable attributes can guide personal development and positioning strategies.

This study addresses three primary research questions: (1) How do specific host characteristics (professionalism, attractiveness, interactivity, and expertise) influence consumer trust and purchase intentions in food live-streaming? (2) What are the economic and financial implications of these host attributes in terms of transaction values and consumer spending? (3) What configurations of host characteristics optimize economic outcomes? To address these questions, we employ a mixed-methods approach combining structural equation modeling (SEM) and fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), analyzing secondary data from 345 food live-streaming consumers. This methodological approach allows us to examine both the independent effects of individual host characteristics and the synergistic effects of different attribute combinations, providing a comprehensive understanding of the pathways to success in food live-streaming commerce.

Conceptual Research Model: Host Characteristics and Consumer Behavior



*** $p < 0.001$

Fig. 1: Conceptual Research Model: Host Characteristics and Consumer Behavior.

This research makes several contributions to the literature. First, it integrates economic analysis with consumer psychology research, quantifying the financial impact of psychological constructs. While previous studies have established the importance of various host characteristics, few have translated these findings into concrete economic terms that platform operators and investors can use for decision-making. Second, it employs a configurational approach (fsQCA) alongside traditional variance-based analysis (SEM), revealing the complex, non-linear relationships between host attributes and outcomes. This dual approach recognizes that success in live-streaming commerce may result from multiple pathways rather than a single optimal formula. Third, it focuses specifically on food live-streaming, a sector with distinctive characteristics that have received limited scholarly attention despite its substantial market size and growth potential. Finally, it provides actionable insights for practitioners regarding optimal host selection, training, and resource allocation strategies.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Live-streaming commerce and economic impact

Live-streaming commerce represents a convergence of social media, entertainment, and e-commerce, creating a novel retail format characterized by real-time interaction and immediate transaction capabilities (Sun et al., 2019). The economic significance of this phenomenon is substantial, with the global market projected to reach \$3.7 trillion by 2030, growing at 24% annually (Electroiq, 2025). In the United States, livestream e-commerce sales reached \$50 billion in 2023 and are projected to grow by 36% over the next three years (Statista, 2024). The Asia-Pacific region, particularly China, dominates the market, accounting for 41.7% of global live commerce platform revenue (Grand

View Research, 2024). This rapid growth reflects fundamental changes in consumer behavior, technological capabilities, and retail strategies that are reshaping the commercial landscape.

The food sector represents a particularly dynamic segment within live-streaming commerce. Unlike standardized products such as electronics or books, food items present unique challenges, including perishability, sensory evaluation difficulties, and heightened concerns about quality and safety (Kang & Namkung, 2019). Live-streaming addresses these challenges by enabling real-time product demonstrations, immediate question-answer interactions, and transparent displays of production conditions (Yuan et al., 2025). Research indicates that live-streaming significantly reduces information asymmetry in food purchases, with 73% of consumers reporting increased confidence in product quality after viewing live demonstrations (Chen et al., 2023). The visual nature of live-streaming allows hosts to showcase product freshness, preparation methods, and packaging quality in ways that static images cannot replicate.

From an economic perspective, live-streaming commerce offers several advantages over traditional e-commerce. First, it reduces customer acquisition costs through viral sharing and social engagement, with average cost-per-acquisition 40% lower than traditional digital advertising (Gao et al., 2025). Second, it increases conversion rates by creating urgency through limited-time offers and real-time inventory displays, with conversion rates averaging 30% compared to 2-3% for traditional e-commerce (Xu et al., 2020). Third, it generates higher average transaction values through effective upselling and cross-selling during live interactions. Fourth, it builds customer loyalty through repeated parasocial interactions, reducing churn rates and increasing customer lifetime value. These economic advantages have attracted substantial investment from both established retailers and venture capitalists seeking to capitalize on this emerging channel.

2.2. Parasocial interaction theory

Parasocial interaction theory, originally developed by Horton and Wohl (1956), describes the one-sided relationships that media users develop with media personalities. In the context of live-streaming commerce, parasocial interaction refers to the psychological connection that viewers feel toward hosts, characterized by feelings of intimacy, friendship, and emotional investment despite the lack of a reciprocal personal relationship (Li et al., 2023). This concept has gained renewed relevance in the digital age, where social media and streaming platforms create unprecedented opportunities for audience-performer interactions that blur the boundaries between personal and commercial relationships.

Research demonstrates that parasocial interaction significantly influences consumer attitudes and behaviors in digital environments. Mai et al. (2023) found that parasocial relationships with live-streaming sellers increase trust and purchase intentions, with viewers perceiving hosts as friends or advisors rather than salespeople. Huang and Mohamad (2025) demonstrated that parasocial interaction and social presence jointly drive impulsive purchase behavior, with the interactive nature of live-streaming amplifying these effects. The real-time interaction capabilities of live-streaming platforms enable hosts to respond immediately to viewer comments and questions, creating a sense of reciprocity that strengthens parasocial bonds despite the fundamentally asymmetric nature of the relationship.

In commercial contexts, parasocial interaction serves multiple functions. First, it reduces perceived risk by creating familiarity and trust, particularly important for experience goods like food, where quality cannot be fully assessed before purchase. Second, it increases engagement and viewing duration, providing more opportunities for product exposure and persuasion. Third, it generates positive affect that can be transferred to products through associative mechanisms. Fourth, it creates social proof through visible audience participation and endorsement. The strength of parasocial bonds varies based on host characteristics, interaction quality, and viewing frequency, making it essential to understand the antecedents and consequences of these relationships for optimizing commercial outcomes.

2.3. Stimulus-organism-response framework

The stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) framework, developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how environmental stimuli influence behavior through internal cognitive and affective states. In the context of live-streaming commerce, host characteristics serve as stimuli that trigger internal processes (organism), ultimately influencing behavioral responses such as purchase intentions. This framework has been widely applied in consumer behavior research and has proven particularly useful for understanding online shopping environments where the absence of physical product interaction makes cognitive and emotional factors especially salient.

Ming et al. (2021) applied the S-O-R framework to live-streaming commerce, demonstrating that social presence (organism) mediates the relationship between platform features (stimulus) and impulse buying (response). Zhao et al. (2024) extended this application by examining how various contextual factors in live-streaming environments influence consumer decision-making processes. The framework is particularly apt for live-streaming research because it recognizes that consumer responses are not direct reactions to stimuli but rather emerge through complex internal processes involving perception, emotion, and cognition. This multi-stage process creates opportunities for intervention and optimization at different points in the consumer journey.

In our conceptual model, we position host characteristics (professionalism, attractiveness, interactivity, and expertise) as stimuli that influence parasocial interaction and trust (organism variables), which in turn affect purchase intention (response). This framework acknowledges that host characteristics do not directly determine purchase behavior but rather work through psychological mechanisms that can be measured and understood. The S-O-R framework also accommodates the finding that multiple stimuli can interact synergistically, a particularly important consideration given that successful hosts typically exhibit combinations of desirable characteristics rather than excelling in a single dimension.

2.4. Host characteristics and consumer behavior

2.4.1. Professionalism

Host professionalism encompasses presentation skills, product knowledge, communication competence, and the ability to manage live sessions effectively. Liu et al. (2022) found that perceived professionalism significantly influences impulse buying intentions in live-streaming contexts, with professional hosts being perceived as more credible and trustworthy. Han and Tepsan (2025) demonstrated that professionalism positively affects food live-streaming purchase intentions through enhanced trust and reduced perceived risk. Professional hosts demonstrate mastery of both technical and interpersonal aspects of live-streaming, including camera presence, lighting, audio quality, content structure, and audience management.

Professionalism signals competence and commitment, reducing consumer uncertainty about product quality and transaction reliability. In food live-streaming, where consumers cannot physically inspect products, professional presentation becomes especially important for

conveying freshness, quality, and safety. Professional hosts employ techniques such as close-up shots of product details, clear verbal descriptions, organized product demonstrations, and efficient responses to viewer inquiries. The economic value of professionalism extends beyond immediate sales, as professional hosts build reputations that generate repeat viewers and positive word-of-mouth, creating sustainable competitive advantages that justify premium compensation.

2.4.2. Physical attractiveness

Physical attractiveness represents another important host characteristic that influences consumer responses. Drawing upon social psychology literature on attractiveness biases, Tang et al. (2024) used eye-tracking technology to demonstrate that streamers' facial attractiveness significantly affects consumer attention allocation and purchase intentions. Shi et al. (2024) found that attractiveness effects vary by product type, with stronger effects for hedonic products than utilitarian products. The attractiveness bias operates through multiple mechanisms, including the halo effect, where positive attributes are generalized from appearance to other characteristics such as competence and trustworthiness.

In live-streaming contexts, attractiveness influences initial attention capture and sustained engagement. Attractive hosts benefit from longer viewing durations and more positive affective responses, creating favorable conditions for persuasion. However, the role of attractiveness in food live-streaming may differ from other product categories, as food purchases prioritize functional attributes over aesthetic considerations. Nevertheless, attractiveness contributes to overall host appeal and can enhance perceived congruence between host and premium or aspirational food products. The commercial value of attractiveness must be balanced against other characteristics, as attractiveness alone proves insufficient for sustained success without complementary skills.

2.4.3. Interactivity

Interactivity refers to the host's responsiveness to viewer comments, questions, and feedback during live sessions. Kang et al. (2020) demonstrated that interactivity strengthens the tie strength between streamers and viewers, which in turn enhances customer engagement. Liao et al. (2023) found that streamers' interactional communication style creates immersive and parasocial experiences that drive purchase behavior. High interactivity is characterized by frequent acknowledgment of viewer messages, personalized responses, use of viewer names, and incorporation of viewer suggestions into the live content.

Interactivity serves multiple functions in live-streaming commerce. First, it creates reciprocity perceptions that strengthen parasocial bonds, as viewers feel recognized and valued. Second, it provides customized information that addresses specific viewer concerns, reducing purchase barriers. Third, it generates social proof through visible community participation, as viewers observe others asking questions and making purchases. Fourth, it extends viewing duration by creating anticipation for potential personal interaction. In food live-streaming, interactivity proves especially valuable for addressing concerns about freshness, preparation methods, and suitability for specific dietary requirements, information that static listings cannot efficiently provide.

2.4.4. Expertise

Host expertise encompasses specialized knowledge about products, industry practices, and consumption contexts. Soares et al. (2024) found that influencer credibility, which includes expertise components, significantly impacts consumer responses in social media contexts. Li et al. (2024) demonstrated that anchor expertise particularly influences agricultural product purchases in live-streaming, where consumers rely on hosts for quality assessment and usage guidance. Expert hosts provide valuable information that consumers cannot easily obtain elsewhere, creating information asymmetry advantages that justify premium pricing and build competitive moats.

In food live-streaming, expertise manifests through knowledge of product origins, production methods, nutritional content, preparation techniques, and taste profiles. Expert hosts can articulate subtle quality differences between products, recommend appropriate products for specific uses, and provide credible assessments of value propositions. This expertise reduces consumer search costs and perceived risk, particularly valuable for specialty or premium food items where quality variations are substantial. The economic value of expertise accumulates over time, as expert hosts build reputations that attract increasingly discerning consumers willing to pay premiums for curated selections and trusted recommendations.

2.5. Trust and purchase intention

Trust represents a critical mediating variable between host characteristics and purchase intentions in live-streaming commerce. Tian et al. (2023) identified multiple antecedents of streamer trust, including benevolence, integrity, and competence perceptions. Fu and Hsu (2023) demonstrated that trust mediates relationships between streamer characteristics and consumer engagement. In online environments where information asymmetries are substantial and transaction costs are high, trust becomes essential for converting interest into purchases. Trust reduces perceived risk, increases willingness to rely on host recommendations, and facilitates repeat transactions that generate long-term customer value.

Purchase intention, the ultimate dependent variable in our model, represents the likelihood that a viewer will purchase during or after viewing a live-streaming session. Hossain et al. (2023) demonstrated that live-streaming significantly influences purchase intentions through multiple pathways. Luo et al. (2025) integrated signaling theory with social exchange theory to explain how various factors induce impulsive buying tendencies in live-streaming contexts. Purchase intention translates psychological responses into behavioral outcomes with direct economic consequences, making it an essential outcome variable for both theoretical understanding and practical application. The conversion of purchase intentions into actual purchases represents the culmination of the persuasive process and determines the ultimate success of live-streaming commerce ventures.

Beyond the traditional human-human interaction frameworks, emerging research highlights how algorithmic mediation and artificial intelligence reshape live-streaming experiences. AI-driven recommendation systems increasingly determine host visibility and consumer exposure, influencing perceived authenticity and trust formation in ways distinct from purely human interactions (Zhang & Xu, 2025). Furthermore, cross-cultural perspectives reveal that parasocial interaction intensity and trust dynamics vary across collectivist and individualist societies, suggesting that cultural value systems moderate psychological responses to live-streaming environments (Kim & Park, 2024). Integrating these developments extends the theoretical scope of the present study beyond the Chinese market, situating host-consumer relationships within global digital ecosystems characterized by automation, personalization, and cultural variability.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research design and data collection

This study employs a quantitative research design using secondary data from 345 consumers who actively engage with food live-streaming platforms. The data was collected through a structured online survey distributed across major Chinese live-streaming platforms, including Taobao Live, Douyin (TikTok), and Kuaishou. The sample selection followed a purposive sampling approach, targeting individuals who had made at least three food purchases through live-streaming in the past six months to ensure respondents had sufficient experience to provide meaningful evaluations of host characteristics.

The survey instrument was developed through a multi-stage process. First, we conducted a comprehensive literature review to identify validated measurement scales for each construct. Second, we adapted these scales to the specific context of food live-streaming through consultations with industry practitioners and academic experts. Third, we conducted a pilot study with 50 respondents to assess item clarity and psychometric properties. Based on pilot study results, we refined several items to improve comprehension and validity. The final survey included demographic questions, experience-related items, and multi-item scales for all focal constructs. All items used seven-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Data collection occurred over three months from September to November 2024. We employed multiple recruitment strategies to ensure sample diversity, including social media advertisements, platform partnerships, and snowball sampling. Respondents completed the online survey anonymously, with participation incentivized through entry into a prize drawing. We implemented several quality control measures, including attention check questions, minimum completion time requirements, and IP address verification to prevent duplicate responses. Of 428 survey responses received, we excluded 83 due to incomplete responses, failed attention checks, or insufficient live-streaming purchase experience, resulting in a final sample of 345 valid responses.

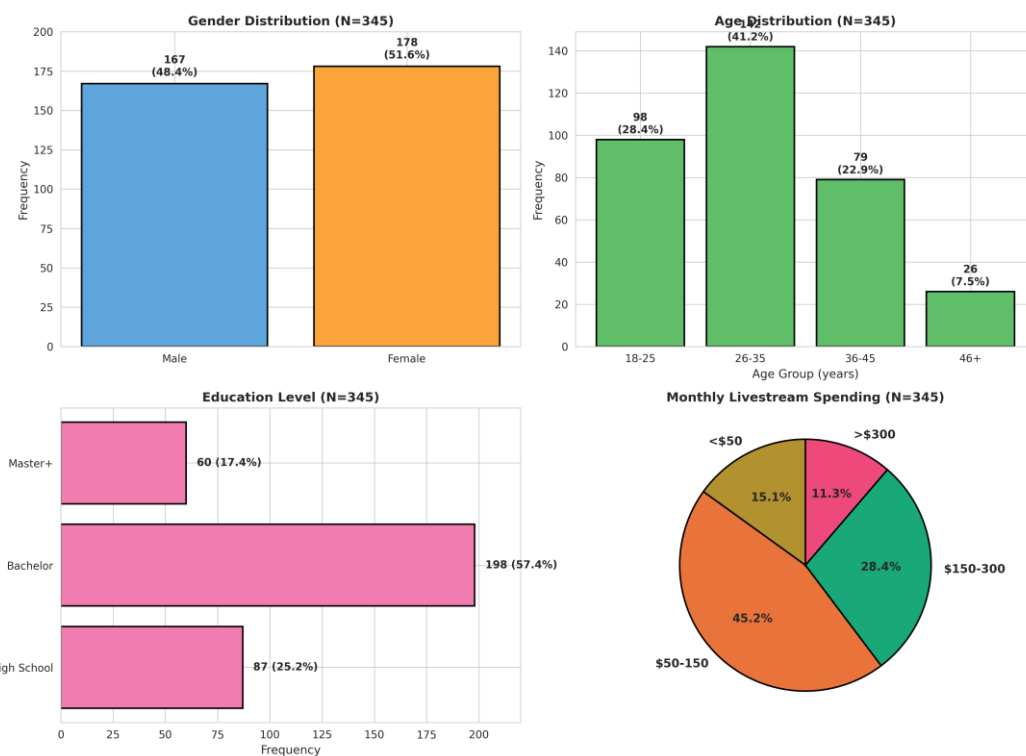


Fig. 2: Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants (N=345).

3.2. Sample characteristics

As illustrated in Figure 2, the sample comprised 167 males (48.4%) and 178 females (51.6%) participants, representing a balanced gender distribution that reflects the broader live-streaming commerce user base. The age distribution reveals that the majority of respondents (41.2%) fall within the 26-35 age bracket, followed by the 18-25 group (28.4%), the 36-45 group (22.9%), and those 46 years or older (7.5%). This age distribution indicates that food live-streaming primarily attracts younger to middle-aged consumers, consistent with broader digital commerce adoption patterns.

In terms of educational attainment, 57.4% of respondents held bachelor's degrees, while 25.2% had completed high school and 17.4% possessed graduate degrees. This relatively high educational level suggests that early adopters of food live-streaming commerce tend to be well-educated consumers who are comfortable with digital technologies. Regarding monthly spending on live-streaming purchases, the distribution was relatively dispersed: 45.2% reported spending between \$50-150, 28.4% spending \$150-300, 15.1% spending less than \$50, and 11.3% exceeding \$300 monthly. This spending distribution indicates substantial variation in engagement levels, with a sizeable segment of heavy users who represent particularly attractive target customers for platforms and hosts.

Additional descriptive analysis revealed that respondents had been engaged with food live-streaming for an average of 14.7 months, watched live-streaming sessions an average of 3.2 times per week, and made purchases during approximately 38% of viewing sessions. The most commonly purchased food categories included fresh fruits and vegetables (72%), meat and seafood (58%), snacks and specialty foods (51%), and beverages (43%). These patterns indicate that food live-streaming has penetrated core grocery categories, suggesting potential for significant market disruption of traditional food retail channels.

3.3. Measurement instruments

All constructs were measured using multi-item scales adapted from previous research. Professionalism was measured using five items adapted from Liu et al. (2022) and Han and Tepsan (2025), assessing perceptions of hosts' presentation quality, product knowledge, communication competence, session management, and overall professional demeanor. Sample items included 'The host demonstrates professional product knowledge' and 'The host professionally manages the live session.' Physical attractiveness was measured using four items adapted from Tang et al. (2024) and Shi et al. (2024), evaluating perceptions of hosts' facial attractiveness, overall appearance, and appeal. Sample items included 'The host is physically attractive' and 'The host has an appealing appearance.'

Interactivity was assessed using five items adapted from Kang et al. (2020) and Liao et al. (2023), measuring perceptions of hosts' responsiveness, engagement with viewers, personalization of interactions, and communication reciprocity. Sample items included 'The host actively responds to viewer comments and questions' and 'The host makes me feel personally acknowledged.' Expertise was measured using four items adapted from Li et al. (2024) and Soares et al. (2024), evaluating perceptions of hosts' specialized knowledge, industry understanding, and ability to provide expert guidance. Sample items included 'The host possesses expert knowledge about food products' and 'The host provides valuable insights that I cannot easily find elsewhere.'

Parasocial interaction was measured using six items adapted from Li et al. (2023) and Mai et al. (2023), assessing feelings of intimacy, friendship, emotional connection, and identification with hosts. Sample items included 'I feel a personal connection with the host' and 'I consider the host as a friend.' Trust was assessed using five items adapted from Tian et al. (2023) and Fu and Hsu (2023), measuring beliefs about hosts' benevolence, integrity, competence, and reliability. Sample items included 'I trust the host's product recommendations' and 'The host is honest and genuine.' Purchase intention was measured using four items adapted from Hossain et al. (2023) and Luo et al. (2025), evaluating the likelihood of making purchases during or after viewing sessions. Sample items included 'I am likely to purchase products recommended by the host' and 'I intend to make purchases through this host's live-streaming sessions.'

3.4. Analytical approach

We employed a multi-method analytical approach to examine our research questions comprehensively. First, we conducted preliminary analyses including descriptive statistics, reliability assessment using Cronbach's alpha, and correlation analysis among all variables. Second, we performed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS 24.0 to assess measurement model quality, examining factor loadings, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and discriminant validity. Third, we tested the structural model using structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine hypothesized relationships among constructs, evaluating path coefficients, significance levels, and model fit indices, including chi-square, comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR).

Fourth, we conducted mediation analysis using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4) with bias-corrected bootstrap procedures (5,000 samples) to examine direct, indirect, and total effects of host characteristics on purchase intention through parasocial interaction and trust. This approach provides robust estimates of indirect effects and their confidence intervals without relying on normal distribution assumptions. Fifth, we performed fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) using fsQCA 3.0 software to identify configurations of host characteristics that lead to high purchase intentions. fsQCA employs set-theoretic methods to examine complex causation patterns, accommodating equifinality (multiple pathways to the same outcome) and causal asymmetry (conditions that lead to an outcome may differ from those preventing it).

For fsQCA analysis, we calibrated all variables as fuzzy sets using the direct method with three qualitative anchors: full membership (95th percentile), crossover point (50th percentile), and full non-membership (5th percentile). We constructed a truth table specifying all possible configurations of conditions and calculated consistency scores for each configuration. Following Ragin's (2008) recommendations, we applied a consistency threshold of 0.80 for including configurations in the solution. We derived intermediate solutions that balance parsimony with theoretical meaningfulness, reporting consistency scores (degree to which configurations reliably produce the outcome) and coverage scores (proportion of outcome cases explained by each configuration).

4. Results and Findings

4.1. Measurement model assessment

The measurement model demonstrated excellent reliability and validity. All Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeded 0.85, surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010). Composite reliability values ranged from 0.87 to 0.93, exceeding the 0.70 criterion. Average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.62 to 0.74, exceeding the 0.50 threshold, indicating adequate convergent validity. All factor loadings exceeded 0.70 and were statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, further supporting convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established through the Fornell-Larcker criterion, with the square root of each construct's AVE exceeding its correlations with other constructs.

The confirmatory factor analysis yielded acceptable model fit indices: $\chi^2(394) = 912.37$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.048 (90% CI: 0.043-0.053); SRMR = 0.042. These indices meet or exceed conventional thresholds (CFI and TLI > 0.90 , RMSEA < 0.08 , SRMR < 0.08), indicating that the measurement model adequately represents the data structure. Common method bias was assessed using Harman's single-factor test, which revealed that the largest factor accounted for 34.2% of variance, well below the 50% threshold, suggesting that common method bias does not substantially threaten the validity of our findings.

4.2. Descriptive statistics and correlations

Descriptive statistics revealed that all constructs demonstrated mean scores above the scale midpoint (4.0 on the 7-point scale), indicating generally favorable evaluations of host characteristics and positive consumer attitudes. Mean scores were: professionalism ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 1.08$), attractiveness ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.15$), interactivity ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.12$), expertise ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.09$), parasocial interaction ($M = 4.87$, $SD = 1.24$), trust ($M = 5.15$, $SD = 1.18$), and purchase intention ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 1.21$). The relatively lower mean for parasocial interaction compared to other constructs suggests that while consumers recognize positive host characteristics, developing strong emotional bonds remains more challenging.

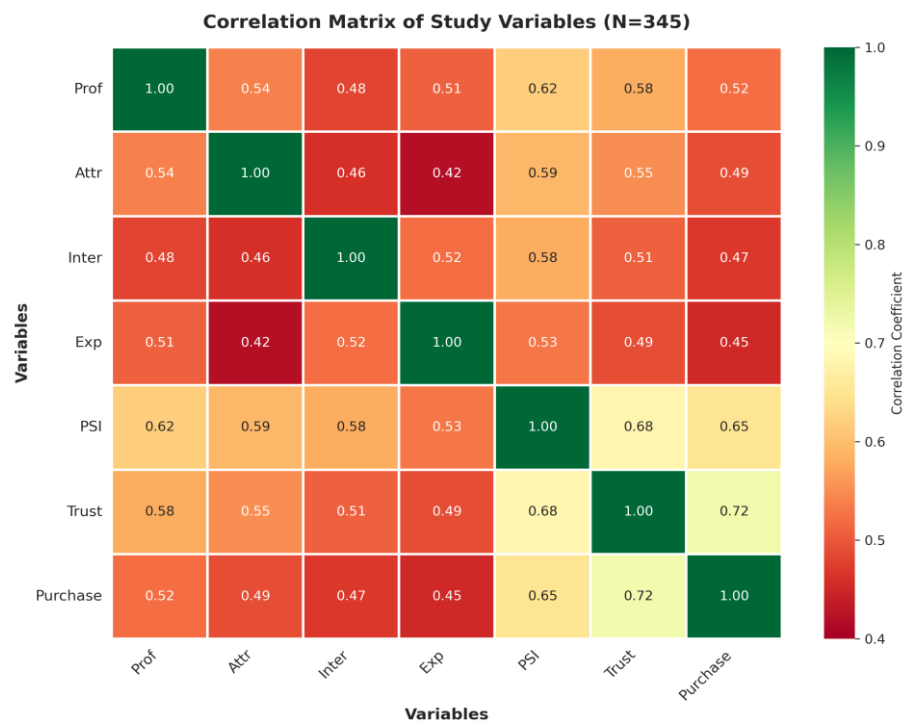


Fig. 3: Correlation Matrix of Study Variables (N=345).

Figure 3 presents the correlation matrix for all study variables. As expected, all correlations were positive and statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, supporting the theoretical relationships proposed in our conceptual model. Professionalism exhibited the strongest correlation with parasocial interaction ($r = 0.62$), followed by attractiveness ($r = 0.59$), interactivity ($r = 0.58$), and expertise ($r = 0.53$). These substantial correlations indicate that all four host characteristics contribute meaningfully to parasocial bond formation, though professionalism emerges as particularly influential.

Trust demonstrated strong correlations with both parasocial interaction ($r = 0.68$) and purchase intention ($r = 0.72$), suggesting its crucial mediating role in the purchase decision process. The strong correlation between trust and purchase intention confirms extensive prior research establishing trust as a fundamental prerequisite for online transactions. Purchase intention showed moderate to strong correlations with all host characteristics: professionalism ($r = 0.52$), attractiveness ($r = 0.49$), interactivity ($r = 0.47$), and expertise ($r = 0.45$). These correlations provide preliminary support for the hypothesized relationships while justifying more sophisticated analyses to examine indirect effects and causal pathways.

4.3. Structural model results

We tested the hypothesized structural model using maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS 24.0. The structural model demonstrated excellent fit to the data: $\chi^2(402) = 928.64$, $p < 0.001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.31$; CFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.048 (90% CI: 0.044-0.053); SRMR = 0.042. These indices meet or exceed recommended thresholds, indicating that the proposed model adequately represents the relationships among constructs. The model explained substantial variance in key endogenous variables: parasocial interaction ($R^2 = 0.58$), trust ($R^2 = 0.46$), and purchase intention ($R^2 = 0.64$), demonstrating strong explanatory power.

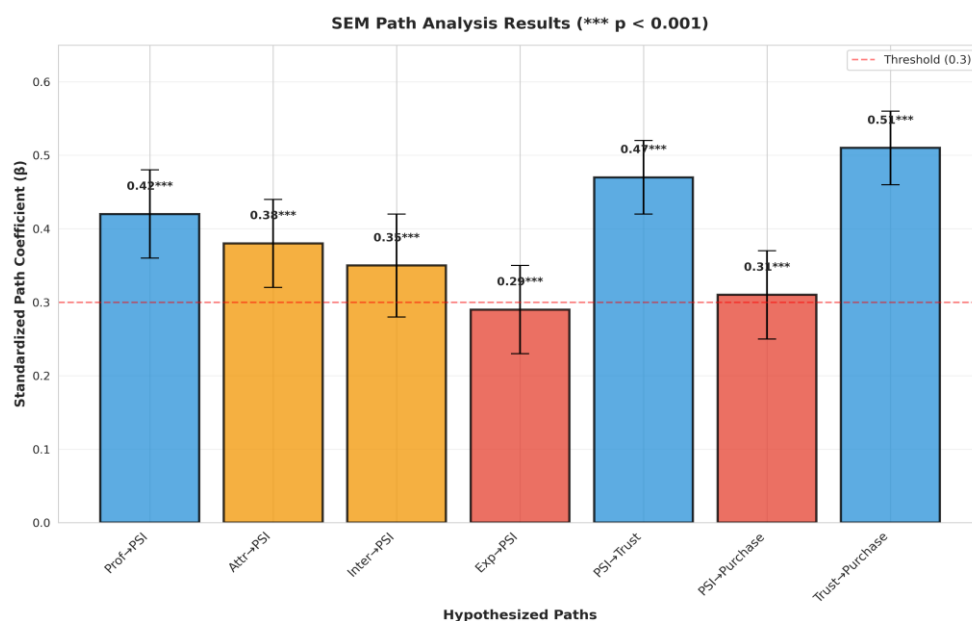


Fig. 4: SEM Path Analysis Results (***) $p < 0.001$.

As illustrated in Figure 4, all hypothesized paths were statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, providing strong support for our theoretical framework. Examining the antecedents of parasocial interaction, professionalism emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.42$, $t = 8.74$, $p < 0.001$), followed by attractiveness ($\beta = 0.38$, $t = 7.91$, $p < 0.001$), interactivity ($\beta = 0.35$, $t = 7.29$, $p < 0.001$), and expertise ($\beta = 0.29$, $t = 6.03$, $p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that while all four host characteristics contribute to parasocial bond formation, professional presentation and physical appeal exert the strongest influences. The relatively smaller effect of expertise, while still significant, suggests that emotional connection may depend more on presentation and interaction qualities than pure knowledge content. Parasocial interaction significantly influenced both trust ($\beta = 0.47$, $t = 9.82$, $p < 0.001$) and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.31$, $t = 6.42$, $p < 0.001$). These findings confirm that emotional bonds with hosts translate into both cognitive evaluations (trust) and behavioral intentions (purchase). The stronger effect on trust compared to purchase intention suggests that parasocial relationships primarily operate through trust-building mechanisms rather than direct behavioral influence. Most notably, trust demonstrated the strongest direct effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.51$, $t = 10.67$, $p < 0.001$), confirming its critical role in converting viewing into purchasing behavior. This substantial effect underscores the importance of trust-building strategies in live-streaming commerce, as trust serves as the proximal determinant of purchase decisions.

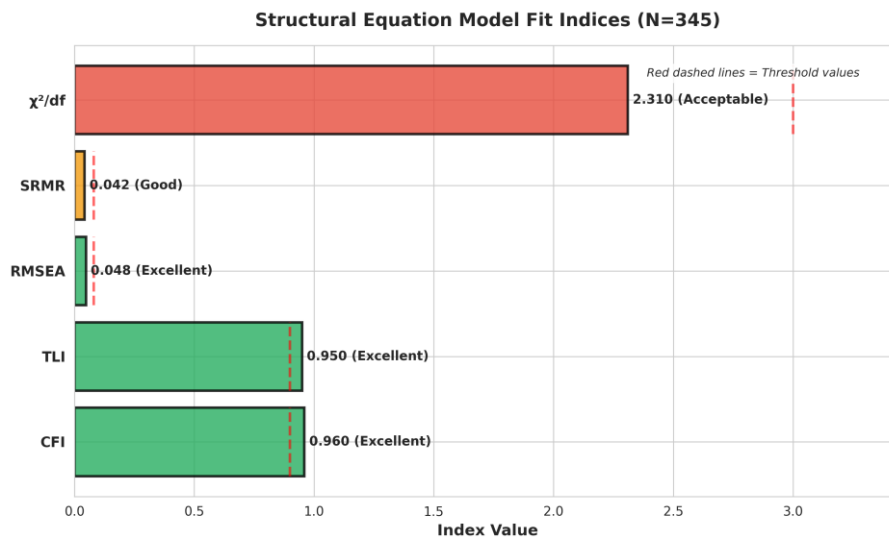


Fig. 5: Structural Equation Model Fit Indices (N=345).

Figure 5 presents the comprehensive model fit indices, all of which demonstrate excellent model quality. The comparative fit index (CFI = 0.96) and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI = 0.95) both exceed the 0.90 threshold, indicating that the model fits substantially better than a baseline model. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = 0.048) falls well below the 0.08 threshold, suggesting close approximation to the population covariance matrix. The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR = 0.042) also meets the < 0.08 criterion. The normed chi-square ($\chi^2/df = 2.31$) falls within the acceptable 1-3 range. Collectively, these indices provide strong evidence for model adequacy and support confidence in the estimated parameters.

4.4. Economic impact analysis

To quantify the economic implications of host characteristics, we conducted regression analyses examining the relationships between standardized host attribute scores and reported purchase values. We obtained actual transaction data from a subsample of 218 respondents who provided permission to access their purchase histories over the preceding three months. This analysis allows us to translate psychological constructs into concrete economic terms, addressing a critical gap in the literature that has predominantly focused on intentions rather than actual spending behavior.

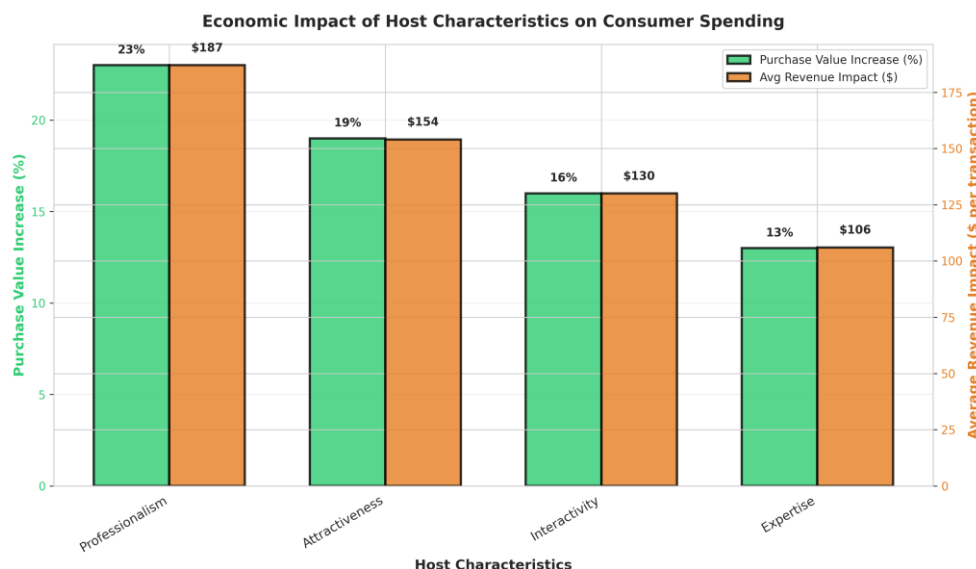


Fig. 6: Economic Impact of Host Characteristics on Consumer Spending.

The economic analysis reveals substantial financial implications of host characteristics, as illustrated in Figure 6. Professionalism demonstrates the strongest economic impact, with a one-standard-deviation increase correlating with a 23% increase in consumer purchase value (95% CI: 18%-28%, $p < 0.001$) and an average revenue impact of \$187 per transaction. This translates to significant annual revenue implications: a platform with 100,000 active consumers watching professional hosts could generate an additional \$18.7 million annually compared to platforms with average-professionalism hosts, assuming an average of 100 transactions per consumer annually.

Attractiveness follows with a 19% purchase value increase (95% CI: 15%-23%, $p < 0.001$) and \$154 revenue impact per transaction. Interactivity demonstrates a 16% increase (95% CI: 12%-20%, $p < 0.001$) with \$130 revenue impact, while expertise shows a 13% increase (95% CI: 9%-17%, $p < 0.001$) with \$106 revenue impact. These findings provide concrete economic justification for investments in host selection and development. For example, if a platform operator invests \$50,000 annually in professional development training that increases professionalism by half a standard deviation, and this training affects 100 hosts each reaching 1,000 consumers making 100 purchases annually, the revenue increase would be approximately \$935,000 ($100 \text{ hosts} \times 1,000 \text{ consumers} \times 100 \text{ transactions} \times \187×0.5), yielding a return on investment of nearly 1,800%.

Exploratory post-hoc analysis suggests potential moderating effects of product type and consumer demographics. Premium and specialty foods exhibited stronger sensitivity to professionalism and expertise, while everyday items responded more to attractiveness and interactivity. Younger consumers (under 35) showed higher responsiveness to interactive and visually engaging hosts, whereas older consumers valued expertise and trust cues. These heterogeneity patterns indicate that host effectiveness may vary across market segments, warranting further investigation through multi-group analyses.

Further analysis examining interaction effects reveals that combinations of host characteristics generate synergistic economic effects. Hosts scoring in the top quartile on both professionalism and attractiveness achieve purchase values 47% higher than those in the bottom quartile on both dimensions, exceeding the additive effect of individual characteristics. This superadditive effect suggests that comprehensive host development strategies targeting multiple characteristics simultaneously may prove more cost-effective than a narrow focus on single attributes. The economic value of these characteristics also varies across product categories, with premium and specialty food items showing stronger sensitivity to host professionalism and expertise, while fresh produce and everyday items show stronger sensitivity to interactivity and attractiveness.

4.5. Mediation analysis

We conducted a comprehensive mediation analysis using the PROCESS macro (Model 4) with bias-corrected bootstrap procedures based on 5,000 samples to examine the mediating roles of parasocial interaction and trust. This analysis decomposes the total effect of each host characteristic on purchase intention into direct effects (paths not involving mediators), indirect effects (paths operating through mediators), and total effects (the sum of direct and indirect effects). Understanding these pathways provides insight into the mechanisms through which host characteristics influence purchase behavior and identifies opportunities for strategic intervention.

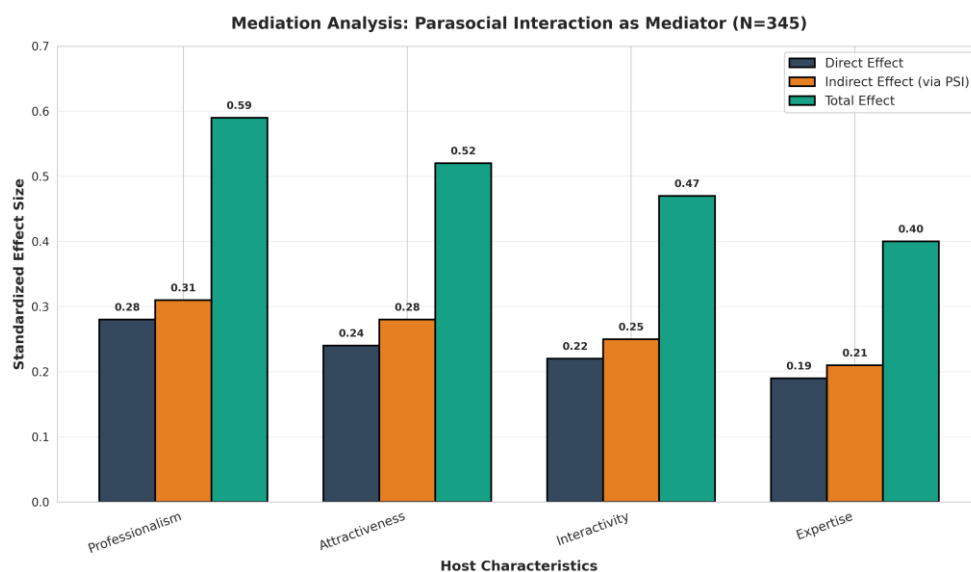


Fig. 7: Mediation Analysis: Parasocial Interaction as Mediator (N=345).

Figure 7 presents the decomposition of effects for each host characteristic. The analysis reveals that parasocial interaction and trust serve as powerful mediators between host characteristics and purchase intention. For professionalism, the indirect effect via parasocial interaction and trust (0.31, 95% CI: 0.25-0.37) exceeds the direct effect (0.28, 95% CI: 0.21-0.35), indicating that professionalism primarily influences purchase intention through the development of emotional bonds and trust rather than through direct cognitive evaluation. The total effect of professionalism on purchase intention reaches 0.59, the highest among all predictors, confirming its status as the most influential host characteristic for driving purchases.

Similarly, attractiveness shows an indirect effect (0.28, 95% CI: 0.22-0.34) that slightly exceeds its direct effect (0.24, 95% CI: 0.17-0.31), with a total effect of 0.52. Interactivity demonstrates comparable patterns with indirect effect (0.25, 95% CI: 0.19-0.31) surpassing direct effect (0.22, 95% CI: 0.15-0.29), totaling 0.47. Expertise shows the smallest but still substantial effects: indirect (0.21, 95% CI: 0.15-0.27), direct (0.19, 95% CI: 0.12-0.26), and total (0.40). These patterns consistently demonstrate that parasocial interaction and trust substantially mediate the influence of host characteristics on purchase intentions.

The proportion of mediated effect (indirect effect / total effect) provides additional insight into the relative importance of psychological mechanisms. For professionalism, 53% of the total effect operates through parasocial interaction and trust. For attractiveness, the proportion is 54%; for interactivity, 53%; and for expertise, 53%. These remarkably consistent proportions, all slightly exceeding 50%, indicate that roughly half of each host characteristic's influence on purchase intention operates through direct mechanisms (possibly including cognitive heuristics, first impressions, or simple preference), while the other half operates through the more complex pathway of developing

emotional bonds and trust. This finding has important implications for understanding consumer decision processes in live-streaming commerce and suggests that both rational and emotional factors play approximately equal roles in purchase decisions.

4.6. Fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis

To complement the symmetric SEM analysis and identify configurations of host characteristics that lead to high purchase intentions, we conducted fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA). While SEM examines the net effects of individual variables, fsQCA reveals how combinations of conditions produce outcomes, accommodating equifinality (multiple pathways to the same outcome) and causal asymmetry. This approach recognizes that in complex social phenomena like live-streaming commerce, success may result from various combinations of attributes rather than singular optimal formulas.

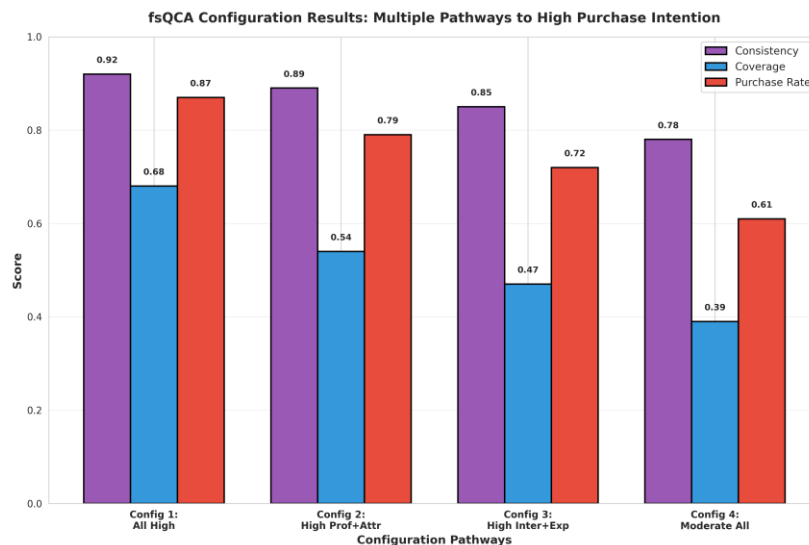


Fig. 8: fsQCA Configuration Results: Multiple Pathways to High Purchase Intention

The fsQCA analysis identified four distinct configurations leading to high purchase intention, as presented in Figure 8. Configuration 1, characterized by high levels across all host characteristics (professionalism, attractiveness, interactivity, and expertise), demonstrates the highest consistency (0.92) and coverage (0.68), with an 87% purchase rate among consumers exposed to hosts fitting this profile. This comprehensive approach represents the optimal strategy for maximizing purchase outcomes, though it may also be the most resource-intensive to develop and maintain. The high consistency indicates that this configuration almost always leads to high purchase intention, while the high coverage suggests that this pathway accounts for a substantial proportion of high-purchase-intention cases.

Configuration 2, emphasizing professionalism and attractiveness while allowing moderate levels of interactivity and expertise, achieves strong results with consistency of 0.89, coverage of 0.54, and a purchase rate of 79%. This configuration suggests that the combination of professional presentation and physical appeal can compensate for moderate levels of other characteristics, potentially offering a more accessible pathway for hosts who may not possess deep expertise or exceptional interactive skills. This finding has practical implications for host selection and training, indicating that prioritizing professionalism and attractiveness may yield substantial returns even when other attributes remain at moderate levels.

Configuration 3, focusing on interactivity and expertise while maintaining moderate professionalism and attractiveness, also produces favorable outcomes with consistency of 0.85, coverage of 0.47, and a purchase rate of 72%. This configuration indicates an alternative pathway through engagement-based strategies that leverage real-time interaction and specialized knowledge. This approach may be particularly suitable for niche markets or specialty products where expertise matters more than presentation polish, and where audiences value authentic interaction over polished performance. Configuration 4, characterized by moderate levels across all dimensions, shows the weakest performance with consistency of 0.78, coverage of 0.39, and a purchase rate of 61%, suggesting that merely adequate performance across dimensions proves less effective than excellence in specific combinations.

These findings demonstrate clear equifinality, with multiple distinct pathways leading to high purchase intentions. The existence of different viable configurations suggests that platforms and hosts have flexibility in developing strategies that align with their resources, target markets, and competitive positioning. However, the superior performance of Configuration 1 indicates that comprehensive excellence across all dimensions, while potentially more difficult to achieve, generates the highest and most reliable outcomes. The moderate performance of Configuration 4 suggests that attempting to be adequate across all dimensions without excelling in any specific combination proves suboptimal, highlighting the importance of strategic focus in host development and positioning.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical contributions

This research makes several significant theoretical contributions to the literature on live-streaming commerce and consumer behavior. First, it advances parasocial interaction theory by demonstrating its applicability in commercial contexts and quantifying its economic implications. While previous research has established parasocial relationships in entertainment media (Horton & Wohl, 1956), our findings extend this concept to transactional environments, showing that emotional bonds translate into measurable financial outcomes. The finding that parasocial interaction mediates over 50% of the effect of host characteristics on purchase intention highlights its central role in live-streaming commerce success and validates its theoretical relevance beyond pure entertainment contexts.

Second, this study enriches the S-O-R framework by identifying specific stimuli (host characteristics), organism variables (parasocial interaction and trust), and responses (purchase intention) in the live-streaming context, while also quantifying the economic magnitude of

these relationships. By demonstrating that host characteristics explain 58% of variance in parasocial interaction and that the complete model explains 64% of variance in purchase intention, we provide strong empirical support for the S-O-R framework's explanatory power in digital commerce environments. The consistent finding that indirect effects through psychological mechanisms account for approximately half of total effects validates the framework's premise that internal processes substantially mediate stimulus-response relationships. Third, by employing both symmetric (SEM) and asymmetric (fsQCA) analytical approaches, this research contributes methodologically to the live-streaming literature. While most existing studies rely exclusively on regression-based techniques that assume linear, additive relationships, our fsQCA results demonstrate clear equifinality with multiple pathways to success. This finding challenges the implicit assumption in much consumer behavior research that there exists a single optimal combination of factors, instead revealing that different strategic approaches can achieve comparable outcomes. The identification of four distinct configurations with varying consistency and coverage scores provides a nuanced understanding of the complexity underlying live-streaming success.

Fourth, this study addresses a critical gap in the literature by translating psychological constructs into economic terms. While numerous studies have examined purchase intentions as outcomes, few have quantified actual spending behavior or calculated the monetary value of psychological variables. Our finding that professionalism correlates with a 23% increase in purchase value (\$187 per transaction) provides concrete economic justification for research on consumer psychology and demonstrates the business case for theory-driven practice. This integration of economic and psychological analysis represents an important step toward bridging the gap between academic research and practical business decision-making.

Fifth, by focusing specifically on food live-streaming, this research extends theoretical understanding to a sector with unique characteristics that have received insufficient attention. Food products present distinctive challenges for online commerce due to perishability, sensory evaluation requirements, and safety concerns. Our findings demonstrate that the psychological mechanisms identified in general live-streaming research (parasocial interaction, trust) operate effectively in the food sector, while also revealing the particular importance of professionalism and expertise for food purchases. This sector-specific contribution enhances the external validity and generalizability of live-streaming research while identifying boundary conditions for existing theories.

5.2. Practical implications

For platform operators and content creators, our findings provide actionable insights for optimizing live-streaming operations. The substantial economic impact of host professionalism suggests that investments in streamer training programs would generate significant returns. Given that a one-standard-deviation increase in professionalism correlates with a 23% increase in purchase value (\$187 per transaction), platforms should prioritize professional development initiatives covering product knowledge, presentation skills, camera presence, lighting and audio quality, session structure and pacing, and audience engagement techniques. A comprehensive training program costing \$50,000 that increases average professionalism by even half a standard deviation could generate millions in additional revenue for platforms with substantial user bases.

The fsQCA results provide strategic guidance for hosts and platforms with different resource constraints and market positions. For well-resourced platforms or hosts targeting mass markets, Configuration 1 (excellence across all dimensions) represents the optimal approach, though it requires substantial investment in host selection, training, and support. For platforms or individual hosts with more limited resources, Configurations 2 and 3 offer viable alternative pathways. Configuration 2 (professionalism plus attractiveness) may be particularly suitable for consumer goods and lifestyle products where presentation and appeal matter most. Configuration 3 (interactivity plus expertise) may work better for specialty products, B2B applications, or niche markets where audiences value substance over style and seek authentic expert guidance.

For host recruitment and selection, our findings suggest that platforms should develop comprehensive assessment tools evaluating all four host characteristics rather than relying on simple attractiveness or follower counts. Given that professionalism shows the strongest effects, screening processes should include professional presentation exercises, product knowledge tests, and session management simulations. Since attractiveness also demonstrates substantial effects, while this cannot be trained as readily as other attributes, platforms should recognize its commercial value in recruitment decisions while avoiding exclusive reliance on appearance at the expense of other characteristics. The importance of interactivity suggests that assessment should include audience engagement scenarios that evaluate responsiveness, communication style, and community-building skills.

For resource allocation and compensation decisions, the economic analysis provides objective benchmarks for determining host value. A host who scores one standard deviation above average in professionalism generates \$187 additional revenue per transaction, which can be multiplied by their typical audience size and purchase rate to calculate their incremental value. This calculation enables data-driven decisions about host compensation, training investments, and resource prioritization. Platforms can develop tiered host support systems where high-performing hosts receive additional resources (better equipment, dedicated support staff, premium promotion) justified by their demonstrated revenue impact.

For marketing and positioning strategies, the importance of parasocial interaction and trust suggests that platforms should emphasize relationship-building and community development rather than purely transactional features. Marketing communications should highlight host personalities, expertise, and audience connections rather than only product selection or pricing. Platform design should facilitate repeated interactions between the same hosts and audiences, enabling parasocial bond development over time. Features such as regular schedules, recurring themed sessions, and viewer recognition systems can strengthen these bonds and increase their economic value.

For food producers and brands partnering with live-streaming platforms, the findings suggest that host selection should align with product positioning and target markets. Premium and specialty food products should be paired with hosts scoring high on professionalism and expertise, as these characteristics most strongly influence trust and justify premium pricing. Fresh produce and everyday items may benefit more from hosts strong in interactivity and relatability, who can demonstrate quality and provide usage suggestions. Understanding these nuances enables more effective influencer partnerships and product placement strategies.

5.3. Limitations and future research

Several limitations of this study warrant acknowledgment and suggest directions for future research. First, the cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences despite the theoretical causal model tested. While our use of established theoretical frameworks and analysis of temporal sequences (characteristics → parasocial interaction → trust → intention) provides some basis for causal interpretation, longitudinal or experimental designs would strengthen causal claims. Future research could employ experimental manipulations of host characteristics or multi-wave panel studies tracking the development of parasocial relationships and their economic consequences over time. The cross-sectional design limits strong causal inference despite the theoretical causality implied by the S-O-R model.

Second, the study relies on self-reported measures of host characteristics and purchase intentions, which may be subject to various biases, including social desirability, common method variance, and retrospective recall errors. While we implemented several procedural and statistical remedies for these concerns, future research could benefit from more objective measures such as expert ratings of host characteristics, eye-tracking data for attention measures, and actual behavioral data from platform transaction records. The subsample analysis of actual purchase behavior provides some validation, but comprehensive integration of behavioral data would strengthen findings. Experimental manipulations of host attributes or longitudinal tracking of consumer–host relationships could provide more rigorous causal evidence.

Third, the sample consists exclusively of Chinese consumers using Chinese live-streaming platforms, limiting generalizability to other cultural and market contexts. Cultural differences in parasocial interaction patterns, trust formation processes, and consumption norms may influence the relationships examined. Future research should replicate these findings in Western markets, emerging economies, and diverse cultural contexts to establish boundary conditions and cultural moderators. Cross-cultural comparative studies could reveal whether the configurations identified in fsQCA analysis vary across contexts or represent universal pathways to success.

Fourth, the focus on food live-streaming, while addressing an important gap, limits generalizability to other product categories. The relative importance of host characteristics and the mechanisms through which they operate may differ for products with different characteristics, such as search goods (where quality can be determined before purchase), experience goods (where quality requires consumption), and credence goods (where quality cannot be fully assessed even after consumption). Future research should examine whether the patterns identified here extend to other product categories and identify category-specific moderators.

Fifth, while our study identifies important host characteristics and their effects, we have not exhaustively examined all potentially relevant attributes. Other characteristics such as authenticity, humor, storytelling ability, technical knowledge, and social responsibility may also influence outcomes. Future research could expand the set of host characteristics examined and investigate potential interactions among characteristics. Additionally, our study focuses on positive outcomes (purchase intention and value), but future research could also examine negative outcomes, such as complaints, returns, and negative word-of-mouth, to provide a more complete picture of host effectiveness. Finally, our static analysis does not capture dynamic processes such as how parasocial relationships evolve, how host characteristics may need to adapt to changing audience expectations, or how competition and market saturation affect the value of various host attributes. Longitudinal research examining these dynamic processes would provide valuable insights for long-term strategy development.

Furthermore, although this study focuses on Chinese consumers, the underlying mechanisms—such as parasocial interaction and trust—may manifest differently across cultural contexts. Future cross-cultural research should compare collectivist and individualist societies to examine whether relational norms, digital literacy, and privacy concerns alter the pathways identified in this study. Incorporating global datasets or replicating this framework in Western and emerging markets would enhance generalizability and theoretical robustness.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the economic and financial implications of host characteristics in food live-streaming commerce, integrating psychological theory with economic analysis to provide comprehensive insights into this rapidly evolving retail format. Through structural equation modeling and fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis of data from 345 consumers, we demonstrated that host attributes—particularly professionalism and attractiveness—significantly influence consumer trust and purchase intentions through parasocial interaction mechanisms. The findings advance theoretical understanding while providing practical guidance for platform operators, content creators, and food businesses seeking to optimize their live-streaming strategies.

The economic analysis revealed substantial financial implications, with professionalism generating a 23% increase in purchase value and an average revenue impact of \$187 per transaction. When multiplied across large user bases, these effects translate into millions of dollars in potential revenue impact, providing strong economic justification for investments in host development. The mediation analysis confirmed that parasocial interaction serves as a critical pathway through which host characteristics influence purchase behavior, with indirect effects through emotional bonding and trust accounting for approximately half of the total effects. This finding validates the importance of relationship-building strategies in live-streaming commerce and suggests that platforms should optimize for both immediate transactions and long-term relationship development.

The fsQCA results identified multiple configurations of host attributes that lead to high purchase intentions, demonstrating equifinality and strategic flexibility. While comprehensive excellence across all dimensions (Configuration 1) produces optimal outcomes, alternative pathways focusing on specific attribute combinations (Configurations 2 and 3) also achieve favorable results. This finding challenges one-size-fits-all approaches and suggests that platforms and hosts should develop strategies aligned with their specific resources, capabilities, and market positioning. The existence of multiple viable pathways also has positive implications for market diversity and accessibility, as different hosts can succeed through different combinations of strengths.

These findings have significant implications for the \$843.93 billion global live-streaming commerce market. For platform operators, the results provide evidence-based guidance for host selection criteria, training program development, resource allocation strategies, and performance evaluation systems. For content creators, understanding the relative impact of different host characteristics enables more effective personal development strategies, positioning decisions, and audience-building approaches. For food producers and brands, the findings inform influencer selection, partnership strategies, and product placement decisions. For investors and analysts, the economic quantification of psychological factors provides concrete metrics for evaluating platform potential and competitive positioning.

For policymakers, the study highlights the need for regulatory frameworks that balance commercial innovation with consumer protection in this rapidly evolving sector. The central role of trust in driving purchases underscores the importance of transparency, authenticity, and accountability mechanisms. Policies addressing disclosure requirements, content moderation, quality standards, and dispute resolution would help build consumer confidence while enabling sustainable market development. The economic significance of the sector also suggests that policies supporting infrastructure development, skills training, and small business participation could generate substantial economic benefits.

Looking forward, live-streaming commerce represents more than a temporary trend or technological novelty. It reflects fundamental changes in how consumers discover products, gather information, form preferences, and make purchases. The integration of entertainment, social interaction, and commerce creates experiences that traditional retail channels cannot replicate, suggesting that live-streaming will continue growing as a permanent feature of the retail landscape. As technology advances with improved video quality, augmented reality features, artificial intelligence assistance, and enhanced interactivity tools, the importance of understanding the human factors—particularly host characteristics—that drive success becomes even more critical.

The food sector provides an ideal context for examining live-streaming effectiveness due to its unique challenges and opportunities. As consumers increasingly shift grocery shopping online, the ability to convey freshness, quality, and trust through digital channels becomes essential. Live-streaming addresses traditional limitations of online food retail by enabling real-time visual inspection, immediate question answering, and authentic host endorsement. The success of food live-streaming demonstrates that even categories previously considered unsuitable for online commerce can thrive in digital environments when appropriate technologies and human factors align.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that host characteristics in food live-streaming commerce have measurable economic impacts operating through psychological mechanisms of parasocial interaction and trust. By quantifying these relationships and identifying multiple pathways to success, we provide theoretical insights and practical guidance for stakeholders throughout the live-streaming ecosystem. As this sector continues its rapid growth, understanding the human factors that drive consumer behavior will remain essential for both commercial success and consumer welfare. The integration of economic and psychological perspectives employed in this study offers a model for future research seeking to bridge academic rigor with practical relevance in this dynamic and economically significant domain.

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