THE STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL OF CAUSAL FACTORS AFFECTING PURCHASING DECISIONS IN E-COMMERCE LIVE-STREAMING OF CHINESE GEN Z CONSUMERS

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Abstract

This research explores the relevant factors affecting the purchasing decisions of China's Generation Z consumers in e-commerce live-streaming. The researcher uses mixed methodologies, combining qualitative and quantitative research, using interviews and surveys to collect data. The sample consisted of 407 Chinese Generation Z consumers in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, with e-commerce live-streaming shopping experience in the past year, by using purposive and snowball sampling methods. Data were analyzed using Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) and Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling. The research results found that platform promotion, streamer attraction, consumer conformity psychology, and consumer personality needs have a significant and positive impact on the purchasing decisions of Chinese Generation Z consumers. Furthermore, consumer factors significantly influence purchasing decisions of Chinese Generation Z consumers, followed by platform factors. On the other hand, streamer factors negatively influence purchasing decisions of Chinese Generation Z consumers.
Keywords: E-Commerce Live-Streaming, Purchase Decision, Platform Factors, Streamer Factors, Consumer Factors

Introduction

In recent years, China's e-commerce live-streaming market has developed rapidly, and fierce competition has resulted in the emergence of many e-commerce platforms and streamers. Compared with traditional e-commerce, e-commerce live-streaming platforms can give consumers a more direct and honest shopping experience and stimulate them to make purchasing decisions more quickly (Zhao, 2016). In 2020, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, most people were isolated at home, and online live-streaming became a popular form of entertainment. Live e-commerce streaming has also become a safer and more effective way of shopping in China (Cai, 2020).

In 2023, the population of Generation Z in China reached 260 million. It indicates that Generation Z is a vital target consumer group that cannot ignored in the Chinese market. Furthermore, Generation Z consumers born with computers pursue quality and personality, less economic pressure, and are good at using mobile shopping and payment (Targamadzė, 2014). These characteristics give them strong spending power and make them essential participants in Chinese e-commerce live-streaming (Hu, 2020). Based on the literature of many scholars in China and abroad, researchers found that platform, streamer, and consumer factors are essential factors affecting purchase decisions in e-commerce live-streaming (Tao & Tao, 2020; Imaningsih & Rohman, 2018). However, there is still a lack of research that takes Generation Z as the research object in e-commerce live streaming in China.

For the above reasons, it is essential to explore and understand the factors that impact the purchasing decisions of Chinese Generation Z consumers. As one of the most populous provinces in China, Sichuan Province has solid economic vitality and an attractive population. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2021), the total population of Sichuan Province is 81.1 million, while the number of Gen Z consumers in e-commerce live-streaming is 11.391 million. Therefore, the research wants to study Gen Z, a large population with purchasing power in Sichuan Province, and an important target group for e-commerce businesses that purchase products through live-streaming.

Literature Reviews

Platform Factors

Platform information quality refers to the quality of information content and presentation forms provided by the e-commerce live-streaming platform to meet user needs, which includes the richness, accuracy, and timeliness of product information, as well as the novelty of product arrangement and interesting presentation (Yusuf & Sunarsi, 2020; Hu, 2020). Platform interaction refers to the consumers communicating with the streamers and other users through various forms and means in the e-commerce live-streaming platform. Interaction has the characteristics of high input from both sides of the communication, fast response to information, and diversified communication methods (Fu, 2009). Platform promotion refers to e-commerce live-streaming platforms, and merchants use various short-term incentives to stimulate and encourage consumers to purchase products or services. The most common promotion methods in live streaming include discounts, gifts, time-limited sales, prize draws, cash rebates, coupons, and so on (Zhang, 2018).

Streamer Factors

Streamer popularity refers to the degree of familiarity of e-commerce streamers to the public, mainly including social fame, fan effect, influence, etc. The number of fans and sales on the e-commerce live-streaming platform can measure the streamer's popularity (Li, 2021). Streamer expertise refers to the ability of e-commerce streamers to select products and recommend products, specifically including relevant product expertise, product understanding, product practical experience, and product sales skills (Zhao, 2016; Li, 2021). Streamer attraction refers to the personal charm of the e-commerce streamer. It is reflected in the form of appearance,

voice, personality, skills, live streaming style, etc, which shows the degree of consumers' love and recognition for the streamer (Gu, 2020).

Consumer Factors

Consumer brand loyalty refers to consumers who are still willing to purchase first, repeat purchases, or recommend the same brand products to others when there are enough alternatives in e-commerce live-streaming (Nawaz & Usman, 2011; Liu et al., 2020). Consumer conformity psychology refers to consumers making their judgments and behavior to conform to the ideas and judgments of the majority to seek social acceptance and identity (Xie & Zhu, 2016). Consumer personality needs refers to consumers seeking unique, alternative products with their characteristics based on public demand (Wu, 2015).

Consumer purchase decisions refer to the process in which consumers carefully evaluate the attributes of certain products, brands, and services and then select and purchase products that can meet specific needs after professional introduction and recommendation of products by streamers in the e-commerce live-streaming room (Kacen & Lee, 2002; Hu, 2020).
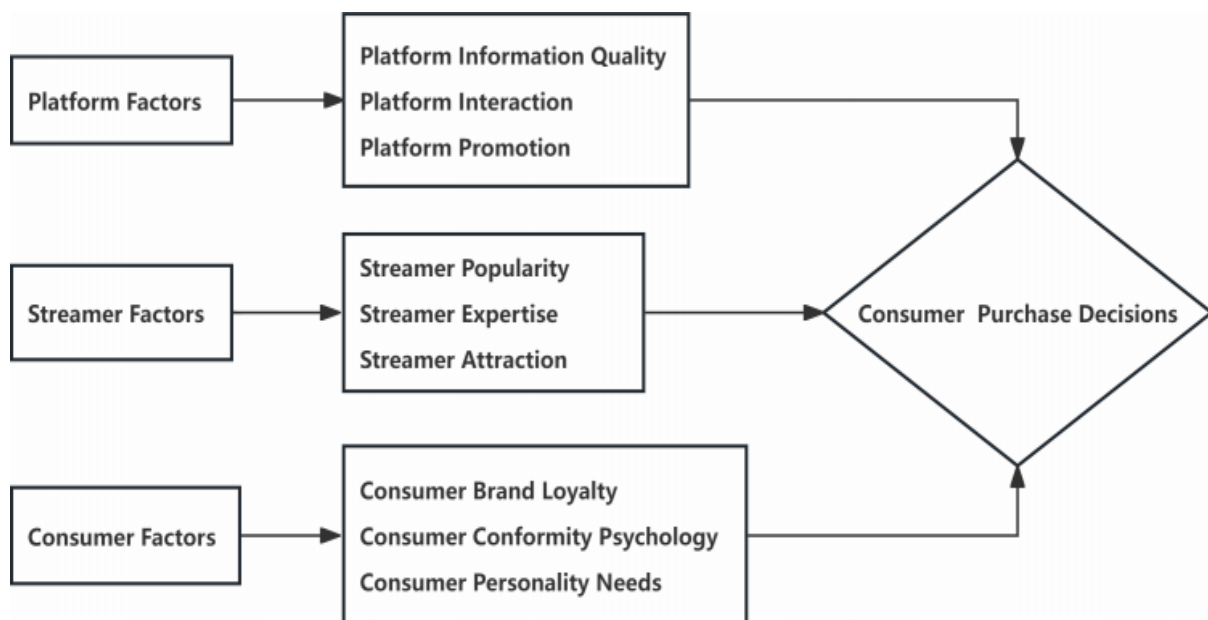
Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 Predict Factors on Purchasing Decisions in E-Commerce Live-Streaming of Chinese Gen Z Consumers

As shown in Figure 1, based on the relevant literature above, the researcher developed a conceptual framework to study the factors that may influence Chinese Generation Z consumers purchasing decisions in e-commerce live-streaming. Includes nine independent variables: platform information quality, platform interaction, platform promotion, streamer popularity, streamer expertise, streamer attraction, consumer brand loyalty, consumer conformity psychology, and consumer personality needs; one dependent variable is consumer purchase decisions.

Research Methodology

The research uses mixed methodologies, combining qualitative and quantitative research. The qualitative research organized 12 people in-depth interviews, which can enrich the questionnaire's content and make it more convincing. The quantitative research used the survey method and organized a questionnaire with a size of 407 people. The steps involved are as follows.

Population and Sample

1) In-depth Interview: Use purposive and voluntary sampling to select 12 people to organize an in-depth interview online. Inclusive factors of depth interviewees: Generation Z consumers lived in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, aged 18-27, with e-commerce live-streaming shopping experience in the past year.

2) Survey: Use purposive and snowball sampling methods to determine the sample size, following the formula of Yamane's (1973) sample was 400, but to increase the reliability of the research results, data were collected from a sample size of 407. Data samples will be collected through online questionnaires. To protect the privacy and safety of minors, the questionnaire's sample scope locks on Generation Z consumers in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, aged 18-27, with e-commerce live-streaming shopping experience in the past year.

Research Tools

1) Tools of In-depth Interview: The researcher designed the interview outline, including basic information and interview questions, based on a reference to the literature. Then, send them to IOC to verify the validity of the interview outline.

2) Tools of Survey: The questionnaires used checklists and the Likert Rating Scale. The questionnaire evaluates content validity by examining the Index of item objective congruence (IOC) by assessing three qualified experts. The results showed that the average scores of all questions in the questionnaire were between 0.66-1.00, which means the question was relevant to the topic. Then, the questionnaire was tested on 30 people to determine the reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The reliability score was 0.898, higher than 0.70 and considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2010).

Statistics Analysis

After collecting all the data, they are coded and analyzed in the computer for statistical calculations, including descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics indicates the results in percentages and means. Includes standard deviations to analyze the data related to the samples. The mean between 4.21-5.00 indicates that the degree of recognition is very high. The mean between 3.41-4.20 indicates that the degree of recognition is high. The mean between 2.61-3.40 indicates that the degree of recognition is medium. The mean between 1.81-2.60 indicates that the degree of recognition is low. The mean between 1.00-1.80 indicates that the degree of recognition is very low. In addition, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation, Multiple Regression Analysis, and Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) will be used to analyze the relationship between the variables. For the assessing criteria of the goodness of fit, the researcher determines p-value > 0.05, $\chi2/df < 3.00$, GFI ≥ 0.95, TLI ≥ 0.95, CFI ≥ 0.95, RMR ≤ 0.05, RMSEA < 0.8 (Hair et al., 2010).

Research Results

The demographic information concerns respondents' gender, age range, education level, occupation, and average monthly income. The majority of respondents in the current research are female. Most of the respondents have a bachelor's degree or equivalent educational level. Most are still students or work for government/state enterprises with a monthly income of less than 5,000 RMB.

Furthermore, Taobao is the favorite e-commerce live-streaming platform of the respondents, followed by TikTok and Pinduoduo. Most respondents have 1-2 years of experience watching e-commerce live-streaming. They keep the frequency of watching e-commerce live-streaming 1-3 days a week, and the duration of each time is within 30 minutes. Most respondents have 1-3 times e-commerce shopping frequency and spend less than 500 RMB in monthly e-commerce live-streaming. The favorite e-commerce live-streaming shopping category of respondents is clothing, shoes, and bags, and the primary purpose of watching e-commerce live-streaming is to buy products.

Table 1 The Mean and Standard Deviation of Platform Factors, Streamer Factors, Consumer Factors, Consumer Purchase Decisions

Platform Factors	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level of Opinion
Platform Information Quality	4.15	0.668	High
Platform Interaction	4.14	0.673	High
Platform Promotion	4.19	0.683	High
Total	**4.16**	**0.620**	**High**
Streamer Factors	**$\bar{x}$**	**S.D.**	**Level of Opinion**
Streamer Popularity	4.02	0.704	High
Streamer Expertise	4.13	0.663	High
Streamer Attraction	4.07	0.687	High
Total	**4.07**	**0.638**	**High**
Consumer Factors	**$\bar{x}$**	**S.D.**	**Level of Opinion**
Consumer Brand Loyalty	4.17	0.641	High
Consumer Conformity Psychology	4.02	0.710	High
Consumer Personality Needs	3.95	0.752	High
Total	**4.05**	**0.631**	**High**
Consumer Purchase Decisions	**$\bar{x}$**	**S.D.**	**Level of Opinion**
Consumer Purchase Intention	3.95	0.839	High
Consumer Purchase Decision	3.88	0.864	High
Total	**3.93**	**0.665**	**High**

As shown in Table 1, in platform factors, the respondents generally have a high level of recognition of platform factors affecting their purchase decisions in e-commerce live-streaming, and the mean score is high (4.16). In streamer factors, the respondents generally have a high level of recognition of streamer factors affecting their purchase decisions in e-commerce live-streaming, and the mean score is high (4.07). In consumer factors, the respondents generally have a high level of recognition of consumer factors affecting their purchase decisions in e-commerce live-streaming, and the mean score is high (4.05). Furthermore, the respondents generally have a high level of recognition of consumer purchase decisions, and the mean score is high (3.93).

Table 2 The Correlation of Platform Factors, Streamer Factors, and Consumer Factors on Consumer Purchase Decisions

Variables (X)	Consumer Purchase Decisions (Y)
Platform Factors	0.616**
Platform Information Quality (X_1)	0.524**
Platform Interaction (X_2)	0.585**
Platform Promotion (X_3)	0.587**
Streamer Factors	0.659**
Streamer Popularity (X_4)	0.600**
Streamer Expertise (X_5)	0.613**
Streamer Attraction (X_6)	0.628**
Consumer Factors	0.697**
Consumer Brand Loyalty (X_7)	0.627**
Consumer Conformity Psychology (X_8)	0.631**
Consumer Personality Needs (X_9)	0.624**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 2, platform factors have a significant and positive correlation with consumer purchase decisions, with a strong correlation coefficient of 0.616. Streamer factors have a significant and positive correlation with consumer purchase decisions, with a strong correlation coefficient of 0.659. Consumer factors have a significant and positive correlation with consumer purchase decisions, with a strong correlation coefficient of 0.697.

Table 3 Variance Inflation Factor in Multiple Regression Analysis of Platform Factors, Streamer Factors, Consumer Factors

Variables	VIF
Platform Information Quality (X_1)	3.303
Platform Interaction (X_2)	3.834
Platform Promotion (X_3)	3.442
Streamer Popularity (X_4)	3.556
Streamer Expertise (X_5)	4.679
Streamer Attraction (X_6)	4.633
Consumer Brand Loyalty (X_7)	3.601
Consumer Conformity Psychology (X_8)	3.101
Consumer Personality Needs (X_9)	2.594

As shown in Table 3, in the multiple regression analysis, the VIF values of the independent variables (X_1-X_9) are all less than 10, so there is no multicollinearity problem between the variables.

Table 4 Enter Multiple Regression Analysis of Platform Factors, Streamer Factors, and Consumer Factors on Consumer Purchase Decisions

	b	SEb	β	t	Sig.
Constant	0.674	0.164		4.096	0.000
Platform Factors	0.138	0.066	0.129	2.092	0.037
Steamer Factors	0.188	0.076	0.18	2.491	0.013
Consumer Factors	0.474	0.068	0.450	6.934	0.000

$R = 0.715$, $R^2 = 0.512$, $R^2_{adj} = 0.508$

As shown in Table 4, $R^2 = 0.512$, indicating that platform, streamer, and consumer factors can explain 51.2% of consumer purchase decision factors.
In enter multiple regression analysis, since the Sig. Value of platform, streamer, and consumer factors are all less than 0.05. It can be considered that platform factors (Sig. = 0.037), streamer factors (Sig. = 0.013), and consumer factors (Sig. = 0.000) all have a significant and positive impact on consumer purchase decisions. Furthermore, consumer factors (β = 0.450) have the most significant impact on consumer purchase decisions, with an impact weight of 45%. Followed by streamer factors (β = 0.18), with an impact weight of 18% on consumer purchase decisions. Finally, platform factors (β = 0.129), with an impact weight of 12.9% on consumer purchase decisions.
$\hat{Y} = 0.45 * \text{Consumer Factors} + 0.18 * \text{Steamer Factors} + 0.129 * \text{Platform Factors}$
As shown in Table 5, $R^2 = 0.509$, indicating that consumer conformity psychology (X_8), platform promotion (X_3), consumer personality needs (X_9), and streamer attraction (X_6) can explain 50.9% of consumer purchase decision factors. Standard. Error of the Estimate is 0.468.

Table 5 R Square and Std. Error of the Estimate of Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	R	R^2	R^2_{adj}	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.631a	0.398	0.396	0.517
2	.691b	0.477	0.474	0.482
3	.706c	0.499	0.495	0.472
4	.714d	0.509	0.504	0.468

a Predictors: (Constant), X_8
b Predictors: (Constant), X_8, X_3
c Predictors: (Constant), X_8, X_3, X_9
d Predictors: (Constant), X_8, X_3, X_9, X_6

Table 6 Variance Analysis Results of Stepwise Multiple Regression

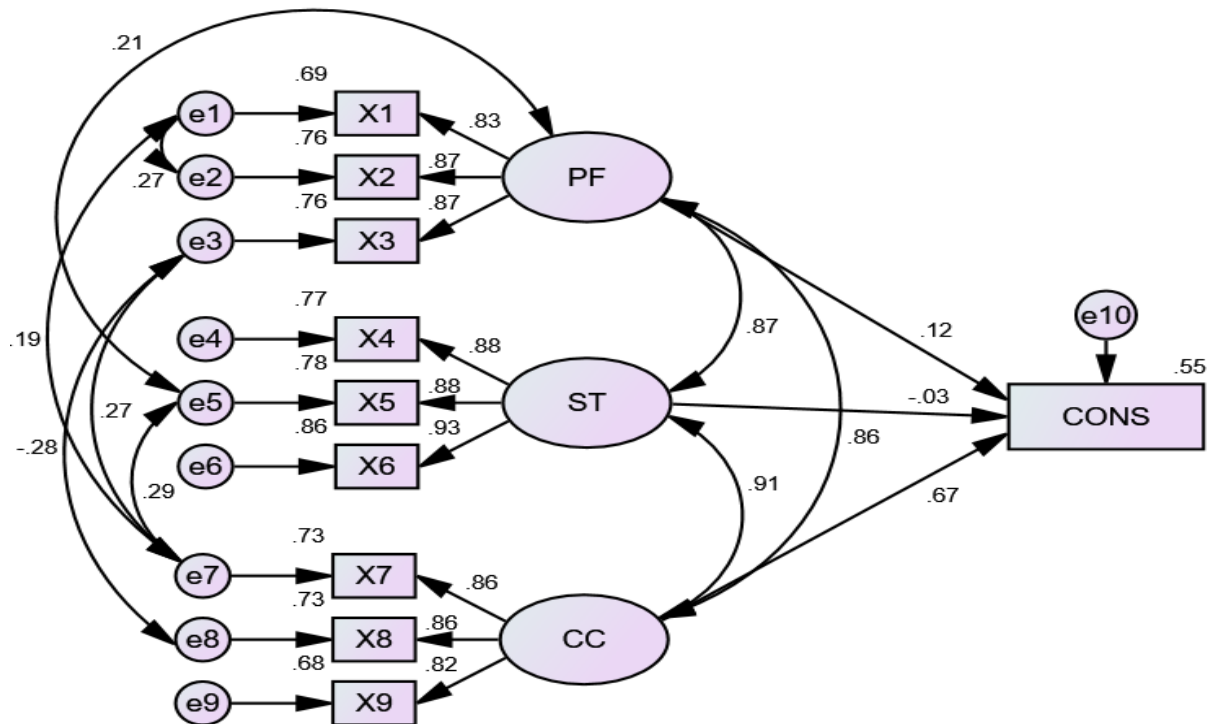|	Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
1	Regression	71.342	1	71.342	267.338	0.000
	Residual	108.079	405	0.267		
	Total	**179.421**	**406**			
2	Regression	85.550	2	42.775	184.095	0.000
	Residual	93.871	404	0.232		
	Total	**179.421**	**406**			
3	Regression	89.518	3	29.839	133.757	0.000
	Residual	89.903	403	0.223		
	Total	**179.421**	**406**			
4	Regression	91.347	4	22.837	104.234	0.000
	Residual	88.074	402	0.219		
	Total	**179.421**	**406**			

From Table 6, the research found that the Sig. Values of models are all less than 0.05, which is statistically significant. It indicates that there is a linear relationship between consumer conformity psychology (X_8), platform promotion (X_3), consumer personality needs (X_9), streamer attraction (X_6), and consumer purchase decisions (Y). Therefore, the research can create further equations.

Table 7 The Results of Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis

Variables		b	SEb	β	t	Sig.
Consumer Conformity Psychology	X_8	0.590	0.036	0.631	16.35	0.000
Platform Promotion	X_3	0.331	0.042	0.340	7.820	0.000
Consumer Personality Needs	X_9	0.205	0.049	0.232	4.217	0.000
Streamer Attraction	X_6	0.166	0.057	0.171	2.889	0.004

As shown in Table 7, the results show that consumer conformity psychology (X_8), platform promotion (X_3), consumer personality needs (X_9), and streamer attraction (X_6) have a significant impact on consumer purchase decisions, as their Sig. Values are all less than 0.05. Furthermore, conformity psychology (X_8, β = 0.631) has the most significant impact on consumer purchase decisions, with an impact weight of 63.1%. The second is platform promotion (X_3, β = 0.340), with an impact weight of 34% on consumer purchase decisions. The third is consumer personality needs (X_9, β = 0.232), with an impact weight of 23.2% on consumer purchase decisions. Finally, streamer attraction (X_6, β = 0.171), with an impact weight of 17.1% on consumer purchase decisions.

$$\hat{Y} = 0.631 * X_8 + 0.340 * X_3 + 0.232 * X_9 + 0.171 * X_6$$

P = .327, CFI = .999, TLI = .999, GFI = .987, RMR = .006, RMSEA = .016, Chi-square = 26.523 (24 df)

Figure 2 The Structural Equation Model of Causal Factors Affecting Purchasing Decisions in E-Commerce Live-Streaming of Chinese Gen Z Consumers After Adjustment

The results, depicted in Figure 2, show that after the adjustments, the calculated p-value is 0.327, $\chi2/df$ is 1.105, GFI is 0.987, TLI is 0.999, CFI is 0.987, RMR is 0.006, and RMSEA is 0.019. All these values meet the specified criteria. Further examination of the factor weights found that all factors exceeded the 0.35 threshold. Therefore, it concluded that the newly adjusted model fits the empirical data well. The developed model aligns with the observational data, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8 Standardized Regression Weights (λ), Squared Multiple Correlation (R2) of Causal Factors Affecting Purchasing Decisions in E-Commerce Live-Streaming of Chinese Gen Z Consumers

Indicator		Factor	Standardized Regression Weights (λ)		Squared Multiple Correlation (R2)		Model Fit			Cut-off Value Requirement
			Before	After	Before	After	Indices	Before	After	
X_1	<---	PF	0.87	0.83	0.75	0.69	$\chi2/df$	4.269	1.105	< 3.00
X_2	<---	PF	0.90	0.87	0.81	0.76	p	0.000	0.327	> 0.05
X_3	<---	PF	0.86	0.87	0.74	0.76	CFI	0.974	0.987	≥ 0.95
X_4	<---	ST	0.86	0.88	0.74	0.77	TLI	0.961	0.999	≥ 0.95
X_5	<---	ST	0.91	0.88	0.82	0.78	GFI	0.939	0.987	≥ 0.95
X_6	<---	ST	0.92	0.93	0.84	0.86	RMR	0.12	0.006	≤ 0.05
X_7	<---	CC	0.87	0.86	0.76	0.73	RMSEA	0.090	0.019	< 0.8
X_8	<---	CC	0.84	0.86	0.71	0.73				
X_9	<---	CC	0.82	0.82	0.67	0.68				

Therefore, the research concludes that the structural equation model of causal factors affecting purchasing decisions in e-commerce live-streaming of Chinese Gen Z consumers indicates that

consumer factors ($\lambda = 0.67$) significantly influence purchasing decisions, followed by platform factors ($\lambda = 0.12$). On the other hand, streamer factors ($\lambda = -0.3$) negatively influence consumer purchasing decisions.

Conclusion and Discussion

Stepwise multiple regression analysis reveals that platform promotion, streamer attraction, consumer conformity psychology, and consumer personality needs have a significant and positive impact on the purchasing decisions of Chinese Generation Z consumers. This conclusion aligns with previous research findings, indicating that Generation Z consumers, despite their young age and limited income, possess substantial spending power, leveraging platform promotions to acquire cost-effective products effectively. Studies by Zhang (2018) and Yusuf & Sunarsi (2020) reinforce the positive impact of promotions on purchasing decisions, while Li (2021) highlights the influence of attractive streamers on consumer attention and product curiosity. Moreover, Gu (2020) underscores the role of live streamer characteristics, such as attractiveness and credibility, in shaping consumer values and purchase choices. Additionally, consumer behavior trends suggest a significant inclination among Generation Z consumers to follow crowd opinions and personalized consumption patterns, as noted in research by Xie & Zhu (2016) and Ba (2018).

The findings derived from the structural equation model of causal factors affecting purchasing decisions in e-commerce live-streaming of Chinese Gen Z consumers indicates that consumer factors significantly influence purchasing decisions, followed by platform factors. On the other hand, streamer factors negatively influence consumer purchasing decisions.

This finding reveals that Chinese Generation Z consumers base their purchases on personal needs. They proactively communicate with streamers and fellow consumers to fulfill social and recognition needs while following herd consumption in e-commerce live-streaming. Their personalized choices, driven by aesthetic preferences, reinforce self-confidence and identity (Wu, 2015). This research also reveals a negative impact of streamer factors on Chinese Generation Z consumers' purchasing decisions in e-commerce live-streaming, echoing findings from scholars such as Liu et al. (2020) and Dhanesh & Duthler (2019). Furthermore, the research emphasizes that consumer dissatisfaction with a streamer's language or behavior can deter product purchases, underscoring the sensitivity of the consumer-streamer relationship to every action and word.

Knowledge from Research to Development

The research believes that in e-commerce live-streaming, the streamer attraction is a double-edged sword. Generation Z consumers will like certain streamers because of their preferences and directional consumption behaviors. However, when the streamer has tax evasion, poor service attitude, inappropriate remarks, or other adverse events that damage their image, Chinese Generation Z consumers will resist streamers and the products they recommend. In this case, the streamer attraction will negatively impact on the purchasing decisions of Chinese Generation Z consumers.
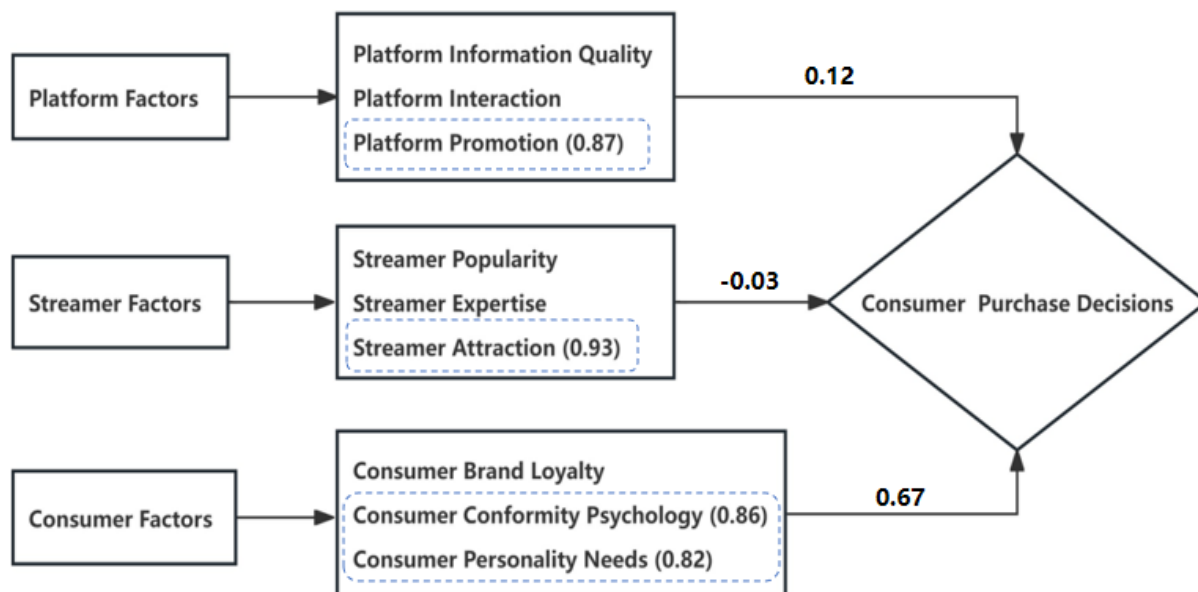
Figure 3 Factors Significantly Affecting Purchasing Decisions in E-Commerce Live-Streaming of Chinese Gen Z Consumers

Suggestions

The research provides rational suggestions for the Chinese e-commerce live-streaming market. Platforms and streamers should be emphasized further in the following aspects. Firstly, platforms and streamers should recommend popular products with good reviews in live-streaming to influence Generation Z consumers. They should also offer personalized products reflecting consumers' styles and maintain close relationships with fans through exclusive benefits to enhance loyalty and intimacy. Secondly, streamers must enhance their appeal and aesthetic to engage Generation Z consumers. They should become opinion leaders in specific product fields, boosting credibility in recommendations. Thirdly, platforms should provide various forms of promotion, which can help Generation Z consumers choose the cost-effective purchase plan.

Other factors, such as product quality, logistics speed, platform services, etc., were not explored in this research and are still worth exploring in future research. In more depth and details of the results, future researchers can choose other generations for research or conduct comparative research on the same generation in different countries.

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