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Live streaming: self-presentation and interaction practices embedded in daily life

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The article aims to explore the potential trajectory of live streaming entering users' daily lives in the era of mobile internet, as well as the social roles it plays in users' practical lives. The article adopts a practical approach to media research, conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with 10 streamers and 10 viewers, and performing online participant observation based on ethnography of the live streaming of the interviewed streamers. The findings reveal that advancements in communication technology empower users, facilitating the integration of live streaming into daily life and reshaping lifestyles. In a context where everything can be streamed, the pursuit of user values becomes an intrinsic driving force for participation in live streaming. Additionally, the interactions built around live streaming have transcended traditional notions of virtual socialization, evolving into practical interaction practices. The study concludes that live streaming has become a new mode of living for people, with the logic of streaming embedded in daily actions, endowing individuals with an imagination of fame and creating rich social realities.

KEYWORDS

live streaming, streamers, viewers, technological empowerment, social recognition

Introduction

"Did you surf the internet today?" Once upon a time, the act of going online represented a way of life, with a relatively clear distinction between online and offline. Today, that boundary has become blurred; being online 24/7 has become the norm, and people have truly become netizens. Perhaps, in today's context, it would be more appropriate to change the question to "Did you livestream today?" Since its inception, online live streaming has undergone several years of evolution, transitioning from initial showcase live broadcasts and game streaming to shopping live streams, outdoor broadcasts, and now to travel and education live streaming. It can be said that online live streaming has achieved a comprehensive scanning of all scenarios, with the notion that everything can be live-streamed, leading to a live-streamed representation of daily life.

According to the "55th Statistical Report on the Development of Internet in China," by December 2024, the number of online live streaming users in China reached 833 million, accounting for 75.2% of the total internet users, meaning that over 70% of internet users are engaged in the practice of online live streaming. Live streaming has become an important part of people's daily life practices; whether watching live streams or hosting their own, live streaming as a practical activity has fully permeated people's real lives.

Starting from the initial entertainment live streaming, online broadcasting has rapidly grown into an essential part of people's work, study, and daily life within just a few years. The term "online streamer" once seemed somewhat distant from ordinary people, but today, it can be said that anyone can become a streamer. Generally speaking, online streamer refer to internet users who are active on various online platforms, performing spontaneous acts such

as singing, dancing, or gaming, or engaging in live commerce and showcasing their daily lives. Online streamers have evolved from being internet celebrities who showcase their talents in performance venues to everyone streamer who participate in content co-creation today (Ji, 2025). Online streamers may possess talents, specialize in a particular field, or excel at being quirky; as long as they are willing, they can go live. If one knows how to manage their presence, they might even gain a large following and have their own fan club, experiencing the feeling of being a star. In the era of mobile internet, people can broadcast anytime and anywhere; whether shopping, working, or exercising, live streaming can take place in various scenarios, and real life has begun to take on a live-streamed daily routine: I stream, therefore I exist. At the same time, watching live streams has become a typical form of media engagement for users today, following their favorite streamers, seeking interaction in the chat room, and even giving gifts as rewards. For viewers, online live streaming has also reshaped their lifestyle, opening a window to another world, and watching live streams has become an important part of their daily life practices.

Unlike the competitive live streaming and talent shows of early PC platforms, daily live streaming, which is supported by mobile internet and accessed through smartphones, has become a norm for some people's lives. Daily live streaming refers to the diverse presentation and display of life content from vibrant individuals, ranging from the mundane surface of everyday life to the less observable aspects of their behind-the-scenes existence, captured through the lens (Wang, 2018). Unlike "companion-style interactive live streaming" and "fragmented video recordings," in daily live streaming, live streaming becomes the main thread of internet users' lives, allowing them to live within the context of the live streaming and build their daily routines around it. As actors, individual streamers occupy a central position within the network system established by live streaming. This is evident not only in the interactive relationships between streamers and their fans in the live broadcast rooms but also in how the daily lives of streamers influence the schedules of their fans. "Due to the synchronous requirements of interactions through live streaming, the delays in daily life online are rearranged." Fans watching live streams have developed a habit and hobby, especially the admiration for their favorite streamers, which has deeply ingrained itself in their consciousness and actions. In this process, daily live streaming has become a representation of contemporary online broadcasting (Zhang and Luo, 2019). For both streamers and viewers, there is a media logic that follows a live streaming format, constructing their real lives through it.

The most significant difference between a live-streaming-oriented lifestyle and a normal lifestyle lies in the live-streaming logic it follows. A normal life typically adheres to a relatively stable sequence of work and leisure, while a life based on live streaming dissolves the temporal boundaries of traditional living. For instance, streamers segment their time units according to their live-streaming schedules. Both lifestyles have a demand for temporal synchronization, but daily live streaming reconstructs the logic of time and space configuration through media. The formation of daily live streaming is by no means an overnight phenomenon. This article aims to explore the journey of users incorporating live streaming into their daily lives through research, in order to objectively present the internal mechanisms and developmental motivations behind the rise of daily online live streaming.

Literature review and research questions

Since the emergence of online live streaming, academic discussions surrounding it have already begun, primarily encompassing the following research topics. Overview of online live streaming research: this type of research focuses on the topic of online live streaming, conducting a comprehensive exploration of its current development status, alienation risks, and coping strategies (Xu, 2018; Wang, 2021; Yu et al., 2021; Chen, 2022). Research on online live streaming platforms: this research examines online live streaming platforms, discussing the logic behind the rise of these platforms, behavioral deviations, and regulatory guidance (Zhang and Song, 2019; He, 2020; Tang and Xie, 2023). Research on online streamers: this type of research focuses on the group of online streamers, exploring topics related to the roles of streamers, normative deviations, and self-construction (Zhang, 2022; Chen and Wang, 2023; Wei, 2024). Others concentrate on labor of online streamers, analyzing the digital labor performed by streamers on live streaming platforms and exploring the process, nature, and fundamental characteristics of their live-streaming labor (Lv, 2021; Zhou et al., 2021; Jiang, 2025).

Research on online live streaming viewers: as important participants in online live streaming, the study of viewers (fans) is also a significant topic of interest for scholars. This research tends to be empirical, analyzing the usage intentions and behavioral characteristics of live streaming users through methods such as surveys and in-depth interviews (Zhou and Hao, 2021; Sun and Gan, 2021; Yang et al., 2023). Research on live streaming commerce or shopping: this type of research primarily focuses on exploring viewers' impulsive purchasing behaviors, examining the influencing factors behind such behaviors, and investigating the underlying mechanisms of impulsive purchase intentions (Huang et al., 2021; Zhu and Zhu, 2024). Communication studies on online live streaming: analyzing online live streaming from the perspective of communication studies is also an important research area (Yu, 2020; Wang et al., 2023; Cai, 2024).

A brief review of research on online live streaming reveals that, as a current media hotspot, it has garnered widespread attention and discussion. Different scholars have conducted analyses from various perspectives, with most studies focusing on issues of normlessness in online live streaming and discussions on platform regulation. Some research targets the relationship between streamers and their fans, analyzing the interactive dynamics within the live streaming environment, or examining the labor process or action characteristics of streamers/fans. These studies primarily emphasize the exploration of the phenomena of online live streaming activities, while lacking a deeper examination and analysis from the perspective of users as active participants.

Based on this, this study aims to explore the construction logic of online live streaming in users' real lives, analyzing the paths and trajectories of how live streaming enters the daily lives of actors such as streamers and viewers. Specifically, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How does online live streaming embed itself into people's daily lives as a lifestyle?

RQ2: How has online live streaming evolved from being a practice of a few individuals to a normalized practice among many people?

RQ3: How has the communication surrounding online live streaming become a primary form of interaction in daily life?

Methodology

Unlike the interpretative and critical approaches of most previous studies on online live streaming, this research primarily follows the principles of practical paradigms. Media studies under practical paradigms focus on what people do or say in relation to media in various contexts (Coudry, 2012). This study views online live streaming as a form of media practice enacted in reality and seeks to understand it within the context of users' perspectives. By examining users' "doing" and "saying" regarding online live streaming, the

research aims to explore how online live streaming permeates users' real lives.

In order to investigate the "doing" and "saying" of live streaming users regarding online live streaming, this study primarily employs in-depth interviews and ethnographic research methods. The "saying" aspect is explored mainly through in-depth interviews, while the "doing" aspect is obtained through online participant observation. By recruiting participants online and through referrals, this study conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 streamers (see Table 1) and 10 viewers (see Table 2), with interview durations ranging from 30 to 60 min. The interviews were primarily conducted face-to-face or via audio connections on WeChat or QQ, and recordings of the conversations were made with the consent of the participants.

The selection of interview subjects was based on purposive sampling principles, choosing streamers with established live streaming experience and duration, as well as users who incorporate watching live streams into their daily media consumption. The selected streamers all

TABLE 1 Basic information and live streaming situation of interviewed streamers.

Number	Gender	Identity	Live streaming platform	Live streaming frequency	Live streaming type
1	Female	Master's student	Himalaya	Once a day	Emotional live streaming
2	Female	Freelancer	Douyin	Once a day	Entertainment live streaming
3	Male	Full-time streamer	Douyin	Six times a week	E-commerce live streaming
4	Female	Office worker	Douyin	Twice a day	Entertainment live streaming
5	Male	Freelancer	Kuaishou	Twice a day	Outdoor live streaming
6	Male	Office worker	Bilibili	Irregular	Gaming live streaming
7	Female	Undergraduate	Douyin	Five times a week	Entertainment live streaming
8	Female	Full-time streamer	YY	Once a day	Entertainment live streaming
9	Male	Office worker	Douyin	Irregular	Work live streaming
10	Male	Freelancer	Kuaishou	Twice a day	Outdoor live streaming

Source: Compiled by this study.

TABLE 2 Basic information and viewing conditions of respondents.

Number	Gender	Identity	Viewing platform	Viewing frequency	Viewing type
1	Male	Lawyer	Douyin, Douyu, Huya	Daily	Game live streaming, entertainment live streaming
2	Male	Company employee	Douyin, Kuaishou	Daily	Game live streaming, finance live streaming
3	Female	Company employee	Douyin	Daily	E-commerce live streaming, emotional live streaming
4	Male	Insurance salesman	Kuaishou, Douyin	Irregular	Game live streaming, outdoor live streaming
5	Female	Worker	Kuaishou	Daily	Emotional live streaming
6	Male	Postgraduate entrance exam candidate	Bilibili, YY	Irregular	Educational live streaming, entertainment live streaming
7	Male	Teacher	Bilibili	Daily	Finance live streaming
8	Female	Private business owner	Kuaishou	Irregular	Literary live streaming
9	Male	Company employee	Douyu	Daily	Entertainment live streaming
10	Female	Healthcare worker	Douyin	Daily	Entertainment live streaming

Source: Compiled by this study.

come from currently influential live streaming platforms and cover a variety of streaming types. Among them, two are full-time streamers, while the remaining eight are part-time streamers, reflecting the current state of live streaming as it integrates into the everyday lives of ordinary people. Most of the interviewed streamers conduct at least one live stream each day, with daily streaming durations ranging from 2 to 6 h. Similarly, most viewers spend several hours each day watching live streams, with viewing durations varying from 1 to 3 h. Interview question examples are as follows:

Could you share what motivated you to start live streaming?
What factors prompted you to begin this journey?
(For streamers).

What is the greatest satisfaction you gain from interacting and communicating with streamers? Are there alternative ways to achieve this satisfaction in your daily life? (For viewers).

This study aims to gain insights into the perceptions, acceptance, and deeper psychological experiences of both streamers and viewers through in-depth interviews. It seeks to understand the daily habits of live streaming users. Additionally, online participant observation of the interviewed streamers will be conducted to examine their self-presentation and interactions during live streams, providing annotations for the social practices of the actors involved. The “self-presentation” of the streamer during a live streaming is manifested through the selection of displayed content, language style, and emotional expression, which together construct and convey a specific self-image. This can be evaluated through the streamer’s choice of topic content, the manner of language expression, and self-adjustment to the situation. The “interaction” between the streamers and fans in the live streaming room refers to the mutual influence and response through verbal communication, actions, and expressions. This interaction includes not only real-time comments and feedback but also emotional resonance. Analysis and assessment can be conducted based on the frequency of interaction, forms of interaction, and emotional connections between the streamers and fans.

The researcher entered the live streaming rooms of the streamers as fans to conduct online participant observation. Each streamer was observed at least once, with complete live streaming sessions recorded. Streamers No. 2, 5, and 8 underwent two observation sessions. The researcher primarily took summary notes to document the topics presented by the streamers, their choice of language, interaction frequency, and fan responses during the live streaming. In terms of the observation process, a structured observation form was used to record relevant content, while field notes captured the researchers’ immediate reflections on the live observations. Each 20-min segment served as a recording unit, highlighting key information and significant events in the live streaming rooms.

In terms of data processing, the materials obtained from in-depth interviews and online participant observations underwent a three-level coding operation, progressing from open coding to category coding, and finally to thematic coding. Based on this, a framework for categorizing the relationships within the data was established to facilitate the description, analysis, and interpretation of the materials.

This study employs both in-depth interviews and participant observation methods, achieving a diversification of data collection regarding the research subjects. The in-depth interviews aim to explore the cognitive and psychological motivations of the participants, while the participant observation of the streamers primarily examines their behavioral performance during the live streaming. The combination of these two methods allows for triangulation of the data, facilitating cross-referencing of the information obtained.

From the perspective of research scope, this study examines online live streaming platforms that were selected using a purposive sampling method. The main platforms include Douyin, Kuaishou, Bilibili, Huya, Douyu, YY, and Himalaya, covering a wide range of live streaming content such as emotions, gaming, entertainment, e-commerce, finance, and education. These platforms include both comprehensive and specialized types. The reason for choosing these platforms is that they are some of the most influential ones today, encompassing mainstream and authoritative live streaming platforms. Among them, Douyin and Kuaishou are emerging, comprehensive short video live streaming platforms; Bilibili is an ACG live streaming platform featuring real-time danmu comments; Huya and Douyu are general platforms primarily centered around game live streaming; YY is a platform aimed at entertainment live streaming; while Himalaya is an audio content-based live sharing platform. The diversity of the selected platform types, along with their rich content and large audience, provides a rich contextual background for the topics to be studied.

In addition, it should be noted that [Table 1](#) specifically presents the basic information and live streaming situation of the hosts. The live streaming situation refers to the temporal and spatial elements of the hosts’ live broadcasts as well as the types of content, which include factors such as the live streaming platform, frequency of live broadcasts, and types of live streams ([Liu and Yang, 2022](#)). [Table 2](#) provides specific information about the viewers’ basic information and viewing habits.

Additionally, this study explained the purpose and use of the research to all participants, stating that the collected data would be used for academic purposes only, following the principle of anonymity, and asked participants to sign an informed consent form.

Research findings and analysis

Through the examination of the daily experiences of streamers and viewers in online live streaming, this study finds that the logic and trajectory of online live streaming entering the daily lives of actors exhibit several core characteristics: (1) In the context of technological empowerment, online live streaming has become a feasible medium for actors’ daily use, reshaping their everyday lifestyles; (2) Driven by the pursuit of value, actors actively engage in online live streaming to meet performance needs, gain emotional recognition, or achieve leisure through viewing; (3) Under the construction of live streaming logic, the boundaries between the virtual and the real have become blurred, and the online and offline interactions facilitated by live streaming have become the actual practices of communication for actors.

Live streaming in daily life: reshaping lifestyles through technological empowerment

With the widespread adoption of smartphones and mobile internet, live streaming has become a medium of practice that anyone can participate in. McLuhan (1965) proposed that the medium is the message, suggesting that “any impact a medium has on individuals and society arises from the new scale it introduces; every new technology we develop brings a new scale into our affairs.” In simpler terms, it means that humans can only engage in communication and other social activities that correspond to a particular medium once that medium exists. Therefore, from the long process of human social development, the truly meaningful and valuable “message” is not the content of communication in various eras, but rather the nature of the communication tools used in that era, the possibilities they create, and the social changes they bring (Guo, 2011). The form of live streaming media, rooted in communication technology and information technology, has already changed people’s lifestyles today. It has not only given rise to new types of professions but has also permeated daily life, reshaping the lives of participants.

The lowering of technological barriers enables ordinary people to engage in live streaming

The development of communication devices and technologies has empowered everyone with the opportunity and possibility to voice their opinions and become streamers in the era of self-media. This is a result of technological empowerment. As one interviewee stated: “From the 2G era to the 3G era, and then to the 4G and 5G eras, communication technology has continuously iterated and upgraded. Mobile phone cameras are becoming clearer, and internet speeds are getting faster. This has led to the self-media era where each of us is a media outlet, and everyone can express their own voice in society. It is precisely because of this technological upgrade that now everyone can become a streamer and share their own lives.” (Streamer No. 6) “The continuous development of 4G networks, WiFi hotspots, and smartphones has greatly eliminated the technical barriers to live streaming, facilitating the entry of live streaming platforms into the era of mobile video streaming where you can ‘watch, look, and broadcast anytime, anywhere’” (Xu, 2018). The upgrade in technology has lowered the barriers to entry, and many interviewed streamers indicated that the development of communication technology has brought convenience to the conduct and execution of online live streaming. “The technology is quite convenient; anyone can stream, from those over 60 to those in their late teens. It has actually brought a lot of convenience to many people.” (Streamer No. 4).

The widespread adoption of smartphones has significantly lowered the technical barriers, providing ordinary people with the convenience to start streaming at any time. As one streamer noted, “When it comes to using a computer, you definitely need some experience; without that, you will not be able to handle many things because the computer interface can be quite complex, and there are various aspects you need to understand. But with a smartphone, it is not like that—it is very simple. Live streaming has become increasingly simplified, and the threshold for becoming a streamer is very low, especially low.” (Streamer No. 7) Alongside technological upgrades, the reduction in communication costs, such as data traffic fees, has also made live streaming a practical possibility. “On the technical side, that is not an issue for me. I have a phone plan with unlimited data,

and it is not expensive. I can stream as much as I want within a month, and the 4G network is quite good.” (Streamer No. 10).

The widespread adoption of smart devices has made live streaming a part of everyday life

The convenience brought by technological upgrades has not only enabled everyone to become a streamer but has also empowered viewers of online live streaming through technology. One viewer, born in the 1960s, shared, “I really do not know how to watch on a computer; I have not even downloaded anything. Maybe it is because I’m older and not very familiar with this stuff. I only watch on my phone; I’ve never watched on a computer. Smartphones provide the convenience for viewing.” (Viewer No. 3) She indicated that the popularity of smartphones has made her a user of online live streaming, opening up a new window in her life.

Moreover, the development of mobile internet has made it possible to watch live streams anytime and anywhere, breaking the constraints and limitations of time and space. Another viewer remarked, “Now you can watch anytime and anywhere. In the past, when I was watching on a computer, it was only convenient when I had the computer on at home, right? Now, you can watch whenever you want—like when you are on the bus, in the office, or even while using the restroom. It is convenient. Now that data is also quite abundant, I just watch whenever I have a moment.” (Viewer No. 2) The statements from these viewers reflect a relaxed attitude toward online live streaming, indicating that, with the support of technology, people’s lifestyles have entered a phase where they can watch and stream content at their convenience.

Interviews revealed that the use of mobile devices has allowed viewers of online live streaming to transcend mere sensory experiences and gain a sense of psychological closeness. One viewer expressed, “For example, if you feel lonely, you want to have your friends with you, right? You want them to appear in front of you at any time. The biggest advantage of using a phone over a TV or a computer is that it provides a sense of intimacy and proximity. You can take it out whenever you need it, which creates an emotional or even physiological connection. By reducing the physical distance, it also shortens the emotional and physiological distance. A phone is fundamentally different from a TV, which is far away, or a computer, which is relatively fixed and cannot be carried around. A phone is like a part of your body.” (Viewer No. 7) The mobile smartphone has brought users a sense of psychological closeness and intimacy, further promoting the expansion and extension of online live streaming viewership.

The empowerment brought by technology has created a media space for online live streaming that involves both streamers and viewers. Online live streaming has permeated people’s daily lives, transcending the boundaries and barriers of time and space, allowing everyone the possibility to engage. As media theory pioneer Marshall McLuhan stated, the evolution of media forms driven by technological advancements continuously reshapes people’s social lives. The widespread adoption of live streaming is becoming a powerful force in shaping the new lifestyle of watching on demand and streaming anytime for today’s individuals.

Everything can be streamed: advocating and satisfying diverse values

The power of technology has given everyone the ability to participate in online live streaming, while also allowing all things in

the world to enter the realm of live streaming through the lens. In terms of everyday life, online live streaming has permeated various fields, especially broad lifestyle streaming, which encompasses nearly all aspects of people's lives; any scene can become content for live streaming. If technological empowerment is the external driving force that brings live streaming into people's daily lives, then the participants' own pursuit of value is the internal factor that sustains the existence of online live streaming. Through interviews, it was found that participants in online live streaming, whether streamers or viewers, hope to pursue their respective value claims and goals through live streaming practices.

Meeting the need for exhibition and gaining social recognition

The exhibition/performance paradigm proposed by [Abercrombie and Longhurst \(1998\)](#) suggests that in the age of images, everyone becomes a user, either directly or indirectly, while also being performers who can use texts for self-presentation and performance. The medium of online live streaming provides an excellent stage for people to present themselves, with streamers driven by the desire for exhibition. "I have always enjoyed performing and have a passion for it. Although I have not been a streamer for long, I feel like I've found something I truly love." (Streamer No. 4) "Most streamers are girls; they like to be noticed. When others pay attention to them and compliment them, it satisfies a certain psychological need. In the live streaming room, they can dress up beautifully and showcase their best selves." (Streamer No. 1) "The existence of showcase live streaming resembles the presentation of self-image reflected in the media mirror, where female streamers indulge in this idealized image and gain a sense of experience that they lack in reality." ([Yuan and Sun, 2017](#)).

In the world of live streaming, seeking recognition is also a value that streamers aspire to pursue, with social needs serving as an important driving force. "When I first started live streaming, if I were to talk about my initial motivation, I think I wanted more people to know me. When I shared something during a live stream and received a response from a viewer 1,000 of kilometers away, that kind of communication across such a distance, where my words received feedback, gave me a great sense of satisfaction." (Streamer No. 6) The recognition and feedback from viewers provide streamers with psychological fulfillment, allowing them to find a sense of belonging in the online space and fulfill their social value needs. Streamer No. 10 expressed a similar viewpoint: "I work in tourism and trade, and I hope to use this platform to let more people understand and know me; it also helps my own business." Streamer No. 10, a Chinese expatriate living in Thailand, conducts outdoor live streams sharing local Thai food and culture, stating that live streaming has become a part of his daily life. For him, gaining recognition is one aspect, but his live streaming also inadvertently builds a bridge for cultural exchange between China and Thailand.

Additionally, observations from online participation have revealed that streamers often announce the time and content of their next live stream at the end of their current session, looking forward to the next online encounter. The live streaming performance fulfills the streamers' need for self-expression, and this sense of value fulfillment and social recognition motivates them to actively prepare for and engage in their next live streaming activity.

Of course, for some streamers, earning income is also an important consideration. Some streamers candidly state, "The main

purpose is to make money." (Streamers No. 2 and 7) "The live streaming industry is a bit easier; just singing and chatting can yield better returns." (Streamer No. 8) However, there are also streamers who express that they primarily go live to spread joy and provide emotional value to others. "Live streaming allows me to make many friends. I can share interesting and fun things I encounter in life, promoting them and bringing a bit of happiness to others. It is just a small effort on my part, but it makes people so happy." (Streamer No. 5) Streamer No. 5 is someone who sells toys at fairs and markets, live streaming animal performances and other shows. They mention that many friends enjoy watching their content, and they find joy in it as well.

Enjoying entertainment and leisure, and experiencing exotic scenery

From the perspective of viewers, watching online live streaming presents a variety of needs. Among these, seeking entertainment and relaxation, as well as passing the time, are significant motivations. "The main purpose of watching is to fill in fragmented time and relieve stress amidst a busy schedule." (Viewer No. 1) "When I first started watching, it was just for entertainment and humor, to alleviate the pressures of life." (Viewer No. 4) Viewer No. 6 expressed a similar sentiment, saying, "I watch leisure-related streams to relax."

Just like the streamers, viewers also consider gaining recognition and a sense of belonging as important values in their participation in online live streaming. "If you can get the attention of the streamers you follow, who are like opinion leaders, and they interact with you and show interest in your topics, it can be incredibly encouraging. It is like finding a sense of recognition within a community." (Viewer No. 7) Through interaction with online streamers, viewers can experience emotional release, comfort, and a sense of belonging, helping to alleviate the pressures of everyday life ([Yu and Hu, 2018](#)). "Every time I think about being able to see my favorite streamer in the live room every day, and maybe even chat a bit, it feels like life has a sense of hope and anticipation." (Viewer No. 9).

Through interviews, it was found that online live streaming opens a window for viewers to understand another unfamiliar world, transcending the barriers and constraints of time and space. Unlike traditional electronic media such as television, which often provides a mirrored representation, the content presented in online live streaming is more vivid, authentic, and complete. One viewer expressed that it was through online live streaming that she gained a more realistic understanding of foreign cultures: "My child is in Germany, and I really want to learn about Germany, but I cannot get that detailed information through various channels. Through this live streaming platform, I find that I learn much more because people living in Germany showcase the little details of life there. You get to understand Germany from various perspectives; each person describes it based on their own environment. So, I watch a lot, and I get to know what Germany is really like." (Viewer No. 3).

Through online live streaming, exotic cultures become accessible and are presented in a relatively authentic manner. Viewers can learn about the vast world through the lens and screen of the streamers. "I enjoy watching a hiking live stream where the streamer travels across the country by bike and on foot. I may not have been to those places, and I'm quite interested in the local customs and culture, so I follow along to broaden my horizons." (Viewer No. 2) As viewers have noted, online live streaming expands users' perspectives, allowing them to

appreciate the cultural landscapes of different regions and experience the unique charm of foreign cultures, satisfying their desire to explore new things.

In online live streaming, both streamers and viewers, as participants, hold their own intrinsic value pursuits, including the desire to showcase their better selves, seek recognition from others, and obtain entertainment and leisure, as well as to understand external cultures, among other things. It is these needs that drive them to engage in the practice of online live streaming. Daily live streaming encompasses various aspects of life scenarios, promoting diverse values, while different types of live streams also satisfy the varied needs of different viewers.

From virtual to reality: constructing everyday interaction practices through live streaming logic

Meyrowitz (1986) argues that the widespread adoption of electronic media has led to the emergence of many new social scenarios. Electronic media, by altering the boundaries of social scenes, not only allows us to approach events or actions more quickly and in greater detail, but also introduces us to new events and new behaviors. The adoption of new media has resulted in widespread and significant changes in social interaction patterns. Online live streaming constructs a completely new scene information system, thereby reshaping and altering the behaviors and actions of participants. Through interviews and participant observation, it has been found that in the context of online live streaming and its derived media scenes, user interaction and communication permeate their daily lives, becoming an important mode of social interaction.

Live streaming constructs action, bridging virtual and real interaction

Constructing daily life through live streaming is an action logic followed by many streamers, and live streaming has shaped their life trajectories, permeating their deeper consciousness. “When you are live streaming, you actually go out very rarely because if you go out, you might as well use that time to do other things, like engaging with fans, practicing a few songs, or watching streams from larger streamers to learn something. When you are live streaming, you do not want to stop; when you are not live streaming, you definitely want to stream. It becomes addictive.” (Streamer No. 7).

Moreover, the communication between streamers and fans often extends beyond the live streaming room, especially for full-time streamers, where interaction with fans becomes the focus of their daily interactions. “A typical live stream lasts about 5–6 h, and aside from my workout, I spend a significant amount of time chatting and messaging with fans during the rest of the day, which takes up quite a bit of my time.” (Streamer No. 8) This streamer candidly admits that there is a lot of chat interaction with fans in the live streaming room, and even after the stream ends, they continue to communicate through fan groups, which occupies a large portion of their daily social interactions.

Through interviews, it was found that live streaming has become an indispensable part of the daily lives of streamers, and the concern of fans has become an important pillar supporting their lives. Multiple interviewed streamers expressed that if they are unable to stream or

interact with fans for any reason, they feel a sense of loss. “I feel a sense of loss; when I do not stream for a day, I think about how fans might not be able to find me.” (Streamer No. 4) “I definitely feel a bit reluctant, especially for those fans who have accompanied me for a long time. If I lose them or something happens, I would feel very sad.” (Streamer No. 1) For streamers, maintaining contact and interaction with fans occupies a very important and irreplaceable position. “It feels like a part of me is missing. After doing live streaming for a while, if I suddenly stop, it feels like something is lacking. If I have not chatted with fans today, it feels like something is missing, like that feeling.” (Streamer No. 10).

Through online participant observation, it was found that in the live streaming room, streamers often encourage viewers to join the fan groups they have created, inviting them to become part of a larger family. This online interaction can further extend into real life. It can be said that online live streaming builds a bridge for communication, and the relationships established through streaming facilitate socialization. “Live streaming has allowed me to meet many friends; virtual friends have turned into real-life friends, and I’ve made a lot of connections.” (Streamer No. 5) “When you connect with someone on a deeper level, they start to see you as a friend. Most of the people who watch live streams are lonely or lack friends in their real lives; they are, in some way, missing something in their lives. So when you offer them kind or warm words, they are very willing to help you.” (Streamer No. 7) The transformation from online strangers to emotional or even real-life friends illustrates how online live streaming expands the interaction space for participants, moving from purely virtual socializing to tangible real-world interactions.

Viewing as a ritual: extending online interactions to offline engagement

Collins (2004) points out that various short-term emotional experiences generated through interaction rituals often transform into what can be termed emotional energy in the long term. The short-term emotions accumulated in the live streaming room can also elevate into a form of emotional energy, subsequently influencing the daily life practices of participants, both for streamers and viewers alike.

Interviews revealed that viewers who admire their favorite streamers tend to follow them closely, extending their interactions from the live streaming room to outside of it. “There is a singer whose live streaming interaction I participated in, and then I chatted with him privately, leaving messages on his Weibo out of admiration. I felt he was no different from an ordinary person, which made me feel a sense of closeness.” (Viewer No. 6) “After the stream ends, I leave messages for streamers I resonate with. Once, I even went viral; I commented on a skit the streamer posted, and the streamer replied to my comment, which attracted 100 of other comments below.” (Viewer No. 2) From the viewers’ statements, it is evident that their joy stems from the interaction and connection with the streamers, enriching their daily life experiences and adding more color and meaning to their lives.

Additionally, interviews revealed that for some viewers, watching online live streaming resembles a ritual event, shaping their own trajectories of action through the streamer’s broadcasts. “For this streamer I like, I watch every time he goes live, like an old friend. If I day I miss his stream, I feel uneasy, as if something is missing.” (Viewer No. 10) If online live streaming were to be removed from the viewers’ lives, they clearly stated that they would feel somewhat uncomfortable,

as the logic of live streaming has constructed a unique lifestyle for them. “If I cannot watch the live stream, I feel a sense of loss because some things become a habit. When I have free time, I think about watching the live stream.” (Viewer No. 5).

In the scene system constructed by online live streaming, participant interactions extend beyond the live streaming room and even into real life, transforming virtual communication into a primary form of tangible interaction. Traditionally, interactions conducted over the internet have been referred to as virtual socializing, distinguishing them from face-to-face real-life interactions. However, today, online socializing occupies nearly every aspect of people’s daily interactions, especially in the context of live streaming practices. The act of live streaming has risen to become a logical framework for real-life actions. From virtual to tangible, it can be said that the interaction practices built around online live streaming have become the *de facto* social practices of the participants.

Conclusion and discussion

This study adopts a user-centered research approach, exploring the trajectory of how online live streaming has entered people’s daily lives and the social roles it plays from the perspectives of both streamers and viewers. Through qualitative interviews and online ethnographic research, it was found that technological innovation has empowered users to engage with online live streaming as a media form, or in other words, the development of communication technology has facilitated the democratization of live streaming usage. The widespread adoption of online live streaming is a typical phenomenon of how technology transforms social and cultural practices. Of course, the pursuit of value through online live streaming serves as an intrinsic motivation for users to actively participate. Participants achieve their desired goals within this context.

Additionally, the study found that interactions among online live streaming participants have extended beyond the live streaming room, evolving from virtual socializing among strangers to real-life interactions resembling acquaintances or friends. The logic of live streaming has become embedded in users’ daily actions, establishing a new media logic that they follow. To some extent, live streaming has become a new lifestyle for people, in which users feel as if they are “like fish in water,” finding their place and getting what they need within it.

This study also found that the everyday integration of live streaming is not only dependent on the availability of technology itself but is also influenced by the interactive effects of gender roles, identities, platform attributes, usage frequency, and content types. Gender roles and types of live streaming exhibit a bidirectional construction feature, with female streamers primarily focusing on entertainment and emotional content, while male streamers tend to prefer outdoor and gaming streams. In terms of viewers, male audiences favor gaming, entertainment, and finance-related streams, whereas female viewers are more interested in emotional content. This indicates that gender roles shape the gendered pathways through which live streaming is embedded in daily life by influencing content production and consumption preferences.

Regarding identity and platform choice, a bidirectional adaptation characteristic is evident. Different identities have

varying degrees of reliance on platform functionalities, making live streaming a flexible carrier that supplements professional identities or leisure activities. Specifically, freelancers tend to choose traffic-intensive platforms like Douyin/Kuaishou to meet their needs for professional flexibility, while full-time streamers focus on niche platforms to strengthen their professional identity through specialized content. For viewers, different professional identities are reflected in skill enhancement or interest expansion achieved through live streaming; for example, graduate exam candidates and teachers choose Bilibili to obtain practical information related to education or finance.

The frequency of use for streaming or viewing directly reflects the extent to which live streaming is embedded in the daily lives of users. High-frequency streamers conduct live sessions 1–2 times daily, creating a ritualized rhythm in their routines, while high-frequency viewers establish a fixed agenda for obtaining information or entertainment through daily viewing. For these frequent users, the integration of live streaming has shifted from instrumental use to the reconstruction of life contexts.

As a form of innovative diffusion (Rogers, 2003), online live streaming undoubtedly influences and reshapes people’s lifestyles. Technological advancements have accelerated the diffusion of online live streaming and expanded the fields and scope of its adoption. When online live streaming presents itself as an environmental trend, its diffusion can also be viewed from another perspective: as a response by users, as actors, to the social development context through the use of this cultural tool. Technological empowerment merely provides a possibility; it is the proactive empowerment of the actors that truly plays a significant role. Rogers proposed that the process of individuals accepting new things is an innovation-decision process, which includes five stages: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. This process encompasses a series of choices and actions, all of which are permeated by the subjective initiative of the actors. The adoption of online live streaming by users is no exception.

In fact, as a form of being-in-the-world, online live streaming has provided a new stage for people’s self-presentation in the electronic media era, offering new means for shaping impressions and satisfying the aspirations of some individuals for fame. Goffman (1959) viewed people’s daily lives as a series of theatrical performances, where individuals perform in different scenes to guide and control the impressions others form of them. In the era of online live streaming, through the lens of the stream, people adjust their behaviors and the ways they engage in activities, granting themselves new situational definitions.

Online live streaming facilitates the recombination of social scenes, and this new scene system alters users’ modes of discourse and behavioral patterns, providing new meanings for their actions. The self-presentation of users manifests in diverse forms, creating a more vibrant and varied social reality.

Finally, it should be noted that the live streaming platforms examined in this study are primarily based on seven platforms: Douyin, Kuaishou, Douyu, Huya, Bilibili, YY, and Himalaya. Therefore, in terms of the generalizability of the research findings and inferences, it is mainly limited to the platform ecosystem formed by this cluster of platforms. Consequently, the external validity of the conclusions drawn from this study needs to be replicated on other platforms for further promotion. Based on

this, future research could expand in this direction, such as testing the transferability of the findings from this study on other platforms (e.g., YouTube, Instagram Live, etc.) and examining cross-regional results based on functional similarities. Comparative studies of live streaming platforms in different countries and regions could also be conducted to explore the potential similarities and differences in how live streaming integrates into people's daily lives under varying social contexts, cultural backgrounds, and functional affordances, thereby investigating the infiltration and development of online live streaming culture in different environmental contexts.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Academic Committee of Sanjiang University. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

YX: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft.

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