
Exploring Live Streaming as a Game-Changer for Direct - to - Consumer Marketing During COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of physical retail stores, compelling brands to explore innovative ways to engage with customers. Live Streaming emerged as a powerful tool, enabling brands to maintain customer access and foster engagement even during lockdowns. This study explores the potential of livestreaming as a viable medium for direct-to-consumer communication and interaction. This paper presents a conceptual framework for using live streaming in marketing, developed through focus group discussions and model analysis based on the ABCD listing methodology. The study examines the dynamics of livestreaming within retail and ecommerce, focusing on its ability to engage both external customers and internal stakeholders. The research reveals that engagement should extend beyond customers to include business partners and internal employees, demonstrating that live streaming is not only a tool for retail sales but also a platform for broader organizational engagement. The findings suggest that livestreaming is a long-term asset for the retail and e-commerce industries, even beyond the pandemic's impact. The study acknowledges the widespread business disruptions caused by the pandemic, which led to decreased demand and hindered operations globally. The limitations also highlight the gaps in business interruption insurance policies, emphasizing the need for businesses to adapt and reconsider existing policies. The pandemic's economic damage remains largely unaddressed. This paper highlights the latest trends in live streaming, offering valuable insights into its application as an integrated marketing communication channel. It underscores the importance of adapting to new technologies and approaches for sustained customer engagement and business resilience.

1. Introduction

This paper examines the transformative role of livestreaming in retail and e-commerce during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on its potential to maintain customer engagement and expand market reach amidst physical store closures. The core research question examines how livestreaming serves as a vital communication channel in crisis times. Five sub-research questions will guide this investigation: whether livestreaming can effectively engage customers, the role of livestreaming in internal company communication, the impact of livestreaming on partner relationships, the sustainability of livestreaming post-pandemic, and the challenges encountered in implementing livestreaming strategies. The research is qualitative in nature, based on the analysis of industry trends, company case studies, and user feedback to generate insights. The paper is designed to be in a format of progression from literature review, discussion on methodology, findings, and finally a conclusion based on implications for future retail strategies.

2. Literature Review

This section summarizes the existing literature on live streaming in retailing and e-commerce, which is organized based on the five sub-research questions: effectiveness of live streaming in interacting with customers, role of live streaming in informing internal employees, impact of live

streaming on partner relationships, sustainability of live streaming after the pandemic, and specific challenges that occur in live streaming strategy implementation. The literature reveals key findings in these areas, including "Customer Engagement through Live Streaming," "Internal Communication Enhancement via Live Streaming," "Partner Relationship Building through Live Streaming," "Long-term Viability of Livestreaming Strategies," and "Barriers to Livestreaming Implementation." Although valuable insights are provided, existing research often fails to consider the full potential of livestreaming beyond customer engagement, underestimates its internal organizational benefits, and lacks detailed exploration of post-pandemic adoption challenges. The study aims to address these gaps by carrying out a deeper analysis of how livestreaming impacts retail and e-commerce on many levels.

2.1 Livestreaming and Customer Engagement

Livestreaming as a tool to enrich customer interaction, focusing on how it can show products dynamically. However, in most of the earlier studies, there was no regard for interactive features that could spur deeper engagement. Later works then expanded on these by incorporating mechanisms for user feedback and real-time interaction analytics. These provide more refined insights into what engagement metrics entail. Still, research does not explore how such interactions are converted into long-term customer loyalty and repeat sales.

2.2 Livestreaming: An Internal Communication Tool

Livestreaming was initially used for external communication. In fact, its internal use was not considered until later studies, which looked into the use of the tool for company-wide announcements and training sessions, thereby improving the efficiency of information dissemination. However, such studies rarely went deeper into its impact on employee engagement and morale, which is one of the focuses of this paper.

2.3 Building Relationship with Partners through Livestreaming

The role of livestreaming in strengthening partner relationships was not explored initially, and most of the early research focused on consumer-facing applications. Recent studies have shown that it is useful in maintaining supplier and partner communication during disruptions. However, despite these findings, the literature still lacks comprehensive analysis of how livestreaming can be strategically integrated into partner relationship management frameworks.

2.4 Long-term Viability of Livestreaming Strategies

In the initial studies, sustainability of livestreaming as a marketing and communication tool post-pandemic has been questioned, where it was primarily considered a temporary solution. In recent studies, it has begun to be investigated as a permanent fixture in digital strategy, as it is relatively cost-effective and scalable. However, these studies are often silent about the technological and infrastructural investments needed for its long-term adoption.

2.5 Barriers to Livestreaming Implementation

Studies have emerged on the major issues that cause hindrances towards livestreaming, including technological obstacles and skill requirements. Early papers tend to just provide a very general overview and not go into specific cases within industries. Subsequent work has tried to fill these voids by offering more case studies, best practices, but the gap remains in not having a robust framework for working across market segments.

3. Method

The study adopts a qualitative method to explore the multifaceted role of livestreaming in retail and e-commerce. Data are collected through industry reports, company case studies, and interviews with key stakeholders within the retail sector. Data collection includes understanding

the strategic use of livestreaming during the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for future marketing communication. Qualitative data analysis will include thematic coding in order to get a grounded view of the different trends and insights into the effect of livestreaming on all the dimensions of retail operations.

4. Results

Grounded qualitative findings from industry reports and stakeholder interviews reveal deep insights into the role of livestreaming in retail and e-commerce. Addressing the sub-research questions, the findings include: "Enhanced Customer Engagement through Interactive Livestreams," "Strengthening Internal Communication with Livestreaming," "Livestreaming as a Tool for Partner Engagement," "Sustainability and Scalability of Livestreaming Strategies," and "Challenges and Solutions in Livestreaming Implementation." These findings show that livestreaming can effectively engage customers by offering them interactive and personalized experiences, enhances internal communication through real-time information sharing, and strengthens partnerships by maintaining seamless communication. Livestreaming has also proven to be sustainable and scalable with the right strategic planning, but at the same time, it also poses challenges like technological barriers and the need for skill development, which can be addressed through targeted training and investment in infrastructure.

4.1 Improved Customer Engagement through Interactive Livestreams

Analysis of interview data and industry reports shows that livestreaming greatly enhances customer engagement through interactive and immersive experiences. Features such as real-time feedback and personalized content were reported as key engagement drivers by participants. For instance, using case studies, a retail brand was livestreaming product launches with Q&A sessions to increase customer interaction as well as sales. These results establish the possibility of building longer-term relationships with customers through livestreaming in coming up with interesting and memorable experiences.

4.2 Improving Internal Communication through Livestreaming

The study found that livestreaming improves internal communication by promoting efficient and interactive information sharing across organizations. Cases from company research show that through livestreaming, training sessions and company announcements are conducted; this improves employees' engagement with the knowledge, and retention improves. For instance, a company used livestreaming for virtual town halls that allowed employees to interact with their leadership in real-time, building a sense of community and belonging.

4.3 Live streaming as a Tool for Partner Engagement

Findings show that livestreaming is a great way of keeping and strengthening partner relationships. Interview answers show that firms use livestreaming when holding virtual meetings and product demonstrations with their partners to ensure flexible communication in case there are interruptions. A case study is demonstrated with a firm making use of livestreams to team up with suppliers in product design to create openness and trust. These findings demonstrate how livestreaming helps in the formation of robust resilient networks.

4.4 Sustainability and Scalability of Livestreaming Strategies

Through proper planning, livestreaming is a sustainable and scalable strategy for retail and e-commerce, as shown through the study. Industry reports reflect data that demonstrates the cost-effectiveness of using livestreaming for marketing, and it should be integrated with long-term digital strategies. Case studies are also made to show an example of the scalability of a brand by infusing livestreams into their omnichannel approach. These findings call for strategic investments in technology and skill to realize the full benefit of livestreaming.

5. Conclusion

This paper offers an in-depth analysis of the impact livestreaming has had on retail and e-commerce during the COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting its potential for better engagement with customers, internal communication, and partners. Findings show that livestreaming is not just a stopgap but a viable long-term strategy with tremendous benefits and challenges. Through integration of insights from existing literature and original data, the study underlines the strategic significance of livestreaming in modern retail operations. However, research is limited in this study due to its focus on specific industry segments and does not capture the full spectrum of livestreaming applications. Future research should explore diverse market contexts and employ mixed methodologies to deepen understanding of the role of livestreaming in the evolving retail landscape.

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