

# "Knowing How to Chat" to "Driving Conversions": A Study on the Emotional Labor of Douyin E-commerce Livestreamers Under Platform Discipline

Mingxuan Yu <sup>1</sup>, Susu Zeng <sup>2, \*</sup>

**Received** 23 May 2026

**Revised** 30 June 2026

**Accepted** 17 June 2026

**Published** 25 July 2026



ISSN 2759-7830 (Online)  
ISSN 2760-2508 (Print)

© 2026 The Author(s)  
Published by Jandoo Press Co., Ltd.

This article is licensed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license:  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

**Abstract:** The emotional labor of apparel e-commerce livestreamers serves as an important entry point for understanding the labor logic of livestream e-commerce. Through in-depth interviews with 15 Douyin e-commerce livestreamers, this paper examines the process by which emotional labor transforms from "knowing how to chat" to "driving conversions" under platform discipline. The study finds that the emotional labor of livestreamers unfolds across four stages: intimate expression, outfit explanation and try-on demonstration, emotional mobilization and rhythm advancement, and after-sales appeasement and relationship maintenance, thereby forming a complete conversion mechanism. Through three interlocking mechanisms of data assessment, livestreaming systems, and team training, the platform screens and solidifies the livestreamers' emotional expressions into a set of calculable sales scripts. In this process, the workers' strategy of "pseudo-authenticity" constitutes a soft resistance to disciplinary power. Although it provides limited psychological compensation, it also imperceptibly reinforces their identification with platform norms, causing them to remain more deeply entrenched within the disciplinary order.

**Keywords:** E-commerce livestreamers; Emotional labor; Platform discipline; Livestream e-commerce

## Introduction

In Douyin apparel livestreaming rooms, a seemingly paradoxical phenomenon warrants attention: livestreamers spend a significant amount of time engaging in "chatting"—such as sharing outfit ideas and expressing personal feelings—that does not directly promote sales, yet this significantly boosts product sales. From "knowing how to chat" to "driving conversions" this process is not a natural outpouring of the livestreamer's personal communication talent, but a quantitative reshaping of emotional communication mediated by platform technology. "Chatting" has thus evolved from a free form of interpersonal communication into emotional work that must achieve quantifiable results. Taking Douyin e-commerce livestreamers as the research subject and employing in-depth interviews, this paper examines how this transformation occurs and how the emotional experiences of livestreamers change during this process.

## Literature Review

### How does "chatting" become labor?

Existing studies have shown that interactions initiated by live-commerce streamers serve as an important means of relationship building. By constructing narrative-based scenarios, employing fictive-kinship forms of address, and providing continuous emotional feedback, streamers create a temporary community grounded in trust and intimacy in front of the screen ([Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020](#)). From the perspective of relational labor, such sustained communication also constitutes an important means through which streamers establish and maintain social relationships with their audiences ([Baym, 2015](#)).

In apparel livestreaming, these interactions also involve aesthetic advice and bodily display. Streamers not only provide information about products but also respond to viewers' needs in the role of fashion consultants. The visibility, real-time responsiveness, and shopping guidance afforded

<sup>1</sup> Tianjin University of Finance and Economics, Tianjin 300222, China; <sup>2</sup> Guangxi Vocational Normal University, Nanning 530007, China.

\* Corresponding author. Email: [20220021@gxvnu.edu.cn](mailto:20220021@gxvnu.edu.cn).

by livestreaming can enhance consumer engagement while reducing, to some extent, uncertainty regarding product quality and personal suitability ([Sun et al., 2019](#); [Lu & Chen, 2021](#)).

Existing research on conversational interaction in livestreaming has generally regarded it either as a natural manifestation of the streamer's personal charisma or as an inherently effective marketing instrument. Such interpretations, however, leave an important question unresolved. If conversational competence were merely an individual talent or an experiential skill, it would not need to be systematically managed, trained, and evaluated. In practice, however, streamers' conversational performances are increasingly subject to organizational management, professional training, and performance assessment.

In *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Hochschild (1983) introduced the concept of emotional labor. Drawing on an empirical study of flight attendants, she demonstrated that the emotional expressions of service workers are not simply spontaneous manifestations of private feelings. Rather, they are performances conducted in accordance with feeling rules and display rules established by organizations.

Within apparel livestreaming, "chatting" involves not only the commodification of emotion but also the digital encoding of aesthetic labor. Through verbal description, streamers translate physical properties that are invisible or difficult to perceive through a screen—such as fabric texture, tailoring, silhouette, and drape—into intelligible aesthetic images. In doing so, they connect interpersonal communication with the production of commercial value. Research on aesthetic labor has similarly demonstrated that workers' appearance, voice, posture, and bodily style can be organized and mobilized as economically valuable labor resources ([Witz et al., 2003](#)).

The tension between workers' authentic feelings and institutional demands gives rise to surface acting and deep acting. The emotional-labor framework thus removes emotion from the exclusively private sphere and conceptualizes it as a labor product that can be systematically produced, managed, appropriated, and exploited. From this perspective, conversational interaction in livestreaming is no longer simply an expression of an individual's ability to speak persuasively. It is a form of emotional labor that is deliberately organized and managed.

Subsequent scholars have extended this model in two principal directions. Bolton and Boyd (2003) argued that workers do not invariably comply passively with organizational requirements. In some circumstances, they may regard emotional labor as a gift through which they bring pleasure or comfort to others. From a political-economic perspective, Brook (2009) criticized emotional-labor theory for concentrating excessively on managerial control while paying insufficient attention to exploitation, particularly the process through which capital converts the use value of emotion into exchange value. The former perspective foregrounds workers' subjective experiences in the performance

of emotional labor, whereas the latter reveals the structural incorporation of emotional capacities into processes of capital accumulation. Both perspectives inform the present study's analysis of how streamers' emotional labor is transformed into economic value.

## How do data reshape "chatting"?

The preceding discussion directs attention to the feedback mechanisms through which emotional labor is organized. Hochschild's model of organizational management and Bolton and Boyd's gift model primarily examine how workers provide services to customers. They offer less detailed accounts, however, of how workers are continuously measured and evaluated by external forces, and how such evaluations subsequently reshape the labor process itself.

Livestreaming analytics dashboards display indicators such as viewer-entry rates, audience retention, interaction frequency, and conversion rates. Taken together, these metrics constitute an increasingly systematic framework for the quantitative evaluation of streamers' affective performances. Research has shown that digital measurement technologies not only track workers' observable behavior but also incorporate stress, emotional states, and perceived productivity into managerial processes, thereby making emotional labor itself monitorable and calculable ([Moore, 2018](#)). Through traffic allocation, recommendation ranking, and account classification, platform algorithms continuously identify and reward interaction patterns associated with higher conversion rates. Algorithmic control therefore reshapes both the behavioral patterns and working strategies of digital platform workers ([Kellogg et al., 2020](#); [Wood et al., 2019](#)).

More importantly, the post-stream review tools provided by platforms and livestreaming agencies can immediately decompose successful conversational performances into analytically manageable components, including product framing, emotional progression, pacing, objection handling, and key conversion points. Through this process, human speech and affect are increasingly subjected to coding, classification, and standardization. Foucault's concept of discipline provides a productive framework for understanding this process. Through hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and examination, disciplinary power exercises detailed control over individuals and transforms them into "docile bodies" ([Foucault, 1977](#)).

Studies of digital labor have demonstrated that algorithms can establish a form of control resembling panoptic surveillance by continuously monitoring the locations, movements, and working conditions of delivery workers and ride-hailing drivers ([Rosenblat & Stark, 2016](#); [Wood et al., 2019](#)). The data displays used in livestreaming operate according to a similar logic. Their disciplinary scope, however, extends beyond bodily movement to encompass deeper levels of emotional expression, verbal performance, and interpersonal communication.

More specifically, the analytics dashboard corresponds to hierarchical observation because it converts interactional performance into numerical indicators that can be continu-

ously tracked. The decomposition of successful scripts through post-stream review corresponds to normalizing judgment because it establishes particular conversational practices as standardized models. The promotion and elimination mechanisms associated with platform traffic pools correspond to examination because they classify, select, and allocate workers according to quantified performance. Together, these mechanisms constitute a comprehensive disciplinary process directed at the emotional and communicative expressions of streamers.

Nevertheless, an analysis based solely on discipline leaves a crucial issue unresolved. Disciplinary theory is particularly effective in explaining how power produces compliant subjects, but it is less capable of explaining why workers may voluntarily participate in their own discipline. In livestreaming practice, many streamers do not merely endure data-based evaluation. Instead, they actively study their analytics dashboards, learn the conversational scripts associated with highly successful streams, and enthusiastically pursue higher conversion rates.

In *Manufacturing Consent*, Burawoy (1979) provided an important explanation of workers' active participation in the labor process. He identified the workplace game of "making out," through which piece-rate wages, rankings, and competitive incentives construct workers as voluntary participants who actively pursue production targets rather than as individuals who are simply coerced into labor. Livestreaming dashboards create a comparable game-like environment. Constantly changing metrics, ranking lists, and the promotion and elimination mechanisms of platform traffic pools transform streamers into "players" who continuously strive to achieve higher performance indicators.

Discipline and the manufacture of consent are therefore not merely parallel mechanisms. From a disciplinary perspective, the analytics dashboard functions as a panoptic instrument of surveillance: streamers modify their behavior because they fear poor performance. Within the logic of the workplace game, however, the nature of this surveillance changes. Data no longer operate solely as an external source of judgment; they become an object of aspiration that streamers seek to master.

The streamer's orientation consequently shifts from "I am being evaluated by data" to "I must improve my data." The passive "docile body" is transformed into an active and enterprising self. Discipline is thereby internalized in a form that workers themselves come to desire. Streamers are not simply compelled to increase conversion rates; they aspire to become more effective at producing conversions. This transformation from an external gaze to a self-directed gaze constitutes one of the more subtle mechanisms of platform governance.

The preceding analysis demonstrates that data systems can convert emotional interaction into measurable and comparable forms. Nevertheless, the effects of such systems vary across product categories because different commodities possess different sensory characteristics and generate different levels of emotional involvement among consumers. It

is therefore necessary to consider why disciplinary practices directed at conversational interaction are particularly pronounced in apparel livestreaming.

### Why apparel livestreaming?

The distinctive character of apparel livestreaming must be understood in relation to a fundamental sensory condition: clothing consumption depends heavily on tactile experience, whereas online shopping prevents consumers from directly accessing such experience. Fabric texture, softness, comfort against the skin, weight, and drape ordinarily need to be verified through touch and physical try-on. Consumers vary in their reliance on tactile information when evaluating products, and the absence of such information can increase the difficulty of assessing product quality and personal suitability (Peck & Childers, 2003). This sensory deficit brings the streamer's body to the forefront of the labor process.

Research on the body in communication studies—from Peters's philosophical reflections on the bodily limits of communication, to McLuhan's understanding of media as extensions of the human body, and to posthumanist examinations of the integration of bodies and technologies—has consistently demonstrated the importance of bodily presence in mediated communication (Peters, 1999; McLuhan, 1964; Hayles, 1999). In virtual shopping environments, consumers cannot physically touch commodities as they would in offline retail settings. The streamer's body consequently becomes particularly important because it encounters the product on behalf of the consumer and communicates aspects of its tactile qualities.

Through such practices as trying on garments, turning to display their fit from different angles, touching or stretching fabrics, and verbally describing material qualities, streamers provide a form of tactile compensation. Sensory experiences that cannot be directly accessed through the screen are translated into visual, auditory, and imaginable forms. The body, in this context, should not be understood as an enclosed biological entity but as an open system deeply integrated with media and technology (Hayles, 1999). In apparel livestreaming, the streamer's body provides a concrete manifestation of this body-technology system. Cameras, lighting, filters, and audio equipment extend and modify the digital representation of the streamer's body, while consumers' imagined relationships with their own bodies are simultaneously activated and guided through these technological arrangements.

Clothing also plays a distinctive role in the construction of consumer identity, which gives the imagined act of trying on garments a meaning that extends beyond functional product evaluation. Possessions are not limited to their practical use value; they may also operate as extensions of the self and as resources for identity expression (Belk, 1988). When a viewer asks, "Would this trench coat suit me?", the question is not limited to sizing or fit. The viewer is also imagining how they might look in the garment and what kind of person they might become by wearing it.

Communication between apparel streamers and viewers therefore provides a bridge for the projection of identity fantasies. Through the display of their own bodies and the verbal articulation of aesthetic styles, streamers enable consumers to imagine a possible future self. Clothing is not merely a commodity placed on the surface of the body; it is a cultural form closely connected to embodied practice and social identity (Entwistle, 2000). Emotional labor centered on identity construction thus engages with the potential transformation of the self rather than merely producing momentary sensory pleasure.

Within the specific environment of the livestreaming room, bodily display is intended not only to demonstrate the advantages of garments but also to present the body in accordance with established aesthetic standards. Research on digital content production has shown that platform workers are frequently required to balance commercial demands with the performance of authenticity. They produce an appearance of naturalness through carefully designed forms of everyday, informal, and personalized expression (Abidin, 2017; Duffy & Hund, 2019). From this perspective, even when platforms and agencies impose standardized requirements and fixed scripts, workers may still inject individualized features into otherwise routinized performances. This raises a further question: does this effort to produce “performed authenticity” weaken platform discipline, or does it ultimately reinforce disciplinary control?

When streamers derive satisfaction from making minor personalized adjustments within a standardized framework and consequently feel that they have preserved a degree of individuality, does this sense of autonomy make them more willing to remain within the standardized labor system? If so, performed authenticity may not constitute genuine resistance to discipline. Rather, it may represent another dimension of the manufacture of consent.

In this sense, performed authenticity functions as a safety valve within the disciplinary system rather than as an effective challenge to it. By preserving a limited degree of individualized expression within standardized performances, streamers may alleviate the sense of alienation produced by routinized labor. At the same time, however, this limited autonomy may strengthen their acceptance of the platform’s labor rules.

Conversational interaction in apparel livestreaming is therefore a composite form of labor. It encompasses aesthetic judgment, tactile substitution, and the mediation of identity imaginaries, while simultaneously involving verbal expression, bodily performance, and emotional influence. When platforms discipline this labor through conversion-centered metrics, what is decomposed and standardized is not limited to conversational technique. The process also encompasses streamers’ subtle aesthetic judgments, their ability to interpret embodied differences, and their capacity to guide consumers’ imagined identities. These forms of labor are highly contextual and resistant to complete standardization, even as platforms continually attempt to render them

measurable, reproducible, and subject to performance evaluation.

## Research Methods and Sample Selection

This paper employs in-depth interviews, combining snowball sampling and purposive sampling, to select 15 e-commerce livestreamers at different stages of their career development and across various apparel sub-sectors for interviews (See Table 1). Regarding age, the interviewed livestreamers range from 21 to 40 years old, which is highly consistent with the primary age demographic of current apparel e-commerce consumers. Among them are 12 females and 3 males, reflecting the industry’s gender structure while accommodating male representation in sectors like streetwear and business menswear. Their livestreaming experience ranges from 2 months (resigned) to 5 years, which helps study the impact of platform rules on livestreamers at different career stages. In terms of category coverage, the sample encompasses 15 sub-sectors, including Korean-style young ladies’ wear, plus-size womenswear, high-end silk and cashmere, maternity wear, sports and outdoor wear, and traditional ancient-style (Hanfu) clothing.

## Specific Manifestations of the Emotional Labor of e-commerce livestreamers Livestreamers narrow the distance with the audience through intimate expression

In apparel livestreaming rooms, intimate expression is usually the starting point of emotional labor. Livestreamers use everyday terms of address to soften the commercial tone of the sales pitch scenario, laying an emotional foundation for subsequent product sales. They typically adopt daily, colloquial, and relatable expressions to maintain interactive stickiness with the audience, transforming the livestreaming room from a one-way promotional scene into an interactive space imbued with a sense of companionship. A plus-size womenswear livestreamer with two years of experience (P2) remarked: “I don’t start by saying how much this piece of clothing costs. Instead, I first ask if they’ve eaten today and if there are any petite sisters here.” This expression involves a deep performance strategy: the livestreamer establishes intimacy through a non-sales posture and uses this to achieve sales targets.

However, intimate expression is not synonymous with fake performance. An ancient-style apparel livestreamer with a year and a half of experience (P10) emphasized the importance of “understanding”: “The audience doesn’t come in to take a class; they come to find someone who understands them. If you say this length is friendly to petite girls, they know you are on their side.” It is evident that intimate expression is driven by both emotional investment and the platform’s conversion logic. When the strategy of “understanding you” is proven by data to have a traffic-drawing effect, communication that originally carried a sense of gift-

**Table 1 | Basic Information of Interviewed Douyin e-commerce livestreamers**

| No. | Age | Gender | Livestreaming Experience | Main Apparel Category                  | Interview Method                     |
|-----|-----|--------|--------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| P1  | 23  | Female | 6 months                 | Korean-style womenswear (Young ladies) | Online voice interview               |
| P2  | 28  | Female | 2 years                  | Plus-size womenswear                   | Offline face-to-face interview       |
| P3  | 35  | Female | 3 years                  | High-end silk and cashmere             | WeChat video interview               |
| P4  | 25  | Male   | 1 year                   | Streetwear menswear                    | Online voice interview               |
| P5  | 30  | Female | 4 years                  | Maternity wear                         | Telephone interview                  |
| P6  | 22  | Female | 3 months                 | Fast fashion influencer styles         | Online text interview                |
| P7  | 40  | Female | 5 years                  | Middle-aged and elderly womenswear     | Offline wholesale market stall visit |
| P8  | 27  | Male   | 8 months                 | Sports and outdoor, yoga wear          | Online voice interview               |
| P9  | 32  | Female | 2.5 years                | Designer brands                        | WeChat voice call                    |
| P10 | 24  | Female | 1.5 years                | Ancient-style (Hanfu) clothing         | Online video interview               |
| P11 | 29  | Female | 1 year                   | Underwear, loungewear                  | Telephone interview                  |
| P12 | 26  | Female | 2 years                  | Commuter, workplace formal wear        | Offline interview                    |
| P13 | 33  | Male   | 3 years                  | Business menswear, shirts and trousers | WeChat text interview                |
| P14 | 21  | Female | 2 months (resigned)      | Shoes and bag pairing                  | Telephone follow-up                  |
| P15 | 31  | Female | 4 years                  | /                                      | Online voice interview               |

giving becomes solidified into standardized opening scripts. This intimate expression, acting as a core emotional labor strategy, seemingly neutralizes sales traces but actually lays the foundation for subsequent sales conversion and emotional monetization by constructing emotional stickiness and trust.

### **Outfit explanation and try-on demonstration: The critical path to building consumer trust**

The trust mechanism in apparel livestreaming relies heavily on the livestreamer's embodied demonstration of the goods. Embodied behaviors in e-commerce livestreaming, such as personal try-ons and experience sharing, can enhance the persuasiveness of the livestreamer's recommendations. Since audiences cannot try clothes online, livestreamers must advance "seeing the clothes" to "believing it suits me" through on-body demonstrations, turning around, close-up shots, and styling instructions. Therefore, livestreamers must not only announce the size, price, and material, but also translate the silhouette, length, drape, thickness, and applicable scenarios into a wearing effect that the audience can visualize. A Korean-style womenswear livestreamer with 6 months of experience (P1) pointed out: "You can't just say the bust is 96 cm; you have to say that for sisters weighing 110 to 140 jin, this will tuck in the armpit fat nicely when worn. You also can't just say it's cotton; you must say it doesn't prickle against the skin and can also be worn in the summer." This type of explanation translates abstract data into concrete bodily experiences, addressing consumers' concerns regarding sizing, color, and scenario suitability while establishing a baseline of trust. A high-end silk and cashmere livestreamer with 3 years of experience (P3) further emphasized the importance of bodily movements: "Silk tends to look dull on camera; only when worn and moving around can its flowing elegance be shown amid the changing light." Clearly, the livestreamer's body is not merely a clothing display tool, but a mediatized sensory intermediary. Sensory compensation mechanisms constructed

through bodily movements such as trying on, turning, and close-ups provide audiences with a sensory experience of a "virtual-try-on".

In the mediatized environment, the livestreamer's body is woven into a 'body-technology' system, becoming the consumer's 'extended sensorium'. Through embodied performances like trying on and turning around, unreachable material properties are transformed into quantifiable visual symbols, thus completing cross-screen sensory compensation.

### **Emotional mobilization and rhythm advancement: On-site drivers for immediate ordering**

Once intimate relationships and trust are preliminarily established, livestreamers must push consumers to place orders through emotional mobilization and rhythm advancement. Apparel consumption is somewhat impulsive, and whether an audience purchases often depends on whether the livestreamer can create a sense of urgency and drive decision-making within a limited time. Livestreamers typically push audiences from a state of observation to a state of action by increasing their speaking speed, emphasizing inventory limits, setting countdowns, and calling out specific viewers to respond. For example, brand e-commerce livestreamers undergo various scripting and sales technique training from the moment they are hired; from unified terms of address to templated processes like "counting down three numbers, put up the link," their labor process increasingly resembles fast-paced, mechanized assembly line production. This rhythmic advancement places continuous demands on the livestreamer's emotions. Even during long livestreams where interaction decreases, livestreamers must maintain an excited, enthusiastic, and stable mode of expression to prevent the atmosphere from dropping and traffic from leaking. The platform's assessment of duration, follower growth, interaction, and transactions closely links emotional

mobilization to traffic pressure, turning emotions into a production resource that sustains the livestream's momentum. Platforms categorize livestreamers into different tiers based on metrics like annual streaming duration, follower count, follower growth trends, the purchase ratio of followers, livestream data trends, and the average number of video likes, comments, favorites, and shares. To retain audience traffic and avoid a drop in their room's ranking, livestreamers generally need to maintain interaction and drive the consumption rhythm in a highly tense state. Thus, immediate ordering in apparel e-commerce livestreams is constantly driven to completion under the combined forces of the livestreamer's continuous emotional mobilization, rhythm control, and platform data pressure.

However, the conversion goal of emotional labor does not end with the on-the-spot transaction. For livestreamers, what is truly valuable is not a one-time order, but a continuous consumption connection. A foreign trade original single apparel livestreamer with four years of experience (P15) stated: "A one-off deal won't last long. No matter how hard I push for the order today, if the customer receives the goods and is unsatisfied, he won't come back next time." Therefore, immediate transactions are not the end of emotional labor; after-sales appeasement and relationship maintenance present entirely new challenges for livestreamers.

### **After-sales appeasement and relationship maintenance: The continuation of conversion from one-time transactions to continuous connections**

Because apparel products are characterized by high return and exchange rates, a livestreamer's emotional labor often extends into the after-sales phase. At this point, after-sales service is not merely technical problem-solving, but rather secondary maintenance of the trust relationship through emotional appeasement. Unlike the "continuation" mode of ambiguous relationships reliant on "push and pull" strategies seen in entertainment/showcase livestreams, the communication and interaction between e-commerce livestreamers and their audiences are based more on the professional role of a "wardrobe consultant". The core of maintaining an intimate distance relies on practical trust, not ambiguous attraction. A commuter formal wear livestreamer with two years of experience (P12) shared her after-sales handling experience, typically opting for a gentler approach: "Baozi (Honey/Darling), this color is closer to its true shade under natural light. Why don't you try it again tomorrow morning, and if you still don't like it, I'll process a return for you." This strategy effectively maintains long-term relationships between merchants and consumers by balancing problem-solving with emotional care.

It is clear that emotional labor does not stop when a transaction is completed; instead, it transitions into relationship maintenance, forming a backbone for future consumption relationships.

## **Platform Discipline: The Institutional Shaping of Emotional Labor**

### **Data assessment: The traffic orientation of emotional expression**

Data assessment is the core mechanism by which emotional labor is continuously reinforced. The Douyin platform provides metrics such as view counts, retention times, interaction rates, follower conversion rates, and transaction volumes, supplying livestreamers with data-based evidence to adjust their forms of address, speaking speed, and display methods. When a certain expression brings higher interaction or sales, it is repeatedly used and precipitates into stable scripts. Therefore, while the emotional expressions and scripts of livestreamers appear to be on-the-spot improvisations, they are essentially the shaping and disciplining of emotional expression by the platform's data logic. However, not all livestreamers can adapt to this mode of emotional discipline. Shoes and bags livestreamer who resigned after only two months (P14) confessed: "I couldn't stand that fake, hyped-up atmosphere. Whenever I saw the cold numbers, I was actually very anxious inside, but I still had to pretend to be enjoying afternoon tea with the sisters in a high-end mall. They (the operations team) were always saying 'you need to shout like this,' 'you need to laugh like this,' and I felt like that just wasn't me." In a follow-up, this livestreamer further stated: "It's not that I resisted the data; it's just that I couldn't do it right no matter how I tried. Others could close deals by shouting their lines, but it had no effect when I shouted. The operations team said I wasn't loose enough." The departure of this livestreamer demonstrates that data assessment has a screening function: those who adapt to the metrics are kept, while those who do not are marginalized. This structural pressure causes most livestreamers to attribute problems to their own mismatch with the platform, rather than to the platform's exploitation itself. This perfectly echoes the micro-manifestations of capital logic pointed out by Brook. A middle-aged and elderly womenswear livestreamer with 5 years of experience (P7) gradually began to see the data dashboard as a game: "At first, I didn't dare look at the data. Later, I would analyze why retention time increased by three seconds today, which sentence caused it, and which style made the comment section most active—it's like playing a video game." In her eyes, data is no longer just a cold monitor, but has transformed into an object of desire through the 'making-out game' mechanism. The livestreamer's self-actualization is narrowed down to numerical growth. The internalization of self-gaze shifts the discipline from external coercion to the subject's self-drive. The "consent" tailored by the platform for the workers makes them unknowingly view the platform's goals as their own while pursuing data, invisibly contributing free labor to the platform.

Furthermore, the disciplinary effect of data assessment is also intuitively reflected in the alienation of the emotional 'gift'. When data dashboards repeatedly verify the traffic-drawing effect of a certain sentence, it is extracted from the

context of a gift and fixed as a standard configuration in the opening script. The livestreamer no longer says this sentence because she "wants to help the viewer," but because "saying it yields good data". When the gift is overlaid by performance, the qualitative nature of emotional labor undergoes an imperceptible yet irreversible change.

### **Livestreaming systems: The time discipline of emotional investment**

In addition to data assessments, livestreaming systems also impose time discipline on livestreamers through factors like duration and frequency. Platform capital uses flexible working hours as a cover, but in reality, it covertly extends working hours, even expropriating personal rest time without compensation. Consequently, livestreamers often "voluntarily" extend their streaming hours, and continue to manage fan groups, process after-sales issues, and reply to private messages after going offline.

A Hanfu livestreamer with a year and a half of experience (P10) described the physical and mental exhaustion after a stream: "After going offline, I feel physically hollowed out. Sometimes someone @s me in the fan group; I see it but don't want to reply, yet a few hours later I feel guilty and end up replying anyway." This 'hollowed out' exhaustion and the 'guilt' felt when not replying indicate that the livestreamer's emotional labor has broken through work boundaries, extending uncompensated into personal rest time.

A foreign trade apparel livestreamer with four years of experience (P15) explicitly pointed out: "It's not that the agency forces you to stream more; it's that you don't dare stream less. If you stream one hour less, the traffic is gone. It's not that I'm hardworking; it's that I'm afraid." This reveals the intrinsic connection between livestreaming rules and algorithmic mechanisms. It shows that time discipline does not manifest as mandatory administrative orders, but is covertly transformed into the algorithm's traffic allocation mechanism. The compulsory nature of the rules is masked by the objectivity of the algorithm, prompting workers to rationalize their self-imposed pressure as an active, rational choice. Instead, it is internalized as the livestreamer's self-requirement through algorithmic allocation and competitive pressure.

In such an institutional environment, the emotional labor borne by e-commerce livestreamers has actually exceeded simple on-camera expression, transforming into a highly dense form of labor shaped jointly by duration requirements, appearance frequency, and emotional control. Therefore, the livestreaming system's discipline of livestreamers not only rearranges their work schedules but also continuously compresses their emotional recovery space, gradually making emotional labor a daily practice hovering perpetually on the edge of burnout.

### **Team training: The tension between standardization of interactive presentation and "pseudo-authenticity"**

Team training outside of the livestream further drives the standardization of emotional labor. After joining an agency, livestreamers usually must undergo training in scripts, actions, camera presence, pacing, and after-sales procedures. Dai Yingjie and Lü Zijian describe this phenomenon as "assembly line production," meaning brand livestreamers must accept uniform script and process training from the day they onboard, with their work processes broken down into replicable, assessable, and standardized segments. Many interviewees indicated that while standardized training improved sales data, it weakened their autonomy of expression. An underwear and loungewear livestreamer with 1 year of experience (P11) said: "At first I thought it was effective, the data really did go up, but the more I learned, the faker I felt. The words you say aren't what you truly want to say, but you have to say them anyway." To resist the alienating experience brought about by emotional standardization, some livestreamers have developed "pseudo-authenticity" expressive strategies. For example, a designer brand livestreamer with 2.5 years of experience (P9), when broadcasting the agency's unified order-forcing script "inventory is low, hurry up and order," intentionally embeds personal life experiences: "These are pieces I kept for myself; it looks great in photos when dining out nicely yesterday," seeking to gain a limited sense of control—"these words are still mine"—amidst mechanical labor.

This personalized presentation maneuvered within standardized scripts is by no means a true victory for the worker's subjectivity. As a defensive strategy, "pseudo-authenticity" provides the subject with faint psychological compensation, but on a macro level, it acts as a "safety valve" for the disciplinary system. It cleverly dissolves the workers' resistance to assembly-line operations. The stealth and effectiveness of platform discipline lie precisely here: it does not seek to entirely obliterate the subjectivity of digital laborers, but rather draws safe boundaries for them that can be commercially co-opted, allowing workers, under the illusion of "limited autonomy," to bond capital logic with self-identity, ultimately making them even more compliant within the platform's normative order.

### **Conclusion**

The emotional labor of Douyin apparel e-commerce livestreamers has become the outcome of interactions among platform discipline, corporate shaping, and consumers. The shift from "knowing how to chat" to "driving conversions" marks a change in the nature of labor within e-commerce livestreaming rooms. Chatting is no longer an open interpersonal exchange, but is alienated into a data-driven capability that can increase retention, interaction, and transactions. e-commerce livestreamers construct an emotional labor chain through intimate expression, try-on

demonstrations, emotional mobilization, and after-sales appeasement. Within this chain, the platform filters effective emotional expressions through data assessment, compresses emotional recovery time via livestreaming systems, and standardizes scripts, actions, and aesthetic judgments through team training, thereby forming a closed loop of discipline over e-commerce livestreamers.

Livestreamers retain partial subjectivity; they embed their personal experiences, tone, and style into the platform's standardized scripts to form an expressive strategy of "pseudo-authenticity". While this strategy offers them limited self-affirmation, it also deeply entrenches them in the platform's labor order, obscuring the platform's regulatory control and labor control. It is thus clear that platform discipline does not simply suppress the subjectivity of workers, but manufactures "consent" through covert means like data games, time pressure, and limited autonomy, turning them into uncompensated laborers and victims of the platform society.

The logical evolution of e-commerce livestreamers from 'being able to chat' to 'being able to convert' reveals the comprehensive rationalization of human relational society by technology, as well as the invisible control and discipline platforms exert over digital workers in a platform society. Future industry governance, while pursuing efficiency metrics, should further focus on the emotional depletion, time boundaries, and diversity of aesthetic labor among digital workers, reserving offline spaces for emotional repair to prevent the exhaustion of aesthetic labor.

## References

- Abidin, C. (2017). familygoals: Family influencers, calibrated amateurism, and justifying young digital labor. *Social Media + Society*, 3(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117707191>
- Baym, N. K. (2015). Connect with your audience! The relational labor of connection. *The Communication Review*, 18(1), 14–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2015.996401>
- Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(2), 139–168. <https://doi.org/10.1086/209154>
- Bolton, S. C., & Boyd, C. (2003). Trolley dolly or skilled emotion manager? Moving on from Hochschild's managed heart. *Work, Employment and Society*, 17(2), 289–308. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017003017002004>
- Brook, P. (2009). The alienated heart: Hochschild's "emotional labour" thesis and the anticapitalist politics of alienation. *Capital & Class*, 33(2), 7–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030981680909800101>
- Burawoy, M. (1979). *Manufacturing consent: Changes in the labor process under monopoly capitalism*. University of Chicago Press.
- Dai, Y., & Lü, Z. (2022). The Subjectivity of Digital Labor and Its Development Trend: Based on the Study of Alienated Labor of Brand Livestreamers. *Journalism & Communication Review*, 75(05), 72–85. <https://doi.org/10.14086/j.cnki.xwycb-pl.2022.05.006>
- Dong, C., & Ye, Z. (2021). Being a Livestreamer: A Digital Ethnography of Relational Labor. *Journal of International Communication*, 43(5), 144–166. <https://doi.org/10.13495/j.cnki.cjic.2021.12.005>
- Duffy, B. E., & Hund, E. (2019). Gendered visibility on social media: Navigating Instagram's authenticity bind. *International Journal of Communication*, 13, 4983–5002. <https://doi.org/10.32376/3f8575cb.3f03db0e>
- Entwistle, J. (2000). Fashion and the fleshy body: Dress as embodied practice. *Fashion Theory*, 4(3), 323–347. <https://doi.org/10.2752/136270400778995471>
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Pantheon Books.
- Han, X., & Xu, Z. (2020). The Impact of E-commerce Livestreamer Attributes on Consumers' Online Purchase Intentions: A Study Based on Grounded Theory. *Foreign Economics & Management*, 42(10), 62–75. <https://doi.org/10.16538/j.cnki.fem.20200820.301>
- Hayles, N. K. (1999). *How we became posthuman: Virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics*. University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226321394.001.0001>
- Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. University of California Press.
- Kellogg, K. C., Valentine, M. A., & Christin, A. (2020). Algorithms at work: The new contested terrain of control. *Academy of Management Annals*, 14(1), 366–410. <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2018.0174>
- Lu, B., & Chen, Z. (2021). Live streaming commerce and consumers' purchase intention: An uncertainty reduction perspective. *Information & Management*, 58(7), Article 103509. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2021.103509>
- McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. McGraw-Hill.
- Moore, P. V. (2018). Tracking affective labour for agility in the quantified workplace. *Body & Society*, 24(3), 39–67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X18775203>
- Peck, J., & Childers, T. L. (2003). Individual differences in haptic information processing: The "need for touch" scale. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30(3), 430–442. <https://doi.org/10.1086/378619>
- Peters, J. D. (1999). *Speaking into the air: A history of the idea of communication*. University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226922638.001.0001>
- Rosenblat, A., & Stark, L. (2016). Algorithmic labor and information asymmetries: A case study of Uber's drivers. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 3758–3784. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2686227>
- Sun, Y., Shao, X., Li, X., Guo, Y., & Nie, K. (2019). How live streaming influences purchase intentions in social commerce: An IT affordance perspective. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 37, Article 100886. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2019.100886>
- Witz, A., Warhurst, C., & Nickson, D. (2003). The labour of aesthetics and the aesthetics of organization. *Organization*, 10(1), 33–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508403010001375>
- Wongkitrungrueng, A., & Assarut, N. (2020). The role of live streaming in building consumer trust and engagement with social commerce sellers. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 543–556. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.08.032>
- Wood, A. J., Graham, M., Lehdonvirta, V., & Hjorth, I. (2019). Good gig, bad gig: Autonomy and algorithmic control in the global gig economy. *Work, Employment and Society*, 33(1), 56–75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017018785616>