

THE IMPACT OF ANCHOR CHARACTERISTICS ON CUSTOMERS' SUSTAINABLE FOLLOW IN E-COMMERCE LIVE BROADCAST—BASED ON THE SURVEY OF TIKTOK USERS IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

With the development of Internet commerce, live broadcast has become a new e-commerce milestone. This study uses SOR model for reference, taking customer perceived value and customer flow experience as intermediary variables, to explore the impact of anchor characteristics on the sustainable follow of customers in the live broadcast room. The research findings demonstrate that the credibility, professionalism, interactivity, and attractiveness of e-commerce anchors have a significant positive impact on customer perceived value and customer flow experience. Customer perceived value and customer flow experience positively influence the sustainable retention of customers in live broadcast rooms. Moreover, these factors act as mediators between the characteristics of e-commerce anchors and the sustainable retention of customers. Therefore, it is imperative for live broadcast e-commerce merchants to adapt their strategies based on anchor attributes in order to enhance customer perceived value and improve customer flow experience. This will effectively guide customers towards sustained engagement and yield favorable marketing outcomes. It is helpful for e-commerce anchors to effectively reduce customer loss and form customer loyalty, and also provides a reference for enterprises to use live broadcast e-commerce for product sales and brand promotion.

Keywords: anchor characteristics; sustainable follow; perceived value; flow experience

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1. INTRODUCTION

Live broadcast e-commerce has become the biggest trend of business mode innovation in recent years, and its scale has been growing at a sustained high speed. According to the Statistical Report on China's Internet Development released by CNNIC, as of June 2022, the number of users of China's live broadcast e-commerce was 469 million, with a year-on-year growth of 85 million. In June 2021, the number of users of live broadcast e-commerce was 384 million, with a year-on-year

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growth of 75 million. Although the user increment of platforms such as Tiktok and Taobao has peaked, there is still much room for the growth of live broadcast e-commerce users.

From the perspective of underlying logic, live broadcast e-commerce focuses on commodity visual content operation and interest recommendation, and presents the core feature of "goods seeking" based on interest, thus greatly shortening the product sales link. In essence, the live broadcast e-commerce will bring customers into a specific consumption scene, and use various scripts, displays, interactions, etc. to affect customers' psychology and ultimately achieve the transformation from fans to purchase. In this process, the anchor, as the content producer, will play an increasingly important role. By using the stickiness of content, the e-commerce value of private domain traffic will be excavated, and the repurchase rate of users will be further improved. Finally, the traditional value logic of image and text e-commerce based on search will be changed.

The live broadcast rooms of e-commerce anchors emerge in endlessly, and more importantly, how to maintain the customers' sustainable follow in the live broadcast room, so as to further improve the customer stickiness of the live broadcast room. At present, scholars' research is mainly focused on the classification, development, communication and marketing of e-commerce anchors. Research on customers focuses on the influencing factors of customers' purchase behavior and willingness. Research on the sustainable follow of customers in live broadcast rooms has not yet been involved. For a long time, most of the scholars' research on the sustainable follow of customers has been in the field of social media. This study attempts to use SOR model to study the impact mechanism of anchor characteristics on customers' sustainable follow.

The study explores the influence of anchor characteristics on the sustainable follow of customers in the live broadcast room, as well as the intermediary role of customer perceived value and customer flow experience in the influence mechanism. While bridging the existing theoretical gap, this study also contributes to advancing our understanding of the impact mechanism underlying customers' sustainable follow. In practice, it is helpful to explore which features of e-commerce anchors will have an impact on customers' purchase behavior, so as to put forward targeted suggestions to the anchors and improve the marketing effect. The sustainable follow of live broadcast e-commerce customers has an effect on customer retention and expansion. This study proposes strategies for e-commerce anchors to effectively generate customer loyalty, and also provides practical guidance for enterprises on how to use e-commerce live broadcasts to sell products and promote brands.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The e-commerce anchor presents products to customers in a comprehensive and detailed manner through expert recommendations, thereby enticing customers to make purchases through continuous interaction. The professionalism of e-commerce anchors and the alignment between anchors and customers influence users' trust perception and perceived value, subsequently impacting their purchase intention (Lin, 2021). Wang et al (2021) demonstrated that the charisma, interaction, and trustworthiness of anchors significantly affect customers' sense of social presence and flow experience. The interaction, professionalism, credibility, and attractiveness of an anchor positively impact customers' purchase intention (Luo, 2022). The charm attributes, interaction

attributes, display attributes, and recommendation attributes as factors influencing customer purchase intentions towards e-commerce anchors (Han, 2021). Zhao, et al. (2022) discovered that interactions with authentic, professional, and popular e-commerce anchors can enhance customer purchase intentions. The professionalism, interactivity and popularity of e-commerce anchors can improve customers' perceived entertainment and perceived utility value, while perceived entertainment and perceived utility value positively affect customers' purchase intention (Gao, 2022).

Currently, there is a limited body of research on the characteristics of e-commerce anchors in terms of information source attributes, with most studies focusing on online celebrities or opinion leaders. Research has demonstrated that within new media, the characteristics of online celebrities or opinion leaders as information sources can influence consumer behavior. Within the framework of the "online celebrity economy" model, the professionalism and attractiveness of opinion leaders positively impact consumers' purchase intentions through the mediating role of customer identity (Yanget al., 2018). Mengfei (2019) examined factors influencing customers' purchase intentions by incorporating characteristics such as professionalism, interactivity, product involvement, and popularity among opinion leaders; their findings revealed that both product involvement and professionalism exhibited positive effects on customers' purchase intentions.

The sustainable follow of customers is essentially inseparable from customer retention, customer repurchase intention and customer loyalty. Sustainable follow can promote visitors to return within a period of time and is one of the main factors to help create and maintain competitiveness and sustainable development (Khalifa, 2002). The security, quality and discount of online websites positively affect website customers' attention through the intermediary effect of customer satisfaction (Zhang, 2016). Twitter's perceived content quality and perceived system quality are the reasons for continuing to use Twitter (Lu & Lee, 2010). And the trust will have a positive impact on the acceptance of problem solutions and website stickiness (Lee & Hyun, 2016).

In the study of flow experience, current scholars primarily focus on its influencing factors and the impact of flow experience on customers' online purchase behavior. The website feedback and target clarity have a positive effect on flow experience (Hu, 2012). The system quality, information quality, and user trust as influential factors in social network flow experiences (Tao, 2010). Impact of customer flow experience on online purchase behavior under various circumstances such as product type, perceived risk, self-confidence, purchase intention, and purchase type (Smith & Sivakumar, 2005). Customer flow experience positively affects online purchase intention and repeat purchase intention by studying web page characteristics' influence on customers' online purchasing behaviors (Hausman & Sickpe, 2009). An online customer's flow experience can affect their brand loyalty (Zhao, 2009). From the perspective of VR technology applied to e-commerce platforms, it has been empirically verified that a positive correlation exists between an online customer's satisfaction with their shopping journey (flow) and their brand loyalty (Lin, 2019).

The perceived value is the assessment made by customers after comparing the benefits and costs of a specific product or service in market transactions from the perspective of customer psychology (Zeithaml, 1988). The impact of customers' risk perception, gain and loss perception in online shopping, as well as their own characteristics on perceived value (Zhong, 2010). Bai (2009)

constructed a structural equation model to explore the relationship among customer perceived value, customer satisfaction, and behavioral orientation, confirming that customer perceived value serves as an influencing factor for customer satisfaction. Zheng et al. (2015) using "Nike" as a test brand, revealed significant positive impacts of customer perceived value and marketing strategy on customer brand loyalty.

Numerous studies have been conducted in the field of e-commerce based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model. Jiman and Zhuo (2020) developed a theoretical model to examine customers' purchase intention for online live broadcasts in e-commerce, revealing that both product characteristics and scenario characteristics positively influence customers' perceived pleasure, perceived value, and ultimately their purchase intention. Building upon the iceberg model research, Li (2022) discovered that interactivity and authenticity of e-commerce live broadcasts positively impact customers' perceived trust, demand, and consequently their purchase intention. In a comprehensive SOR model, one or more groups of organisms are connected to external stimuli and behavioral responses through mediation variables. Drawing from the SOR model framework, this study constructs an impact model illustrating how e-commerce anchor characteristics affect customer sustainable follow by considering customer perceived value and customer flow experience as intermediary variables.

3. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS AND THEORETICAL MODE

3.1 Research hypothesis

3.1.1 Hypotheses between anchor characteristics and customer perceived value

E-commerce anchor professionalism refers to that the anchor masters the knowledge, skills and experience related to the recommended products. Professional e-commerce anchors will clearly and accurately deliver product information and reduce customers' uncertainty about products, which will make customers think that products are very useful for themselves and enhance customer perceived value (Dipayana, et al, 2013). The sense of trust will inhibit negative communication and positively affect customer perceived value (Liu, 2021). The image elements of online celebrity positively affect customer perceived value, including the expression, temperament and conversation of online celebrity. Therefore, the attraction of e-commerce anchors can increase customer perceived value (Lin Tingting, 2021). Information, interaction and other factors will affect customer perceived value (Patwardhan, 2005). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Anchor characteristics positively affect customer perceived value
- H1a: The credibility of anchors positively affects customer perceived value
- H1b: The professionalism of anchors positively affects customer perceived value
- H1c: The interactivity of anchors positively affects customer perceived value
- H1d: The attractiveness of anchors positively affects customer perceived value

3.1.2 Hypotheses between anchor characteristics and customer flow experience

In the process of e-commerce live broadcast, customers will be stimulated by information. When the information source becomes more credible, customers' positive evaluation of the information source will shift to services and products, ultimately improving customers' feelings and recognition (Ling , 2011), so that customers can focus more on watching live broadcast and enhance their sense of pleasure in watching live broadcast. The professionalism of online celebrity positively affects customers' arousal and pleasure (Wu , 2014). Zheng (2020) found in his research that the interaction between e-commerce anchors and customers will enhance customer flow experience. Flow experience is an unconscious experience, with a certain degree of addiction and control. When customers watch the live broadcast, the more attractive the e-commerce anchor is, the more pleasant the customers will feel. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H2: Anchor characteristics positively affect customer flow experience
- H2a: The credibility of anchors positively affects customer flow experience
- H2b: The professionalism of anchors positively affects customer flow experience
- H2c: The interactivity of anchors positively affects customer flow experience
- H2d: The attractiveness of anchors positively affects customer flow experience

3.1.3 Hypothesis between customer perceived value and sustainable follow

When watching the live broadcast, customers will evaluate the services and products of the anchor, which generating psychological reactions that help customers to repeat their purchases. The greater the perceived value of the website, the longer they stay on the website. Sustainable followed customers will repeatedly visit or watch the preferred live broadcast room, and will extend their stay in the live broadcast room. The sustainable follow is the influencing factor of customers' repurchase intention, and customer perceived value affects customers' repurchase intention through customer trust and satisfaction. Factors such as system quality, information quality, trust, perceived value and perceived usefulness can promote website stickiness. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H3: Customer perceived value positively affects customer sustainable follow

3.1.4 Hypothesis between customer flow experience and sustainable follow

When customers watch the live broadcast of e-commerce, they will have the flow experience, which will reduce the perceived risk of customers and will produce a pleasant and exciting experience. The flow characteristics of users will increase the frequency and time of users' visits, forming customers sustainable follow (Ruth, 2001). The user satisfaction and flow experience positively affect users' willingness to continue using (Zhao , 2012). Customer flow experience can produce inner happiness and play a role in customer loyalty. Customer flow experience can attract customers' attention for a long time, so as to extend the viewing time of customers in the live broadcast room and sustainable follow, so that customers have the desire to return to the live broadcast room repeatedly. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Customer flow experience positively affects customer sustainable follow

3.1.5 Intermediate hypotheses about customer perceived value and flow experience

In the SOR model, when stimulated by the external environment, the body will internalize the stimulus into a psychological transformation mechanism of information, and then make relevant responses to the external stimulus information. According to SOR theory and the above, the higher the professionalism, credibility, attractiveness and interactivity of the e-commerce anchor as an information source, the higher the customer perceived value and customer flow experience, and the customer perceived value and customer flow experience positively affect the customer sustainable follow. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

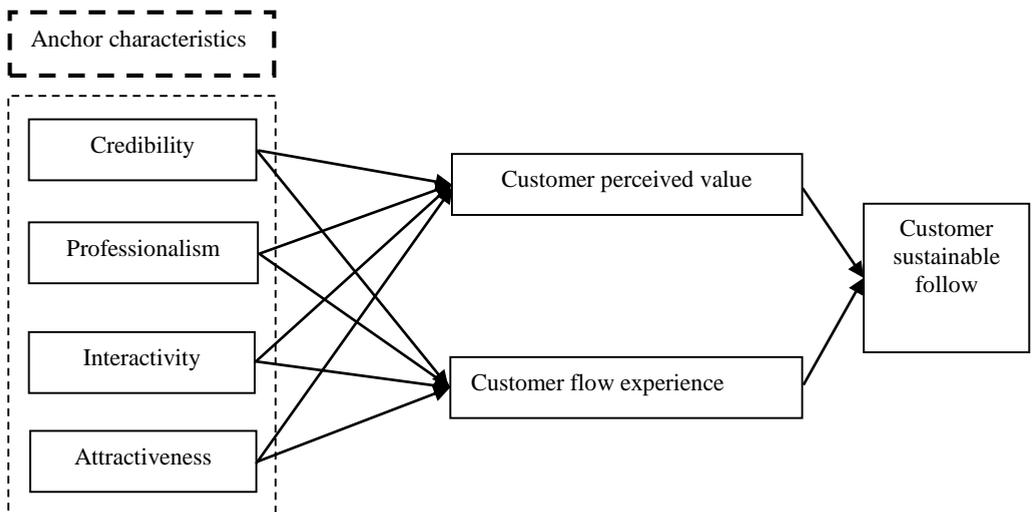
H5: Customer perceived value plays an intermediary role between e-commerce anchor characteristics and customer sustainable follow

H6: Customer flow experience plays an intermediary role between e-commerce anchor characteristics and customer sustainable follow

3.2 Theoretical mode

Based on the relevant theoretical basis and the previous hypotheses, this study uses the SOR theory for reference to build a conceptual model of customer sustainable follow in live broadcast e-commerce (as shown in Figure 1). In this model, the anchor characteristics, as an external stimulus variable, influences the customer sustainable follow through the mediation of customer perceived value and customer flow experience. Among them, the anchor characteristics are measured from four aspects: the credibility, professionalism, interactivity and attractiveness.

Figure 1: The theoretical mode



4. RESEARCH METHODS AND RESULTS

4.1 Questionnaire and description statistics

In this study, we referred to relevant scales related to anchor characteristics, customer perceived value, customer follow experience, and sustainable following in existing literature and made necessary modifications according to the research object and purpose. All scales were measured using the Likert 5-level scale, and the questionnaire was pre-surveyed and revised before distribution. This study focuses on Chinese users of TikTok, specifically targeting young office workers and college students who frequently engage in live e-commerce as research subjects. The questionnaire was distributed through various channels including We Chat, Questionnaire stars app, email etc. A total of 652 questionnaires were collected initially; however, considering the diverse range of e-commerce anchors covering different products and services, invalid questionnaires were excluded from analysis. Through stratified sampling technique, a final sample size of 369 valid questionnaires was retained for further analysis. Sample statistics reveal that more than 70% of respondents are women aged between 21-45 years old with over 80% having obtained a bachelor's degree or higher education level; their monthly income ranges from ¥3000 to ¥8000. These sample characteristics align well with general attributes observed among live broadcast e-commerce customers groups.

4.2 Data analysis

In this study, confirmatory factor analysis was used to test the validity and reliability of the measurement model. Reliability is measured by Cronbach's α and Composite Reliability (CR). Aggregation validity is measured by Average Variance Extracted (AVE). As shown in Table 1, values of Cronbach's α ranged from 0.82 to 0.90, all greater than 0.7. CR values ranged from 0.79 to 0.88, all of which were greater than 0.7, indicating high reliability. The AVE values of each variable ranged from 0.56 to 0.66, all greater than 0.5, indicating well aggregation validity.

Table 1: Variable scale, reliability and validity analysis

Variable	Measurement	α	CR	AVE
Credibility	Cr1.The live broadcast content of e-commerce anchor is reliable	0.87	0.87	0.62
	Cr2.The products recommended by e-commerce anchor are reliable			
	Cr3.I trust the e-commerce anchor			
Professionalism	Pro1.The anchor has professional skills in recommending products	0.89	0.86	0.61
	Pro2.The anchor has rich experience in recommended products			
	Pro3.The anchor has professional knowledge in the field of recommended products			
Interactivity	In1.The anchor has a good interaction with the customers	0.82	0.82	0.60
	In2.The live broadcast content aroused my interest			
	In3.The live broadcast content encourages customers to participate effectively			
Attractiveness	At1.I followed because of the charm of the e-commerce anchor	0.83	0.81	0.61
	At2.I believed that the anchor is humorous and interesting			
	At3.The reason why I watch the live broadcast is that the anchor attracts me			
Customer Perceived Value	Pv1.Watching the live broadcast can help me make better shopping decisions	0.88	0.88	0.66
	Pv2.Shopping by watching the live broadcast is an efficient way to purchase			
	Pv3.The products in the anchor broadcast room are cost-effective			
	Pv4.Watching the live broadcast can make me feel that products bought are needed			
Customer Flow Experience	Fe1.I really enjoy watching the live broadcast of the anchor	0.82	0.79	0.56
	Fe2.Time flies when I watch the live broadcast of the anchor			
	Fe3.I often focus my attention and temporarily forget other things while watching the live broadcast of the anchor			
Customer Sustainable Follow	Sf1.I will often enter the anchor studio to watch the live broadcast	0.90	0.82	0.60
	Sf2.I often buy products through this e-commerce anchor studio			
	Sf3.I often spend more time watching the live broadcast of the e-commerce anchor			

The AMOS 23.0 software was used to analyze the standardized path coefficient in the model, as shown in Table 2. All adaptation indicators meet the requirements, indicating that the model is well matched with the scale, and the model-fitting degree is high, so the model is established.

Table 2: Model-fitting degree test

Index	χ^2 / df	NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Actual	1.915	0.921	0.935	0.953	0.944	0.916	0.053
Suggested	< 3	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	< 0.08

4.3 Hypothesis test

The structural equation is used to test the hypothesis, and maximum likelihood estimation is used for parameter estimation. It can be seen from Table 3 that the credibility, professionalism, interactivity and attractiveness of e-commerce anchors have a significant positive impact on perceived value and flow experience, that is, the characteristics of anchors have a significant impact on customer perceived value and customer flow experience. The results also show that customer perceived value has a positive significant impact on customer sustainable follow, and customer flow experience has a positive significant impact on customer sustainable follow.

Table 3: Hypothesis test results

Hypothesis	β	S.E.	C.R.	P-value	Results
H1a	0.254	0.059	1.413	0.011	Accepted
H1b	0.360	0.066	2.830	0.016	Accepted
H1c	0.155	0.053	1.207	0.020	Accepted
H1d	0.174	0.072	3.218	0.000	Accepted
H2a	0.263	0.032	9.254	0.030	Accepted
H2b	0.281	0.039	12.541	0.000	Accepted
H2c	0.484	0.070	9.185	0.000	Accepted
H2d	0.354	0.056	15.130	0.000	Accepted
H3	0.877	0.049	6.143	0.021	Accepted
H4	0.563	0.082	1.830	0.018	Accepted

The three-step regression coefficient method proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) is used to test the intermediary role of customer perceived value and customer flow experience. It can be seen from Table 4 that regression model 1 shows that the regression coefficients of credibility, professionalism, interactivity and attractiveness on customer perceived value all reach a significant level of more than 5%, indicating that they have a positive significant impact on customer perceived value, which also indicates that the intermediary role of customer perceived value is possible. Next, it is necessary to further judge the significance of the intermediary role of customer perceived value, and whether it is a full intermediary role or a partial intermediary role. Regression

model 2 shows that the regression coefficients of credibility, professionalism, interactivity and attractiveness on customer perceived value all reach a significant level of more than 5%. And model 3 shows that when credibility, professionalism, interactivity and attractiveness make regression analysis on the customer sustainable follow, only the regression coefficient of customer perceived value reaches a significant level, which indicates that the intermediary role of perceived value is obvious and has a complete intermediary role, so it proves that H5 is established.

Table 4: Intermediary test results of consumer perceived value

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Credibility	0.172	0.115	0.080
Professionalism	0.152	0.164	0.071
Interactivity	0.219	0.194	0.203
Attractiveness	0.286	0.212	0.161
Customer Perceived Value	-	-	0.583
R ² value	0.258	0.167	0.545
F value	45.498	63.976	71.326

Similarly, Table 5 shows that in the relationship between anchor characteristics (credibility, professionalism, interactivity and attractiveness) and customer sustainable follow, the intermediary role of customer flow experience is obvious and has a full intermediary role, so it proves that H6 is established.

Table 5: Intermediary test results of consumer flow experience

Independent variable	Dependent Variable		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Credibility	0.315	0.094	0.087
Professionalism	0.211	0.351	0.024
Interactivity	0.326	0.500	0.337
Attractiveness	0.532	0.595	0.371
Customer Flow Experience	-	-	0.668
R ² value	0.644	0.563	0.582
F value	143.508	220.081	132.493

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the SOR theory for reference, this study discusses the specific impact of e-commerce anchor characteristics on customer sustainable follow in the live broadcast room. The conclusions are as follows.

First of all, the characteristics of live broadcast e-commerce anchors have a positive impact on customer perceived value and customer flow experience. The credibility, professionalism, interactivity and attractiveness of e-commerce anchors have a significant positive impact on customer perceived value. Customer perceived value is the evaluation made by customers after comparing the effectiveness, benefits and costs with the emotional relationship established by the anchors in the process of purchasing goods and services through e-commerce live broadcast. Professional anchors will provide customers with more comprehensive product information, which will make customers feel that the product is of good quality and affordable. When the e-commerce anchor has credibility, customers will feel that the information conveyed by the anchor is credible, which will reduce customers' perceived risk. Customers get the product information they want through interaction with e-commerce anchors, and recognize that e-commerce live broadcasting is efficient and the products they buy are needed. The products displayed by the attractive e-commerce anchors will make customers think that the products are trendy, and will be as fashionable and beautiful as the e-commerce anchors when using the products, increasing the perceived value of customers.

The credibility, professionalism, interactivity and attractiveness of e-commerce anchors have a significant positive impact on customer flow experience. Customer flow experience refers to the positive experience when customers are completely immersed or committed to watching the live broadcast of e-commerce anchors, including pleasure, excitement, concentration and loss of self-consciousness, etc. Professional anchors will have complete knowledge of the product areas they recommend, and customers will feel pleasure that e-commerce live broadcasting can save shopping time and energy. The credibility of e-commerce anchors will reduce the risk of customers' purchase decisions. In the process of frequent interaction between customers and anchors, they will feel immersed and temporarily forget their worries. Attractive e-commerce anchors can increase customers' adaptability to information, make customers more focused, and even feel the loss of time.

Secondly, customer perceived value and customer flow experience positively affect the sustainable follow of customers in the live broadcast room. Customers' sustainable follow focuses on the attention, reuse and extension of time in the live broadcast room of e-commerce. In live broadcast e-commerce, customer perceived value can extend the time that customers watch the live broadcast, and hope that customers can visit the live broadcast room repeatedly to watch live broadcast or purchase products, which ultimately forms customers' sustainable follow. The customer flow experience can make customers have a pleasant and focused experience when watching the live broadcast, and even ignore the loss of time and loss of self-consciousness, so that customers can prolong their time in the live broadcast room of e-commerce anchors or increase the number of times to return to the live broadcast room.

Finally, the mediating effect of customer perceived value and customer flow experience. According to the SOR model, when customers are exposed to external stimuli, the body will generate physiological and psychological reactions, thereby affecting customer behavior. In live broadcast e-commerce, the anchor, as a source of information, is also a stimulus in itself. When customers are stimulated by the anchor, they will, on the one hand, rationally perceive the quality, cost effectiveness, and overall experience of the product recommended by the anchor, on the other hand,

they will feel pleasurable, focused, and even lose self-consciousness, which will prolong the time spent watching live broadcast, Repeatedly return and use their preferred live broadcast room to watch or purchase products. In summary, customer perceived value and customer flow experience play a intermediary role between e-commerce anchor characteristics and customer sustainable follow.

The findings of this study address certain theoretical gaps and make a significant contribution to the investigation of the impact mechanism concerning customers' sustainable follow. During the research process, due to internal and external constraints, there were some shortcomings. First of all, customer sustainable follow of live broadcast rooms is a complex process. In addition to the characteristics of e-commerce anchors, there are other factors that affect customer behavior, and the intermediary role is not only customer perceived value and customer flow experience. In future research, the adjustment role of different categories of products in e-commerce live broadcast can be studied. Secondly, a questionnaire survey is used to verify the hypothesis, and future research can use practical methods of purchasing behavior to verify the hypothesis. At the same time, in order to break through the limitations of research objects that may be limited by regions or e-commerce platforms, future research can expand the sample range for more in-depth discussion.

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