

Analysis of Cross-Cultural Barriers in Cross-Border E-commerce Live Streaming

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Manuscript received November 5, 2024; accepted June 5, 2025; published August 4, 2025.

Abstract—In the past few years, China's cross-border e-commerce industry has witnessed remarkable growth, with live streaming emerging as a novel marketing approach to penetrate international markets (Z. Y. Wang and T. Li, 2023). Nevertheless, cross-border e-commerce live streaming confronts numerous challenges, among which cross-cultural barriers stand out prominently. This paper delves deep into these barriers and proposes corresponding strategies, aiming to assist cross-border e-commerce enterprises in transcending cultural differences, promoting the healthy development of cross-border e-commerce live streaming, and facilitating their better integration into the global market.

Keywords—cross-border e-commerce, cross-cultural barriers, cultural differences, live marketing

I. INTRODUCTION

Cross-border e-commerce live streaming represents a new business model that combines live streaming with e-commerce (Si, 2024). Leveraging Internet live streaming technology, it integrates product display, promotion, and interactive communication to drive cross-border commodity circulation. However, during its rapid development, a series of cross-cultural barriers have emerged, including language communication difficulties, misunderstandings of non-verbal symbols, differences in communication styles, social norms, cultural values, and ways of thinking. These barriers impede the effective transmission of information, damage the brand image, and reduce consumers' trust and purchase intention, thus demanding immediate resolution.

II. STATUS OF CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE LIVE STREAMING

The development of cross-border e-commerce live streaming is generally on the rise. According to a recent study by market analysts Juniper Research, global cross-border e-commerce transactions are projected to reach \$1.6 trillion in 2023. This figure is predicted to escalate by more than 107 percent over the ensuing five-year period, surpassing \$3.3 trillion by 2028. This would account for 33 percent of global e-commerce expenditure.

The development of cross-border e-commerce live streaming has attracted significant capital investment and has prompted major e-commerce platforms, including Amazon, Sizzle, and Lazada, to introduce live streaming functionalities. Since 2019, prominent e-commerce platforms such as Lazada, Shopee, Amazon, and Alibaba International Station have introduced live streaming functionalities in succession. Concurrently, social networking platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have also demonstrated substantial support for live streaming services.

Cross-border e-commerce live streaming has emerged as a significant mode of e-commerce in recent years, exhibiting rapid growth. As of June 2022, the number of Chinese e-commerce live streaming users had reached 469 million, (CNNIC, 2022) accounting for 44.6% of the total number of Internet users. The Jitterbug platform, in particular, has emerged as a notable host of live broadcasts, with over 9 million live streams per month, and a staggering volume of goods sold surpassing 10 billion, marking a 2.2-fold annual growth in transactions.

While live shopping in Europe and the United States emerged later, it has exhibited remarkable growth. According to Fig. 1, in 2022, live shopping revenue in the United States is projected to reach 20 billion U.S. dollars, and it is anticipated to rise to 60 billion U.S. dollars by 2026, with the live e-commerce penetration rate projected to increase to 5.2%.

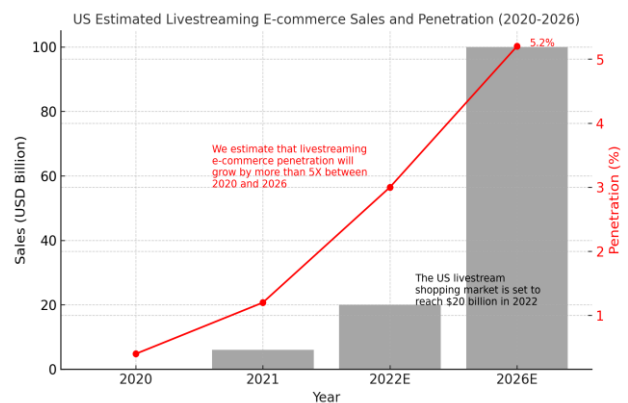


Fig. 1. US estimated livestreaming e-commerce sales and penetration. (Source: Coresight research)

Consumer acceptance of live shopping is also on the rise, as evidenced by an October 2022 survey which showed that 36% of U.S. respondents and 25% of U.K. respondents had shopped on live streaming platforms (Chen and Wang, 2023). According to Fig. 2, the highest level of acceptance was seen in the 19–25 age group, with approximately 47% of U.S. and U.K. respondents having shopped on live streams within that age group.

With respect to preferred live shopping platforms, TikTok Live, Facebook Live, Instagram Live, and Amazon Live emerged as the top choices among consumers in both the U.K. and the U.S. (Smith, 2023). According to Fig. 3, during the period spanning July to September of 2022, 27% of U.S. respondents reported utilizing live shopping platforms. respondents spent between \$20 and \$50 on live shopping, while 31% of U.K. respondents spent between \$10 and \$20. In terms of shopping categories, fashion apparel emerged as the most popular, followed by personal care and beauty.

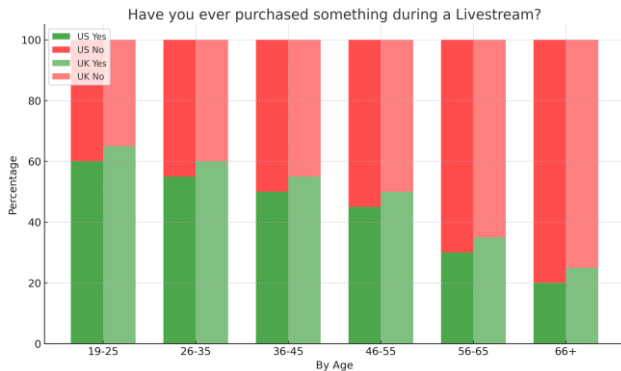


Fig. 2. Consumer live streaming shopping behavior in Europe and America.

(Source: The influencer marketing factory)

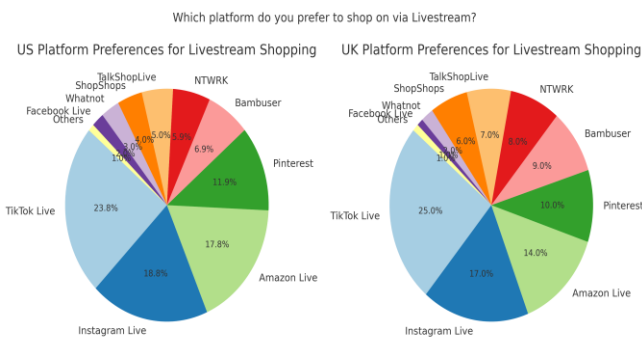


Fig. 3. Consumer preferences for live shopping platforms in Europe and the US.

(Source: The influencer marketing factory)

The analysis indicates that live cross-border e-commerce has exhibited a rapid development trend on a global scale, particularly in China, Europe, and the United States, accompanied by an increase in user base and acceptance.

Cross-border e-commerce live broadcasting represents a significant financial opportunity and shows promise for future development. Technological advancements have enabled high-definition live broadcasting, real-time translation, and other functionalities that enhance the viewer experience, thereby transcending geographical and linguistic boundaries. Consequently, consumers worldwide can engage in synchronous interaction. Cross-border e-commerce platforms have developed live broadcast panels to attract a significant number of merchants, encompassing diverse categories such as beauty, apparel, and digital products. This has led to a substantial enrichment of product offerings. Conversely, online celebrities and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) have emerged as the prevailing trend of introducing goods to the market, thereby effectively augmenting product sales and brand recognition through their professional appraisals and substantial fan bases.

The development of cross-border e-commerce live broadcasting is hindered by several factors. Firstly, significant cross-cultural barriers must be considered. Live broadcasting across borders faces challenges such as time differences and language and cultural differences between countries. These factors can impede the accurate transmission of commodity information. For instance, the language barrier can hinder consumers' ability to comprehensively understand product information, terms of service, promotions, and other details. This, in turn, can lead to a reduction in consumers' purchasing intentions and trust.

Secondly, logistics management has been identified as the primary impediment to the advancement of live cross-border e-commerce (Huang and Yang, 2023). The intricate nature of cross-border transportation, characterized by arduous customs clearance procedures, exorbitant logistics costs, and protracted delivery times, has a deleterious effect on consumers' shopping experience and purchase intention. Furthermore, it is imperative to acknowledge the influence of consumer habits, which vary significantly across different geographical regions. Consumers in disparate countries and regions exhibit distinct consumption patterns, product preferences, and aesthetic principles. Consequently, cross-border e-commerce enterprises must meticulously understand and adapt to these variances to align with consumers' diverse consumption requirements across different countries. Furthermore, the functional limitations of the live broadcast platform are a salient issue, as the aggregation of overseas live broadcasts is inadequate, resulting in a limited number of viewers for each live broadcast. Additionally, the live broadcast functionality of overseas social media has not yet been integrated with the e-commerce platform, hindering the direct attraction of traffic. Consequently, these factors collaborate to impede the progress of cross-border e-commerce live broadcasting. The subsequent section provides an exhaustive analysis employing cross-cultural barriers as a foundational point of departure.

III. THE ANALYZE OF CROSS-CULTURAL BARRIERS IN CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE LIVE STREAMING

A. Language Barriers

Language barriers are the most direct and significant obstacles in cross-border e-commerce live streaming. In cross-border e-commerce live streaming, language is an important tool for sellers to communicate with overseas consumers, and the host is the most critical information transmitter. They explain the characteristics, usage methods, prices, and other key information of the products through language and text to attract and retain consumers. However, language barriers have become a major challenge for hosts. Although they have rich product knowledge and enthusiastic explanations, they sometimes seem to be at a loss when expressing themselves in a foreign language (Bian and Guo, 2022).

1) Communication

Vocabulary comprehension and application pose significant challenges for hosts during live-streaming interactions. Consumers frequently employ slang, abbreviations, and professional product-related terminology, which may give rise to deviations in information transmission. For instance, hosts lacking understanding of these elements may misinterpret consumers' intentions and fail to convey product features precisely.

Furthermore, some hosts encounter difficulties in achieving fluent oral expression in foreign languages. This not only undermines the coherence of the live broadcast but also diminishes audience engagement. Additionally, each language possesses its unique intonation patterns. When hosts are unable to adapt to these, it may cause discomfort

among the audience and impede effective information reception.

To address this issue, Aliexpress, in collaboration with Alibaba's Dharma Institute, introduced real-time translation live-streaming technology. Leveraging artificial intelligence and machine learning, this technology enables multilingual interpretation during live broadcasts. In a live-streaming event for the European market featuring SmarTone products, the anchor delivered the presentation in Chinese, and the system instantaneously translated the content into multiple languages. This technological innovation has enhanced viewer engagement; however, challenges such as inaccurate translations remain. Enterprises are thus compelled to optimize translation algorithms to elevate the overall viewing experience.

2) Expression (from the collectivist and individualist perspective)

In collectivist cultures, consumers focus on the social attributes of products. During live broadcasts, hosts can create a warm atmosphere and highlight the product's gift-giving and group-use features. In individualist-oriented countries, consumers value the personalized attributes of products. Hosts should objectively and accurately introduce the direct benefits of products to individuals and avoid ambiguous expressions.

B. Non-Verbal Barriers

In the process of cross-border e-commerce live streaming, non-verbal factors play an undeniable role, and they often become potential cross-cultural barriers, affecting the communication effect between the host and the audience as well as the success of marketing.

1) Body language

In the context of cross-border e-commerce live broadcasting, body language emerges as a pivotal element. It has been demonstrated that body language can enhance the communication effect, facilitate cross-border interaction, and assist in language expression by leveraging universal movement. Consequently, viewers from diverse international backgrounds can more readily discern the anchor's intended message. Moreover, body language can augment information transfer, guiding the audience to focus on salient product details. Furthermore, the use of body language can enrich the audience's experience, rendering the live screen more dynamic and engaging. This, in turn, attracts the audience's attention and fosters a positive atmosphere, thereby increasing their interest and propelling their participation. Furthermore, adept body language can facilitate the establishment of a relationship of trust, thereby showcasing the anchor's professionalism and confidence. This, in turn, fosters increased viewer confidence in the product and serves to mitigate the psychological distance between the anchor and the audience. Consequently, emotional connection is enhanced, thus increasing the likelihood that viewers will accept the recommended products (Si, 2024).

Albert Mehrabian's seminal research on nonverbal communication posits that the frequency of body language use plays a particularly prominent role in communication. He proposed the well-known 7%-38%-55% rule, as shown in Fig. 4, which posits that 55% of the message is conveyed

through nonverbal cues, including facial expressions and posture, 38% is transmitted through the tone of voice (e.g., intonation, volume, etc.), and only 7% is derived from the verbal content. This suggests that body posture is an important part of communication. In his research, he emphasizes the role of body language in the expression of emotion. For instance, a tilted body, a nodding head, or an open posture during conversation can enhance rapport, while conversely, crossing arms and turning one's back to the other person signals indifference and closedness.

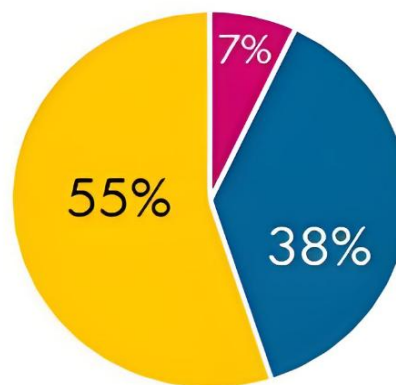


Fig. 4. 7%-38%-55% rule.
(Source: FourWeekMBA)

The meaning of body language varies greatly in different cultural backgrounds. For example, in some European and American countries, people are accustomed to maintaining a large personal space. If the host is too close to the camera in the live broadcast and frequently makes gestures that intrude into the audience's personal space, such as pointing at close range, it may make European and American viewers feel offended, thereby generating resistance to the live broadcast. In the Middle East, rich and large hand movements are considered a sign of warmth and friendliness. If the host's movements are small and reserved, local viewers may feel that the host lacks sincerity and enthusiasm, making it difficult to establish a sense of closeness and reducing their attention to the product.

In some Asian countries, such as Japan, nodding does not necessarily mean agreement; it may only indicate "I am listening." However, for European and American hosts who are not familiar with this cultural detail, if they mistakenly take the nodding of Japanese viewers as a confirmation of the intention to purchase, subsequent communication is likely to deviate, leading to misunderstandings and affecting the promotion of transactions.

2) Hand gestures

Gestures are a significant form of body language. In American daily communication, about 60% of conversations involve at least one gesture, with the proportion rising in informal and emotional exchanges (Zhang, 2022). They visually enhance product information presented by anchors. For example, when introducing complex electronic products, precise gestures help the audience better understand the operation. This reduces the audience's cognitive burden and improves information reception efficiency.

Dynamic and expressive gestures can also attract the audience's attention and boost their enthusiasm for live

interaction. They create a passionate atmosphere, evoke positive emotions, and increase the audience's favorability towards the anchor and products, promoting purchase conversion. In cross-border e-commerce live-streaming, gestures are essential for communication.

Gestures have universality and cultural specificity. Common gestures like the thumbs-up are widely recognized, facilitating global communication. However, cultural differences matter. For instance, in some Middle Eastern countries, certain gestures are disrespectful. Thus, anchors must study the target-audience culture to avoid cultural misunderstandings and ensure smooth communication during live-streaming.

3) Facial expression interpretation

Facial expressions play a key role in conveying emotions, but their interpretations differ culturally. Western hosts often use exaggerated expressions to attract audiences, while in East Asian cultures, especially in South Korea, reserved and gentle facial expressions are preferred. Western-style hosts may face image crises when live-streaming in South Korea.

4) Eye contact

Eye contact is a form of non-verbal communication that helps build emotional connections. In cross-border e-commerce live streaming, it's crucial to use eye contact skills according to different cultural backgrounds.

In Europe and America, particularly in the United States, the cultural emphasis on individual independence and self-confidence is pronounced. A study of Americans' social habits revealed that the average duration of eye contact is approximately three seconds. Furthermore, eye contact is employed more frequently in positive conversations. The study also found that maintaining eye contact fosters trust, with approximately 70% of individuals typically making eye contact at least once during a face-to-face conversation. So anchorpersons in live broadcasts are expected to maintain a firm gaze, direct their vision at the camera, and project a sense of unwavering confidence. This approach aims to instill a sense of assurance in the audience, fostering the belief that the anchor is presenting a product with unquestionable merit. For instance, when introducing high-end electronic products, the anchor conveys the reliable quality and cutting-edge technology of the product through his unwavering gaze, aligning with the psychological inclination of the American audience to pursue excellence and place trust in authority figures. This approach fosters a sense of urgency, prompting the audience to make a swift purchasing decision.

Asian cultures are characterized by a tendency towards introversion. In the context of cross-border e-commerce live broadcasts, for instance, Japanese broadcasters are advised to prioritize subtlety and respect in their eye contact. Avoiding excessive eye contact, such as by slightly bowing the head, momentarily moving out of the line of sight, and then looking back at the camera, conveys a modest and courteous demeanor, effectively avoiding the audience's perception of overpowering behavior. When showcasing traditional handicrafts, such as fine ceramics and handmade embroidery, this kind of delicate and restrained eye contact can foster a sense of respect for Japanese culture among the audience, thereby fostering a closer connection, enhancing the affinity

for the products, and increasing the audience's inclination to purchase.

The Middle East is a region characterized by robust religious and cultural customs, with a profound emphasis on respect and decorum in social etiquette. During live broadcasts, anchors must maintain a dignified and composed demeanor, avoiding random eye movements, glancing, and other distracting behaviors. They should also ensure that their gaze encompasses the entirety of the camera screen, thereby preventing any potential cultural misunderstandings. For instance, when introducing fashionable clothing, the eyes should calmly sweep through the details of the clothing, not only to showcase the product's characteristics but also to convey respect for the audience. This approach enables viewers in the Middle Eastern region to perceive the quality and authenticity of the product, fostering a sense of confidence in their purchase decisions.

In short, anchors must understand cultural differences in eye contact and adjust their behavior to enhance cross-cultural communication and live marketing results.

C. Cultural Custom Differences

1) Differences in consumer behavior habits

a) Shopping time preferences

Consumers in different cultural regions have completely different shopping time habits. According to Chime, *U.S. consumers most often shop online at 2:30 p.m. on Saturdays. Additionally, 42% of Americans choose to shop on Saturdays.* There are also differences in shopping time preferences by generation: *Gen Xers tend to shop on Sundays (24%), while Gen Zers prefer to shop online on Mondays (17%).* In the Middle East, due to religious customs, Friday is a day of worship, and most people are busy with religious activities, while Thursday evening often becomes the shopping peak. If the host broadcasts globally according to the usual schedule and ignores this feature, broadcasting on Friday will inevitably face a situation with few viewers, and the effect of the live broadcast will be greatly reduced.

b) Purchase Decision Speed

Cultural background has a profound impact on consumers' purchase decision speed. In some Western countries, such as the United Kingdom, consumers are influenced by individualism and contractuality. They usually do their homework before shopping, have a deep understanding of the product's performance and brand reputation, and once they enter the live broadcast room, if the product meets their expectations, the decision-making process is relatively fast. The host only needs to answer questions accurately and promote transactions. However, in Asia's India, consumers are more accustomed to making purchase decisions through family and social group discussions. They frequently consult family and friends' opinions in the live broadcast room, and even invite them to watch the live broadcast together. The host needs to spend more time dealing with questions from multiple people and guide the group to reach a consensus with a more patient and friendly attitude, otherwise, it will be difficult to promote sales.

2) Value differences

a) Balancing brand and cost-performance ratio

Western culture emphasizes personal achievement and individuality, and brands often occupy a high position in consumers' hearts. European and American consumers are willing to pay a premium for high-end well-known brands to show their taste and status. In cross-border e-commerce live streaming, if the host mainly promotes unknown small brands, even if the product cost-performance ratio is extremely high, European and American viewers may not be interested. They pay more attention to the historical heritage and unique design concepts behind the brand. In contrast, in emerging market countries in Southeast Asia, such as Vietnam, consumers, due to the stage of economic development and pragmatic values, are more sensitive to prices and pay more attention to the practicality and cost-performance ratio of the product. If the host only emphasizes the brand value and neglects the detailed explanation of the product's actual function and price advantage, it will be difficult to attract local consumers to place orders.

3) Collective and individual orientation

In East Asian countries with strong collective values, such as South Korea, the social attributes of products are highly valued (Hofstede, 2020). When consumers purchase products, they prioritize whether the product is suitable as a gift and whether it helps maintain interpersonal relationships. Beauty products are often sold in exquisite sets, focusing on the purpose of giving gifts to relatives and friends. If cross-border e-commerce hosts do not understand this value orientation and only focus on personal use scenarios for live broadcast promotion, it will be difficult to increase product sales. In countries where individualism is prevalent, such as Australia, consumers pay more attention to how products meet their individual independent interests, hobbies, and fitness needs. The host designs live broadcast content around personal experience and self-improvement to meet the value pursuit of local viewers and improve the acceptance of the live broadcast.

IV. CONCLUSION

Cross-border e-commerce live streaming has developed rapidly globally, but cross-cultural barriers hinder its further progress. To address these barriers, hosts should improve their language skills, form multilingual teams, and make rational use of translation technology. They also need to understand different cultural non-verbal norms and adjust their body language, facial expressions, and eye contact accordingly. Moreover, live broadcast schedules and product introductions should be adjusted based on the shopping habits and value orientations of consumers in different regions. By implementing these strategies (Liu, 2024), cross-border e-commerce enterprises can better overcome cultural barriers, integrate into the global market, and

promote the sustainable and healthy development of cross-border e-commerce live streaming. Continuous exploration and improvement of these strategies are needed to adapt to the changing market environment.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Y. Q. H. was primarily responsible for the conception of the research, data collection, literature review, and drafting of the manuscript; B. L. H. provided guidance on the research topic, contributed to the conceptual framework, and offered critical revisions throughout the manuscript preparation; both authors had approved the final version.

FUNDING

This work was supported in part by the U.S. Department of Commerce under Grant BS123456 (sponsor and financial support acknowledgment goes here).

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