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Consumer Purchase Intention Differences Between AI Streamers and Human Streamers in Live-streaming E-commerce

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Abstract: This study employs the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework and social presence theory to investigate the relation of host type to social presence, host trust, and consumers' purchase intention. It treats host type as the external stimulus (S), social presence and host trust as the internal psychological response (O), and purchase intention as the behavioral response (R) of the model. It puts forward a sequential pathway that host type may be in a way to shape the perceived social presence and, through host trust, purchase intention. We use video clips of live-streaming e-commerce session as the stimuli in a single-factor, randomized between-subjects experiment. 157 participants were randomly assigned to watch a product promotion video with either AI host or a human host. They completed a questionnaire of social presence, host trust and purchase intention. Independent-samples t-tests, regression analysis, and Bootstrap-based sequential mediation analysis are used to see the differences between host types and the psychological mechanism that may explain the differences.

Keywords: S-O-R Theory; Social Presence; Purchase Intention; Host Trus; Live-Stream Shopping

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1. Introduction

As the artificial intelligence generation content (aigc) and the digital human are more and more widely used, ai hosts are becoming an alternative to the human hosts in the live-streaming e-commerce . With the digital avatar, speech synthesis, and automated content generation, ai hosts can present the products continuously and deliver the standardized information. There can be potential gains in the operational efficiency and the scale of the ai host. Besides, the live-streaming e-commerce also depends on the social connection, the interaction, and the trust. The human host can let the viewers feel the social presence by the speech, the emotional expression, and the real exchange with the viewer. The ai host can look like the human's appearance and the communication style of the human. But, we do not know whether the consumer would feel the same social presence and the trust. Hosts' verbal communication can increase consumers' perceived product value in live-streaming e-commerce (Luo et al., 2021). Their interactivity can strengthen trust and influence consumers' intention to keep watching (Zhang et al., 2022). The atmosphere, interactions, and experiences that hosts can create can shape purchase intention (Liu & Liu, 2023). Motion capture and deep learning have also made AI hosts' interactions more sophisticated. The research links AI hosts to purchase intention through trust (Qian et al., 2025), identifies a positive relationship between AI host interactivity and perceived social

presence (Wang et al., 2023), and reports a mediating role for perceived novelty in consumers' purchase intentions (Li et al., 2025). Consistent, predictable interactions may allow AI hosts to represent a brand's image and strengthen brand trust (Dou & Di, 2025). Consumers with stronger utilitarian motivations for watching live streams also tend to trust AI hosts more than human hosts (Lin et al., 2026). These studies address host type, social presence, trust, and purchase intention; however, they leave questions about how social presence and host trust relate across AI-hosted and human-hosted settings. Comparing purchase intentions alone may miss the psychological processes behind these differences.

This study therefore investigates how the consumers perceive the social presence and trust in each setting, and how those responses relate to purchase intention. It has three questions. First, is there a significant difference between purchase intention and perceived social presence in AI-hosted and human-hosted live stream? Second, is perceived social presence positively associated with the host trust and is the host trust positively associated with the purchase intention? Third, do perceived social presence and the host trust sequentially mediate the relation between the host type and the purchase intention?

2. Theoretical Foundation and Hypothesis Formulation

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

The StimulusOrganismResponse (S-O-R) framework is the description of how the environmental stimuli bring about the internal cognitive and emotional states and through those states the behavioral responses . In Makmor (2026), the entertainment, interactivity, and remote presentation in the live-streaming marketing are linked with the impulsive purchasing behavior . The S-O-R framework gives an account of all of these in a broad way. In order to explain how the AI and the human host shape the consumers\' social perception and psychological experience, a more specific theoretical perspectives is needed.

Social presence theory deals with consumers' experience of social connection in the mediated setting. In the context of live-streaming e-commerce, social presence means the perceived presence of the host and the sense of interpersonal communication, interaction, and companionship in the session. Previous study has indicated that interactivity of digital human hosts, the perceived social presence and purchase intention are related to each other (Chen, 2024). It indicates that the responses of consumers to the marketing that with AI is related to the social interaction experience of the consumers as well as the technological capability.

Research on live-streaming environments, host characteristics, social presence, and trust has helped explain the psychological connections between hosts and consumers. With the use of AI hosts increasing, these interactions are extended to the AI generated digital entities . It would be interesting to see what social cues different hosts give, and how those social cues relate to purchase intention. Social presence and host trust capture different evaluations: the former concerns how the host is perceived to be present, how he/she communicates and interacts; the latter concerns the honesty of the host, and the credibility of the product information given by the host. Hence, by only examining the direct relationship between host type and purchase intention, the differences in these psychological responses may never be explained.

In this study, the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework is combined with social presence theory in a sequential mediation model. The external stimulus (S) is host type; the internal psychological responses (O) are social presence and host trust; and the behavioral response (R) is purchase intention. The proposed pathway is host type social presence host trust purchase intention. The analyses in this study directly compare the consumers psychological evaluation and purchase intention in AI-hosted and human-hosted. It checks whether social presence and host trust sequentially mediate the relationship between host type and purchase intention. This would add more empirical evidences on how consumers respond to different hosts in live-streaming e-commerce.

2.2 Theoretical Assumption

With the development of artificial intelligence and the technology of digital human, the live-streaming e-commerce is not only out of the human host, but also the AI host. Previous study indicates that the application of AI in live-streaming can increase the consumer engagement and purchase intention (Mei, 2025). The appearance and the intrinsic characteristic of the AI hosts also may shape the acceptance and trust , and the implications for the purchase intention (Zhao, 2025). The AI host can bring operational efficiency and the information is delivered in a standard way, while the natural expression of the human host and the emotional communication may generate the stronger purchase intention. We have the following hypothesis: .

H1: Host type does affect consumers' purchase intentions, and the purchase intentions of human hosts will be higher than AI hosts in the context of live-streaming e-commerce.

Social presence may relate the AI driven stimuli to the engagement and purchase intention. Perceived interpersonal connections may help to build trust (Yu, 2026). In the context of live-streaming e-commerce, this experience is a sense of the presence of the host, an atmosphere of the interpersonal communication and a social connection with the host. Anthropomorphism, responsiveness, perceived intelligence and personalization increase the perceived authenticity of the AI host. Perceived authenticity strengthens the trust, which is positively related to purchase intention and engagement in live-streaming interaction (Nguyen, 2026). The following hypothesis is proposed: .

H2: In the context of live-streaming e-commerce, the consumers exposed to the human hosts would feel higher level of social presence than the ones exposed to the AI hosts.

Since consumers cannot examine the products directly before buy through a live stream, they have to rely on the hosts' information as well as on its perceived credibility. Has been found that trust partially mediate the relationship between AI hosts' visual and competence-related characteristics and purchase intention (Shui, 2025). Also research shown that, when trust in human-AI interactions is higher, digital human hosts' interactivity can strengthen social presence and, in turn, purchase intention (Chen, 2024). Social presence gives the sense of interpersonal connection and of another person's presence in mediated communication. Perceiving a host as socially present and of being interactive may encourage positive interpersonal evaluations and greater trust. Therefore, we have the following hypothesis:

H3: Perceived social presence is positively associated with consumers' trust in the host.

In live-streaming e-commerce, there is information asymmetry and consumers use hosts' product descriptions and demonstrations to judge whether the product meets their needs. Personalization, interactivity and amount of information can increase engagement and the likelihood of planned and impulsive purchase (Liu, 2026). If a host is considered trustworthy, honest and can provide the information, then the host can reduce the uncertainty about the purchase. Consumers may be more willing to buy the recommended product. The following hypothesis is proposed:

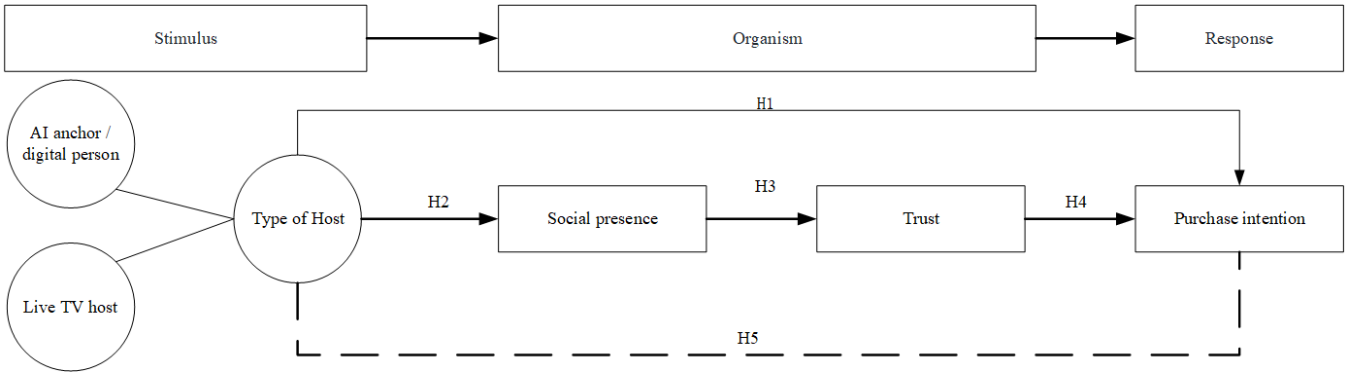
H4: Host trust is positively associated with consumers' purchase intention.

The following hypothesis is proposed: Differences in AI and human hosts' characteristics and communication styles may produce different levels of perceived social presence. These perceptions may shape trust in the host, which may increase consumers' willingness to accept product information and purchase the recommended products. Social presence and host trust are related but different processes: a sense of social connection may help trust to develop, and trust may then strengthen purchase intention. Together, they may form a sequential mediating pathway between host type and purchase intention.

H5: Perceived social presence and host trust sequentially mediate the relationship between host type and consumers' purchase intention.

The research model therefore considers host type as the independent variable, social presence and host trust as the sequential mediators, and purchase intention as the dependent variable. The comparison of AI-hosted vs. human-hosted setting gives an empirical evidence over what kind of psychological experiences may connect the host type to the consumers' purchase intention in live-streaming e-commerce.

Figure 1: Theoretical model framework



3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study was a single-factor, two-group between-subjects experiment. The participants were assigned to an AI host or human host condition randomly, and were told the type of host they would watch before watching the product promotion video of the host type. After that, they filled out a questionnaire on their perceptions and behavioral intentions. Participants were recruited by Questionnaire Star (Wenjuanxing), an online survey platform. We excluded the respondents who had never watched the e-commerce live stream so that the final sample had the prior experience of this setting. We used clips from the actual live-streaming e-commerce session to provide a reasonable viewing context.

All items used a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Both conditions used coat promotion videos lasting approximately 32 seconds. Of the 203 questionnaires collected, 46 questionnaires were excluded because the respondents have no prior experience watching live-streaming e-commerce session. The final sample comprised 157 valid questionnaires, a valid response rate of 77.4%. The AI host condition included 72 (45.9%) participants, and the human host condition included 85 (54.1%) participants. Reliability and validity analyses indicated satisfactory measurement quality..

3.2 Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were calculated using IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0 and are reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Basic Information

Project	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
1. Gender	male	65	41.4
	female	92	58.6
2. Age	Under the age of 18	1	0.6
	18—24	34	21.7
	25—30	43	27.4
	31—40	49	31.2
	41—50	22	14
	51 years old and above	8	5.1
3. Educational qualifications	Bachelor	61	38.9
	Doctorate or above	3	1.9
	Junior College	47	29.9
	High school / vocational school and below	21	13.4
	Master	25	15.9
4. Occupation	Individual business owners / Freelancers	45	28.7
	Civil servants / personnel of public institutions	23	14.6
	Others (unemployed)	3	1.9
	Others (retired)	1	0.6
	Enterprise employees	63	40.1
	Student	22	14
5. Monthly profit	≥12,000 yuan	9	5.7
	3000—4999	26	16.6
	≤3000 yuan	16	10.2
	5000—7999	49	31.2
	8000—11999	36	22.9
	No fixed income / Student	21	13.4

3.3 Reliability and Validity Analysis

The questionnaire measured three dimensions using items adapted from established scales, including Liu et al. (2025). Selected items were modified to fit the live-streaming e-commerce setting examined here.

Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR) were calculated for each construct. All reliability coefficients in Table 2 exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, supporting internal consistency. Factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) were used to assess convergent validity. As shown in Table 2, all factor loadings exceeded 0.70, and all AVE values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50. These results support the scales' convergent validity.

Table 2: Model validity and reliability test

Variate	Indicators	Factor loading	Cronbach's α	Load squared	SUM	AVE	CR
Social presence	S1	0.867	0.907	0.752	2.819	0.705	0.905
	S2	0.853		0.728			
	S3	0.823		0.677			
	S4	0.814		0.663			
The host's trust	B1	0.852	0.883	0.726	2.691	0.673	0.891
	B2	0.847		0.717			
	B3	0.810		0.656			
	B4	0.769		0.591			
Purchase intention	PI1	0.861	0.889	0.741	2.765	0.691	0.899
	PI2	0.831		0.691			
	PI3	0.821		0.674			
	PI4	0.812		0.659			

4. Analysis

4.1 The Influence of the Type of Host on Purchase Intention

To test H1, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine differences in purchase intention between the AI host and human host groups. Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was satisfied ($F = 1.887$, $p = .172$). The independent-samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in purchase intention between the two groups ($t = -5.475$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−1.21, −0.57]). Specifically, participants in the AI host group reported significantly lower purchase intentions than those in the human host group, with a mean difference of −0.89. These findings support H1, indicating that human hosts elicited higher purchase intentions than AI hosts in the experimental context.

Table 3: The influence of the type of host on purchase intention

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	MD	Std. Error Difference	95% CI
Equal variances assumed	1.887	0.172	-5.475	155	0	-0.892	0.163	[-1.214,-0.570]
Equal variances not assumed			-5.513	153.913	0	-0.892	0.162	[-1.212,-0.573]

4.2 The Influence of Host Types on the Sense of Social Presence

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine differences in perceived social presence between the AI host and human host groups. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: The influence of host types on the sense of social presence

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	MD	Std. Error Difference	95% CI
Equal variances assumed	0.487	0.486	-6.127	155	0	-1.028	0.168	[-1.359,-0.697]
Equal variances not assumed			-6.097	147.504	0	-1.028	0.169	[-1.361,-0.695]

Levene's test supported the assumption of equal variances ($F = 0.487$, $p = .486$). Perceived social presence differed significantly between the AI host and human host groups ($t = -6.127$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−1.359, −0.697]). The AI host group reported lower perceived social presence, with a mean difference of −1.028. This result supports H2: participants experienced greater social presence in the human host condition.

4.3 The Impact of Social Presence on Viewer Trust in Hosts

A simple linear regression tested H3, with perceived social presence predicting host trust. The association was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.402$, $t = 5.460$, $p < .001$). The model accounted for 16.1% of the variance in host trust ($R^2 = .161$). Higher perceived social presence was associated with greater host trust, supporting H3.

4.4 The Influence of the Host's Trust on the Purchase Intention

H4 was tested using a simple linear regression with host trust predicting purchase intention. Host trust was positively associated with purchase intention ($\beta = 0.398$, $t = 5.397$, $p < .001$). The model accounted for 15.8% of the variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = .158$). This positive association supports H4.

4.5 Chain Mediation Effect Test

To test H5, a sequential mediation analysis was conducted using Model 6 of Hayes' PROCESS macro. The indirect effects of host type on purchase intention through perceived social presence and host trust were examined using the bootstrapping method with 95% confidence intervals. The results are presented in Table 4..

Table 4: Chain mediation effect analysis

Type of effect	Effect Path	Effect size	Standard error	95%CI	Significance
Direct effect	Anchor type → Purchase intention	0.398	0.1656	[0.071,0.725]	Significant
Total indirect effect	Sum of all indirect paths	0.494	0.1031	[0.312,0.719]	Significant
Indirect Effect 1	Anchor type → Social presence → Consumer purchase intention	0.353	0.0932	[0.190,0.557]	Significant
Indirect Effect 2	Anchor type → Trust → Purchase intention	0.081	0.049	[0.002,0.191]	Significant
Chain indirect effect	Anchor type → Social presence → Anchor trust → Purchase intention	0.060	0.0294	[0.013,0.128]	Significant

As shown in the table, the direct effect of host type on consumers' purchase intention was statistically significant ($B = 0.3978$, $p = .0175$, 95% CI [0.071, 0.725]), as the confidence interval did not include zero. Similarly, the total indirect effect was significant ($B = 0.494$, Bootstrap 95% CI [0.312, 0.719]), indicating a statistically significant overall mediation effect.

In the indirect path from the type of host → social presence → consumer purchase intention, the indirect effect value is 0.353, and the Bootstrap 95% confidence interval is [0.190, 0.557]. The interval range does not include 0, indicating that the indirect effect of social presence between the type of host and consumer purchase intention is significant

In the indirect path of anchor type → anchor trust → consumer purchase intention, the indirect effect value is 0.081, the Bootstrap 95% confidence interval is [0.002,0.191], and the interval range does not include 0, indicating that anchor trust has a significant indirect effect between anchor type and consumer purchase intention.

For the sequential path host type social presence host trust consumer purchase intention, the indirect effect was 0.060 and the Bootstrap 95% confidence interval was [0.013, 0.128]. Because the confidence interval did not contain 0, we can say that there is a significant sequential indirect effect through social presence and host trust.

The direct effect of host type on purchase intention remained significant after the mediators were included. All three indirect effects were statistically significant, including the sequential pathway through perceived social presence and host trust. These results support H5 and indicate that social presence and host trust help explain the relationship between host type and purchase intention.

5. Discussion

5.1 Research Has Found

The comparison also addresses consumers' social and psychological experiences in addition to the differences in marketing effectiveness for the consumers. In this study, we examine how the host type (AI vs. human) related to purchase intention in live-streaming e-commerce and whether perceived social presence and host trust help explain that relationship. It considers how the consumers evaluate the social presence and the trust for the two host types and how those evaluations relate to the purchase intention.

By comparison, human hosts, may gain trust through their unstructured responses during live broadcasts (Zhang Baosheng, 2021). Consumers negative impressions of the virtuality of AI hosts (Xie Xinru, 2026) may generate fear (Yuan Haixia, 2024). In the clothing live-streaming setting studied here, hosts social interaction cues may encourage more positive psychological evaluations.

The indirect effect through perceived social presence was the largest of the three specific pathways. The effect through host trust and the sequential effect through both mediators were smaller. The pattern that we observed here suggests that social presence may be particularly relevant to differences in purchase intention between AI-hosted and human-hosted live streams. The direct effect of host type remained significant after both mediators were included. Social presence and host trust therefore do not fully account for the difference between groups, leaving other psychological mechanisms to be examined.

5.2 From Differences in Marketing Effects to Consumer Psychological Mechanisms

This study also looks at the psychological processes behind the differences in purchase intention between AI and human hosts. Thus, the comparison is not only in the marketing outcome. For example, the consumer may still not want to purchase when he/she knows that it is an AI host who is presenting the product (Williams and Lim, 2024). Social presence and interactivity in the live broadcast can induce the desire of purchase (Chen Liu Yin, 2025). Social presence can also motivate the interaction and trust (Shareef et al., 2020). The fact that the sequential indirect effect found here is statistically significant implies that the experiences of social interaction and the evaluation of trust may jointly help explain the purchase intention. This study adds to the psychological account of the difference between the two host types and also extends the application of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework to the AI driven live-streaming e-commerce.

5.3 The Differentiation of Anchor Types and the Establishment of Consumer Trust

These findings can be used when brands and platforms consider the host selection in live-streaming e-commerce. That choice should be made when considering marketing objectives, product characteristics, and consumers' psychological needs, as well as when considering technological efficiency and operating costs. In the clothing videos used here, participants in the human host condition reported greater social presence and purchase intention. Human hosts may therefore be preferable when the emotional expression and interactive experiences are central to the marketing activity. AI hosts may still be useful for the standardized product presentation and continuous information delivery. How effective the AI hosts are in those settings needs to be tested. Improving the AI hosts also calls for attention to verbal communication, interaction styles, and emotional expression, as well as to the digital appearance and information delivery. These features may help to improve the perceived social presence. Accurate product descriptions and reliable information may help brands and platforms to build trust and to encourage purchase intention. As the AI generated avatars become more and more realistic, host identity disclosure and marketing transparency also need attention. The AI hosts in this study used the digital likenesses of real individuals with their authorization, and participants were told the host identities before they viewed. How different forms of AI identity disclosure may affect trust and purchase intention is a question for future research.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Research Results

In this study, by using a between-subjects experiment, we compared the purchase intention in AI-hosted and human-hosted live-streaming e-commerce. Perceived social presence and the host trust were analysed as the sequential mediators between the host type and purchase intention using social presence theory and the Stimulus-orgasm-Response (S-O-R) framework.

Consumers' responses to host type involved perceived social presence and host trust as well as purchase intention. In the setting studied here, human hosts generated greater social presence and purchase intention than AI hosts. The differences in social interaction experiences may help explain this pattern. AI hosts can deliver product information well, but perceived authenticity, interactive capabilities, and information credibility may also shape the evaluations. Their roles need to be further investigated.

A sense of interaction, responsiveness, and companionship in a live-streaming video may lead consumers to experience the host as a social interaction partner as well as a source of product information. If the credibility of that information may matter for purchase intention. The consumers who think that the product information is authentic, reliable and trustworthy may be willing to buy the recommended products.

Participants in the human host group reported greater perceived social presence than participants in the AI host group. Social presence was positively associated with host trust, which was, in turn, associated with stronger purchase intention. In the Stimulus that is, Organism, that is, Response (S-O-R) framework, host type is an external stimulus, and social presence and host trust are consumers internal psychological responses. Purchase intention is the behavioral intention associated with these processes.

6.2 Limitations and Future Research

The study has several limitations. Clips from actual live-streaming e-commerce sessions were used to make the experimental setting more realistic, but this choice introduced potential confounding factors that could not be fully controlled. Both videos featured coats and lasted approximately 32 seconds, yet their product descriptions and some presentation features differed. Only one video represented each condition. Host appearance, communication style, and video production characteristics may therefore have contributed to the observed results.

Recruitment primarily through an online survey platform and the limited sample size may restrict generalization to the wider population of live-streaming e-commerce consumers. Respondents who had never watched e-commerce live streams were excluded. The findings therefore apply primarily to consumers with previous viewing experience.

Although the sequential indirect effect was statistically significant, it does not establish that perceived social presence develops before host trust. Purchase intention also does not necessarily lead to an actual purchase. Prices, purchasing power, brand preferences, promotions, and other contextual factors may influence purchasing decisions. Future research could use live-streaming transaction data, simulated purchasing tasks, or measures of actual purchasing behavior to examine how host type relates to consumers' purchasing decisions.

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No

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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