Research on the communication of virtual anchors in E-commerce platforms from the perspective of Embodied Theory -- taking the live streaming sales of the virtual idol Luo Tianyi as an example

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Abstract

In recent years, with the rise of virtual anchors in live streaming, virtual characters represented by "virtual idols" have gradually entered people's life. This paper mainly analyzes the interactive ways and characteristics of virtual idol Luo Tianyi's practice of selling goods in live streaming. In this communication practice, Luo Tianyi has embodied phenomena on two levels "physical and emotional." In addition, this paper also analyzes the communication mode of virtual anchors in e-commerce platforms from the physical-emotional level. Our research believes that in e-commerce live streaming, virtual anchors can integrate technology with their bodies and combine audiences with shopping scenes, thus improving the audience's perception and experience and contributing to the development of the live streaming selling industry. However, the technical construction and practical application of virtual anchors still have some problems to be solved. With the progress and perfection of technology, virtual anchors will have more excellent application space in the future live-streaming industry.

1. Introduction

The most prominent feature of e-commerce live broadcasting is the "face-to-face" interaction between users and anchors and the real-time bullet-screen interaction of users. Virtual live streaming platforms supported by AI technology can show products to users live and explain preferential information and carry out real-time online interaction with users, including greeting, answering questions, recommending products, warming performances, etc. However, in recent years, with the continuous development of artificial intelligence technology, technology has been widely used in practical communication activities. The virtual idol circuit gradually became lively when explosive negative star news flooded the market. Brands sign virtual idols as spokespersons one after another or launch their virtual image spokespersons. E-commerce live broadcasting began to build virtual idol live broadcasting rooms. The virtual idol is not limited to image communication and has begun to interact with the audience of virtual e-commerce anchors.

The virtual idol-transformed anchor's live broadcast mode impacts the actual live broadcast and the original virtual anchor. First, the virtual idol itself has a solid fan base. With its live streaming flow, most fans will rush into the broadcast room to interact with the idol and the passers-by popular science of their idol. The charm of the anchor, fun, and uniqueness will attract the remaining audience. Because of these characteristics, they gradually consolidate the original fans to attract a more loyal audience. They are willing to stare at the anchor before their mobile phone screen. Second, the cost of virtual live streaming is high. Building a virtual anchor and creating a virtual scene takes a lot of time, energy, and money. Furthermore, the virtual idol wins in the long time active in the virtual field. They have the technical support of the technology company behind them. A mature operation team can meet the changes of the characters and scenes, saving much time.

Most research currently tends to the status quo and advantages of virtual anchors, but many problems are still worth discussing in the development process. Virtual anchor makes technology more deeply integrated into people's bodies and lives and has become a member of the main communication body. In this context, how does the audience of the virtual anchor feel the identity and existence of the person behind the virtual avatar, and why does the embodied experience generated by virtual anchor technology break the screen boundary and establish contact with the audience? What do virtual anchors need to improve and develop in the future of e-commerce live broadcasting? These questions will be further studied in this paper.

2. Research background and status quo

Since COVID-19 in 2020, the Internet has become a communication channel for people to stay at home, and live streaming has gradually become the main force to meet people's life and spiritual needs. In the era of national anchors and national live broadcasting, the continuous growth of online live broadcasting users promotes the rapid development of live broadcasting, and the enormous economic share created by e-commerce live broadcasting accounts for half of the live broadcasting.

However, the key to e-commerce live broadcasting lies in the communication between anchors and audiences to promote economic development, and the anchors begin to integrate live broadcasting. Virtual idols have also stepped onto the stage of live broadcasting from the virtual field and widely entered people's online life."Virtual anchor" can be interpreted as the behavior of a virtual body when broadcasting live on the Internet. Based on facial capture, motion capture, and other technologies, anchors' facial expressions and actions can be synchronized with the virtual character models in real-time to carry out webcasts and other activities.[1] "Virtual anchor" is a new form of the development of "virtual idol" in the era of a network broadcast. Both are expressed through the virtual body form, while the latter uses it as the medium. In recent years, the second metaverse culture is gradually being accepted by more people. Luo Tianyi, a virtual idol with grey hair and green eyes and the first Chinese voice library, was launched by Shanghai Heron in 2012. Her attention and commercial value are equal to that of real stars. She has many fans and endorses brands, including the well-known Baicaolin, KFC, etc. Statistics show that Luo Tianyi's microblog fans reached 4.59 million, and B station Luo Tianyi has 1.82 million fans. Five years after her debut, Luo Tianyi held her first online concert in Shanghai in 2017. Tickets cost 1,280 yuan, and 500 SVIP tickets for the first concert were sold out within three minutes. Compared with the real idol, Luo Tianyi, this kind of virtual idol has remarkable plasticity, and her character and soul will continue to enrich the audience's preferences. She can create a perfect character image without the need to rest and sleep in the case of continuous standing in front of the screen to interact with the audience.

Under the background of having a large base of fans and high traffic, Luo Tianyi became the first live virtual anchor with goods, breaking the boundary between the two elements and reality to realize the transformation of a virtual idol into a virtual anchor. Her first show with goods, according to incomplete statistics, with 18 pieces of goods, a live online viewing number once as high as 6.3 million. In 2020, Luo Tian Yi into the Taobao broadcast room, the first cross-border test of water goods for Bausch & Lomb, Midea, L 'Occitane, and other goods. After Luo Tianyi went online, the number of live online viewers was 2.7 million, and nearly 2 million people rewarded interaction. In addition to personal shopping, the linkage between Luo Tianyi and real anchors pushed live-streaming shopping to a new climax. In March 2020, Luo Tianyi and star Ren Jialun sold Tide laundry detergent on JD.com, and the interaction reached over 6,000W times. Tide sales on JD.com also reached a new high on that day. At the launch conference of Ford Collar S, she not only introduced the social tool Ford Collar S for everyone but also had a cross-dimensional battle and answered with Chang 'a Ford National Sales and Service organization President Song Yang. Thus, applying a virtual anchor in the e-commerce platform has created publicity, economic, and commercial value for communication and solved the problem that e-commerce enterprises are challenging to start broadcasting and need an anchor. In the live broadcast, the image and scene of the virtual anchor are constructed in various ways to gather the audience into a new experience. The technology and the audience's body are integrated to make the audience feel the power of communication more.

3. Explore the embodied performance of virtual idols in e-commerce live broadcasting

"Embodied" means that when a person is engaged in a particular activity, his body, mind, object, and environment naturally unite into one without distinction to devote himself to the activity. The body is the "externalization" of our body into the world around us and the "internalization" into our body. Nevertheless, the

body is always associated with our body, and it will eventually manifest itself in our body. The body is not a mere technology or emotion, nor a universal empathy, but the human being is integrated with the things around us in certain activities **[2]**.

3.1 Materiality of scene construction

3.1.1 Scene construction: panoramic involvement

Scene construction is significant for live broadcasts. Joshua Meyerowitz argues in his "Media Situation Theory" that each unique behavior requires each unique situation, and electronic media facilitates the integration of many situations. Just as the national live streaming boom rising from 2020 combines the two ways people used to choose products on Taobao and other shopping websites according to text introduction and listen to the salesman's introduction in shopping malls, people used to choose products according to text introduction to form a new mode of publicity.

However, the scene of live anchors is set up in advance. It cannot be changed according to the change of products, making the constant repetition between anchors and scenes cause visual fatigue and reduce communication. Science and technology not only meet the needs of human beings but also continuously improve the needs of people. Virtual idol Luo Tianyi comes from the virtual character constructed by technology and makes sound synthesis to create the anchor image most people favor. Combining the current virtual technology of AR and reality, she creates a varied scene to better integrate with the scene harmonically and let the technology extend to the audience and devote themselves to the live broadcast. Better consolidate the flow rate and popularity of live broadcasts. When people's needs are met, the value of a new scene is exciting and expands users' application to the scene. In this process, the application scenario will gradually take on business attributes, thus forming a business scenario with realizable value. Therefore, expanding technical capabilities is the basis for expanding all scenarios. We can only meet users' personalized and differentiated needs by constantly developing future technical capabilities to create more valuable application scenarios [3].

3.1.2 Scenario combination: cross-boundary interconnection

Translating the meaning of a scene into a connection across borders is a way to "legitimize" it. The "out of thin air" scene function is a form of scene development, and users' satisfaction with the new scene will directly affect the effect of e-commerce publicity. These new scenes can meet the user's need for a novel psychological experience, and the value generated can strengthen the communication effect **[4]**. In e-commerce live broadcasting, the audience is the demand for products and the test of whether the anchor and the constructed scene can meet their emotions. How to make the audience feel comfortable, product publicity intentions, and strong communication have become the primary purpose of live broadcasting.

Virtual idol Luo Tianyi enters the live broadcast room and crosses the boundary from the two-dimensional scene to the real scene, breaking the barrier between the virtual and the real, making the audience feel fresh and fresh, and having a higher acceptance of the content and products propagated. Jingdong Tide brand's live stream opened the first two-dimension Ai-bean and three-dimension stream star live stream with goods -- star Ren Jialun and virtual singer Luo Tianyi broke the dimensional wall together, which is also the first time the live-streaming industry c a virtual character into the e-commerce live broadcast room, which is of pioneering significance. Ren Jialun and Luo Tianyi, two-star contestants with their strength and influence, captured many young consumers, injected strong vitality into the brand, and broke the dimensional live broadcast, achieving considerable success. In only four hours, the number of Weibo reading exceeded 100 million, original comments over ten thousand, and the interaction of Jingdong Live broadcast reached 60 million. The elimination rate of Jingdong set a historical record **[5]**. Combining the two scenes makes the body and technology merge and become one. The audience is no longer bound by technology, but technology becomes a part of the body. The audience has become a part of itself when watching the live broadcast and is attracted by the live broadcast scene and anchors. The virtual anchor image represented by Luo Tianyi is no longer just a two-dimensional figure but a new communication model in the era of new media. Her success has also established the confidence for more virtual idols in this field to break the circle.

3.2 The embodiment of the emotional connection between the bearer and the receiver

3.2.1 Interactive connection of fans' emotions

In the new Internet era, traffic flow and popularity have become criteria for measuring whether a star or anchor has become a "top stream." As live streaming becomes more and more common, anchors become more and more internal, and virtual idols also begin to move toward the anchor industry. The quadratic subculture group represented by Bilibili has gradually moved to the reality circle. Fans' emotion has entered the "big circle" from the small circle, reflected in their acceptance of the communication content and consumption of the products they buy. In this kind of fan group's interaction with virtual anchors, fans can gain a "sense of freedom," a "sense of security" immersed in their favorite world and the "confidence" that resonates with their interaction. These three feelings allow users to communicate with others in the real world and experience the virtual world in a two-dimensional culture.

As a virtual being, Luo Tianyi has become more intimate with her fans to make them loyal to her. To this end, operators try to make the virtual characters more human by giving them a way to communicate with each other. In this year's e-commerce live-streaming boom, Luo Tianyi also became frequently involved, a direct way to make money for the company and a new way to establish interactive relations with fans. On April 21, in Li Jiaqi's studio, Luo Tianyi interacted with her fans. After her debut on Taobao live-streaming platform, the number of online viewers reached 2.7 million that night, with nearly 2 million rewards, breaking the circle between reality and reality[6].

3.2.2 Participatory interaction improves communication power

The importance of the media is self-evident today. Since COVID-19 in 2020, people trapped at home have become participants in the Internet culture. Live broadcasting enables people to interact and participate continuously, promoting media culture transformation. American scholar Henry Jenkins proposed the concept of "participatory culture," which refers to a new media culture style of freedom, equality, openness, inclusiveness, and sharing created based on Web2.0 network, with all netizens as the theme, through some identity, and mainly in the form of actively creating media texts, spreading media content and strengthening network communication[7]. In the era of new media, participatory culture is more strengthened and prominent in the network, and the audience expects more to participate in it and become a part of the incarnation of technology. The success of virtual idol Luo Tianyi in breaking the circle of virtual anchors is mainly because Luo Tianyi's creative dominance is in the hands of many fans, and the audience shares the creation. It is no longer a case of everyone keeping silent, but just like the dialogue column with Luo Tianyi produced by the official People's Entertainment: "Ten years of youth song," they encourage the audience to create, enrich the image and character of the virtual idol, become the virtual anchor that people identify with and welcome. The audience personally participates in it and feels the inner resonance to have the glory of breaking the circle today.

By paying attention to virtual anchors, consumers can get the impression of the appearance of anchors, thus affecting consumers' first impression of anchors, thus affecting consumers' attention to attract more attention. The use of consumer emotion for content creation makes consumers feel involved and produce consumption behaviors under the influence of emotion, thus creating unique IP to realize the personalization of virtual anchor and achieve the effect of the brand. Therefore, although the virtual idol is rooted in "technology," its transformation into the virtual anchor itself has fan emotion, ordinary audiences give it real emotion because of their participation, and the attention to the emotional experience of consumers is the motivation and significance of the survival and development of the virtual anchor[8].

3.2.3 Emerging technologies strengthen embodied characteristics

In the era of new media, technology has been updating and developing, occupying an increasingly important position in people's life. VR, AR, MR, and other emerging virtual technologies reflect McLuhan's view that "media is the extension of people," which extends people from the real world to the virtual world. Virtual anchors are the bridge between reality and virtual, and anchors as virtual idols have more advantages. Virtual technology endows virtual idols with social ability, while live broadcasting enables virtual idols to enter reality from animation and get closer to people's lives. In the study of virtual idol Luo Tianyi's live broadcast, it can be

found that Luo Tianyi's appearance in the live broadcast room is the application of visualization technology in the live broadcast room. Through shaping the scene, establishing emotion, creating resonance, and other ways, the live broadcast attracts people's senses and vision, extending into the network. Technology tries to construct realistic virtual space for people to imagine and immersive. In the live barrage of fans to Luo Tianyi's confession, passers-by to Luo Tianyi's questions so that the broadcast room is no longer a solo dance, but everyone is happy. The audience is no longer a passive receiver isolated by the screen, but an active consumer with the right to choose and participate, genuinely achieving the triple integration of "body + technology + psychology."

4. From the virtual idol Luo Tianyi's broken circle transformation with cargo host broadcast analysis of its physical advantages

4.1 Main advantages of virtual idol anchors

4.1.1 About consumers: Reach a consensus on body cognition

Rui Bifeng and Ang Zhen pointed out that from the perspective of philosophy and cognitive linguistics, the core of "embodied" is not necessarily related to the existence of the body but a practice between the body and the outside world. Meaning, understanding, and communication are based on the practice of the body[9]. When consumers watch the live broadcast of the virtual idol Luo Tianyi, although she does not physically communicate with consumers, her specific function is to convey information through her language, expression, and action. It is the anchor's communication through symbols that connects his body with the consumer's body. Forming a practice of "display," "communication," and "consumption."

Rui Bifeng believes that the two-way integration of humans and technology is a kind of "background relationship," which reflects the regulation of the technological environment on humans and human's dependence on the technological environment. "Background relationship" is a more profound "immersive relationship" in which the technological environment disappears from the body feeling and often appears in an off-site form compared with the tangible body. However, it constitutes the environment necessary for human survival activities and directly reflects the interaction between humans and the outside world. It can be seen that communication is not the non-material exchange of two people's spiritual level but the high combination of body, spirit, and material technology. When entering the live broadcast room, the virtual idol anchor creates a harmonious and friendly atmosphere with the sweet and sweet tone of "welcome fans and friends." The consumer body carries on self-cognition in the face of the message delivered by the anchor, finds the group consensus in the live broadcast room, and puts himself into the role of "friend" called by the virtual anchor. Labeling themselves as "Luo Tianyi friend" in the broadcast dialogue, ignoring the existence of technology, and enlarging their self-consciousness. For example, in the joint live broadcast of Luo Tianyi and Li Jiaqi, Luo Tianyi shows the singing voice to consumers as a virtual idol, narrowing the distance between anchors and consumers, enhancing the sense of closeness and novelty, naturally with anchors and other consumers to form a consensus, help the brand to complete the purpose of the sales.

4.1.2 About the virtual anchors themselves: the networked body fills the void

The networked body attempts to interpret the embodiment of "body + technology" from the physical body perspective. Liu Hailong believes it can be discussed from the two perspectives of "patch" and "virus," respectively. These two concepts are derived from computer security, which is constructed from the perspective of networks rather than people. Its purpose is to show that the establishment of the Internet technology system does not leave the physical practice and physical concept, the Internet integrates the human body into it, and the "network body" acts as a "patch" and "virus" to make up for and resist the defects of modern Internet technology and system[10]. This paper focuses on the essence of virtual idol anchors from the perspective of "patch": "patch" emphasizes that the body becomes a part of the network or platform. The virtual idol is a virtual image and character constructed by real people through controlling equipment or technology. The constructed virtual idols replace the physical body of real anchors to enter the network world, fill the gap between the virtual network and reality, and complete the transformation from the physical body to the network body. Although there is no communication and behavior of actual bodies in the network world, the networked body uses the function of "patch," and the virtual idol uses its traffic and popularity to turn the live broadcast into the connection between the network and reality. The physical body of the consumer acts in the real world through the consensus and

consumption effect generated by the virtual anchor, breaking the last barrier between the virtual and reality.

4.2 Formal advantages of virtual idol anchors

4.2.1 Emotional media: bonding the roles of both parties

Zhang Lu believes that under the dual structure of virtual anchors, the audience's cognition of virtual anchors is not limited to the text enjoyment of "radio drama" but focuses on the "dynamic quadratic element." Therefore, the discussion of virtual anchors must return to the media environment of the live-streaming platform itself, which is to create a sense of reality closer to real life and expand the space for people to express their emotions in the network world [11]. The transformation of virtual idol Luo Tianyi to a virtual anchor means that her quadratic role has changed from the subculture stage to the public stage for most people. Compared with the minority groups she used to rely on in Station B, the performance of her anchor role is attached to various media, with the characteristics of real people as the main body, the platform live broadcast as the support, and the fan group as the basis. The refined and perfect anchor image meets and satisfies the expectations and needs of the public to a large extent. When the audience enjoys the aesthetic experience brought by her image, they can also experience different roles of Luo Tianyi: the performer who sings aloud in the broadcast room, the answerer who answers questions with the audience in real time, and the spokesperson who has a smooth dialogue with the real anchors. Each identity transformation is the bond between her communicator and receiver role. Virtual idol anchors from a single performance mode or interactive mode to achieve the emotional connection between the two interactive modes so that the communication of virtual anchor is no longer based on the communicator as the center but on the receiver as the center. Virtual anchor no longer transmits content or products from the perspective of the "teacher," and the audience no longer needs to play the role of "student" who resists learning. The emotional role of "friend" between the two sides connects through the media.

4.2.2 Consumption symbolization: Idol effect drives live streaming economy

Collins believes the interactive ritual chain is a motivational model driven by market mechanisms that transfer individuals from one situation to another. During the interaction, "emotional energy" is considered a true driving force to engage in personal interactions, and individuals tend to get the most information from emotional energy. As mentioned above, the emotional energy of fans brought by virtual idol anchors prompts the audience to interact with them and pay willingly according to the interactive ritual chain. This symbol consumption strengthens the original emotional energy when receiving a real-time reply.

Luo Tianyi symbolizes consumption in Luo Tianyi's live broadcast of breaking the circle and bringing goods. The audience consumes because of the anchor rather than the product, thus promoting the live-streaming economy. Virtual idol comes across the boundary to break users' boundaries and realize the dream of cross-dimension. Adding virtual idols to the e-commerce platform is undoubtedly a new vertical channel, which can bring more popularity and make the identity of "idols" more attractive. Young people who want to try new things can satisfy their curiosity and their desire to buy by adding virtual idols.

4.3 Environmental advantages of virtual idol anchors

4.3.1 Virtual "presence": media technology retreat breaks presuppositions

Research on embodied theory in academia can be divided into two approaches. The first is that scholars such as Liu Hailong and Sun Wei focus on the presence and absence of the body in the embodied body; the second is that scholars such as Rui Bifeng and Sun Shuang focus on the retirement of media technology in the process of communication. This paper analyzes the embodied practice of the virtual idol Luo Tianyi in transitioning to a virtual anchor from the first path. It is found that Luo Tianyi enters Taobao, Jingdong, and other media platforms to start live broadcasting and bring goods. The audience which enters the live broadcasting room shows the networked body in the network space at this time, and the audience is also regarded as a symbol to interact with the virtual anchor in the live broadcast bullet screen with a nickname. In the whole communication process, although the physical body is absent, it is present to communicate and interact in the form of a networked body. The emerging technologies used to build virtual anchors and the communication media platform are invisible in the communication between the two sides. Technology is no longer attached to the human body or equipment but

internalized in the body. Audiences pay attention to appreciate Luo Tianyi's body constructed by virtual technology and her unique performance. They use media technology without realizing it, thus breaking people's original psychological presupposition of virtual anchor and realizing the co-existence of virtual and real.

4.3.2 Reality and virtuality: scenes blend to meet the experience

After COVID-19 in 2020, the rise of live broadcasting changed people's previous fixed mode of relying on text introduction or offline consumption and established a new virtual face-to-face communication in the network. As a leading figure in the virtual field, virtual idols transform into virtual anchors to open up a new track for e-commerce live broadcasting. The primary condition for virtual anchors to bring goods is virtualization. In the current media environment, with the continuous development of the mobile network, the pattern of interweaving between humans and machine continues to occur. More often, the human body and the Internet world are in a state of integration. The presence and departure of people's bodies are no longer limited to the presence and departure of geographical nature in the general sense. Still, they reflect the interaction mode of combining real and virtual[®]. Virtual idols with goods have been freed from the human body's limitations, and the limitations of time and space seem very small on live-streaming platforms. Luo Tianyi is a virtual idol created with a perfect personality and body. Viewers are drawn to her body and performance when interacting with her as an anchor. At the same time, they label themselves as fans or friends of Luo Tianyi in the interaction rather than two different dimensions of people. The virtual scene allows the audience's physical body to act in the real world to meet the users' real experiences and psychological needs.

5. Conclusion

Through the above research, it can be seen that the virtual idol transformed into the physical value and advantages of e-commerce anchors. The successful crossover of virtual idols means that the live-streaming industry and the virtual field have reached a certain degree of integration. From the audience's point of view, the emotional experience and scene transformation brought by virtual idols meet the audience's experience and psychological needs. At the same time, the virtual dimension steps forward to reality, gradually breaking the dimension barrier and bridging the gap between virtual and real. From the point of view of e-commerce live broadcasting, the transformation of a virtual idol to carrier host broadcasting undoubtedly promotes the development of the live streaming economy, improves the flow of live broadcasting, drives the sales of live broadcasting, and reduces the cost and time of re-training anchors.

However, in the face of virtual idols' leap to reality, we must consider whether there will be a lack of human subjectivity. To ensure that the thinking and language of virtual idols and their transmitted values are based on the correct legal and moral foundation and prevent the false guidance of virtual idols from trapping the broad audience into the simulated environment created by capital. We should let virtual idol play their idol power, actively use new technology to make their image and character and live scene more perfect, with the help of technology to give it more concrete emotion, so that technology better stealth in live streaming, let the audience naturally enjoy the fun of live broadcast.

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