

The Rise of Online Celebrity and Its Influence on Online Shopping

—A Case of Li Ziqi

Yiru Jiang^{1,a,*}

¹*Stellart International School of Arts (SISA), Foshan, Guangdong, 5280120, China*

a. ER0323@outlook.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: This article explores the impact of online celebrities, or influencers, on global online shopping and consumer behavior, focusing on the case of Li Ziqi, a well-known Chinese internet celebrity. Li Ziqi has gained a substantial following through her expertly produced videos showcasing traditional Chinese products, attracting consumer interest both locally and internationally. The paper delves into Li Ziqi's journey to fame, her video production techniques, commercial endeavors, and social influence, while also discussing the broader economic implications of online celebrities. Moreover, the article compares livestreaming economies across countries and provides strategic recommendations for optimizing the effectiveness of influencer marketing within regulatory guidelines. The study concludes that online influencers like Li Ziqi significantly impact e-commerce and cultural exchange. Despite facing challenges, they must adapt to trends to sustain their influence. Ensuring consumer privacy and ethical advertising is crucial for balancing commercial interests with consumer rights, thereby sustaining the digital marketing paradigm.

Keywords: Online Celebrity, E-commerce, Live-streaming Marketing, Li Ziqi.

1. Introduction

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2023) [1], national online retail sales in the first half of the year were 7.16 trillion yuan, demonstrating a significant year-on-year increase of 13.1%. Notably, the sales of physical goods alone reached 6.06 trillion yuan, reflecting a notable year-on-year increase of 10.8%, which represented 26.6% of the total sales. The report further highlights the remarkable growth in online service consumption, the continuous enhancement of online retail across different regions, and the sustained expansion of rural online retail. This upward trend in online shopping is expected to persist, driven by rising internet penetration rates and increasing consumer purchasing power.

The rise of online celebrities has notably invigorated e-commerce in China. With an internet user base of 1.079 billion and an internet penetration rate of 76.4%, the user base for short vlogs has grown to 962 million (CNNIC, 2023). Online celebrities effectively engage vast audiences through interactive formats such as short vlogs, enhancing user stickiness and significantly influencing consumer behavior. Liu and Lv [2] asserted that online celebrities transform their popularity into

tangible purchasing power, benefiting both their fan base and associated brands through precise and targeted marketing strategies.

Despite the evident success, the online celebrity economy faces significant challenges. The transparency of marketing models, the quality of goods promoted, and the complexity of monetization processes pose ongoing issues. Moreover, the pursuit of online fame sometimes leads to sensationalism, which can undermine the industry's credibility. Addressing these challenges is imperative to maintain consumer trust and ensure the sustainable growth of the online celebrity economy.

This study aims to investigate the marketing strategies employed by online celebrities, analyze their impact on market effectiveness, and assess their influence on corporate performance, with a specific focus on Li Ziqi. Li Ziqi, a prominent figure on social media, has captivated a global audience through her portrayal of traditional Chinese rural life, influencing purchasing preferences and patterns. The research will be structured as follows: it will begin with an overview of Li Ziqi, followed by an analysis of the online celebrity concept, their marketing impact, and performance comparison. The study will conclude with strategic recommendations for online celebrities, consumers, platforms, and policymakers.

2. Case of Li Ziqi

Li Ziqi is the creator of a short vlog on mainland China. She was born in a rural area where life was difficult during her childhood. Her profound love for life and a desire for exploration have fuelled her journey toward becoming a distinctive representative of the Chinese Internet era. Her narrative is a personal tale of perseverance and a microcosm of the revitalization of Chinese rural culture in the digital era.

Her vlog covers a wide range of themes, from handmade crafts to cooking, where she demonstrates exceptional skills and deep cultural heritage. This content provides viewers with a visually immersive experience by seamlessly blending food preparation with ancient crafts, resulting in a visually rich and rustic charm. The melodic tunes, picturesque scenes, and emotionally resonant portrayal of daily life in her vlogs further enhance the overall appeal to the audience. One of Li Ziqi's notable series focuses on producing traditional rural foods like tofu, cured meat, and rice wine. Through these vlogs, she displays her exquisite culinary skills and in-depth knowledge of conventional craftsmanship, offering viewers a glimpse into the simplicity and beauty of rural Chinese life.

Subsequently, this paper will delve into three key aspects of Li Ziqi's vlog: her shooting preparation and techniques, as well as her commercial and social activities.

2.1. Shooting Preparation and Techniques

Li Ziqi's videos are celebrated for their high production quality and serene aesthetic. Initially, she handled all aspects of production, including photography and editing, before expanding her team to include a personal assistant and a videographer. Her content primarily features traditional Chinese life, showcasing activities like cooking, handicrafts, and farming, which resonate deeply with audiences both in China and abroad. [3] [4]

Lang analysed Li Ziqi's videos and suggested that, for the shooting needs, Li Ziqi built the scene using lighting for the composition and did colour grading and special effects in the later stages. From a visual storytelling perspective, Li Ziqi's short videos are objective, focusing on close-up shots of ingredients, techniques, and labour processes. These shots capture the meticulous attention of the characters involved. Additionally, there are panoramic views of natural landscapes, seamlessly transitioning to showcase seasonal natural elements and organisms.

2.2. Commercial Activities

Li Ziqi has effectively monetized her online presence through various commercial activities. Her product line, which includes food and handicrafts, has achieved significant success on platforms such as Tmall. Despite a significant drop in sales during her hiatus, her brand managed to maintain a substantial market presence. The study anticipates her return to content creation to further boost her commercial ventures. [3] [4]

In 2016, Li Ziqi initiated her journey into commercial activities by partnering with an MCN called Weinian Technology. Subsequently, in 2017, she founded Sichuan Ziqi Cultural Communication to further develop and broaden the scope of her business ventures. These companies play crucial roles in facilitating cultural and artistic exchanges, conducting branding and marketing initiatives, planning film and television projects, designing advertisements, providing technical services, and sourcing products. Li Ziqi's main commercial activities encompass collaboration with MCNs, online merchandise sales, revenue sharing, and advertising on Vlog platforms.

In 2018, Li Ziqi launched an online store on Tmall. Shortly after the launch, the sales of five products skyrocketed, exceeding 10 million in just three days. As a result of this success, Tmall stores' total sales in 2019 amounted to 71 million yuan. Simultaneously, Li Ziqi established physical stores in major cities like Beijing, Chongqing, and Hangzhou. Notably, Li Ziqi's offline channel construction has now reached a stage of exemplary management, a significant milestone in the brand's rapid development [5]

Li Ziqi's income primarily comes from a variety of sources, including sharing playback and browsing. Additionally, she generates revenue from advertising placement, fan rewards, and live broadcast income. Li Ziqi's videos typically receive over 5 million views, with some reaching as high as 40 million views. According to Nox Influencer, a reputable marketing and social media analytics platform in Hong Kong, Li Ziqi's annual revenue potential could potentially reach 40 million yuan solely based on YouTube's share of traffic.

Li Ziqi's success is greatly attributed to the fan base gained from a series of activities. Li Ziqi has exceeded 10 million fans on YouTube, becoming the first Chinese creator to have over 10 million fans on the platform [6]. Three years later, Li Ziqi broke the Guinness World Record for the "Most Subscribers to a Chinese YouTube Channel" with 14.1 million YouTube subscriptions (2021). As of 2024, Li Ziqi's Chao Hua reading volume reached 510 million, with 204,000 followers, collectively called the Ziqi family". [7]

2.3. Social Influence

Li Ziqi has utilized her Vlog to establish a strong online presence, focusing on promoting agricultural culture and philanthropic activities. Through showcasing her skills and rural lifestyles, she has engaged in various social welfare initiatives, including tree-planting campaigns, poverty alleviation, and support for left-behind children in rural areas. In 2018, she initiated a campaign through her official social media platforms to provide support for left-behind children in rural areas. She encouraged her followers to contribute goods or funds with the aim of improving the living conditions of these children. Subsequently, in 2019, she was involved in poverty alleviation and education support efforts by contributing funds or materials to aid underprivileged students. In 2020, Li Ziqi led a tree-planting campaign, mobilizing her supporters through official social media platforms to participate in environmental conservation endeavors. These endeavors exemplify her use of vlogs and social media to both entertain and educate her audiences, as well as advocate for environmental conservation and social responsibility.

3. Discussion

This paper presents a conceptual framework that aims to explain the emergence of online celebrities, their impact on the economy, and the associated challenges and recommendations.

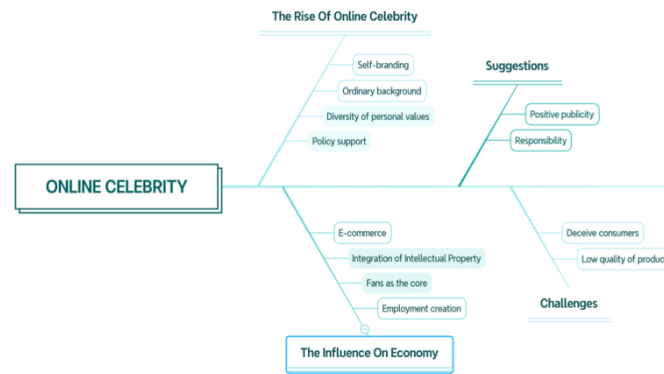


Figure 1:The Performance of Online Celebrity

3.1. The Rise of Online Celebrities

Online celebrities, as defined by Wang [8], are individuals who utilise Internet media to showcase themselves, allowing them to fulfil desires and aspirations that may not be feasible or accessible in reality. This strong online presence can assist individuals in rapidly gaining public visibility, thereby achieving fame. The following section will synthesise the existing literature and explore the reasons for the rise of online celebrities. These reasons are self-promotion, grassroots backgrounds, diverse personal values, and policy support.

The growing consumption of digital content and the personalized nature of social media contribute to the rise of online celebrities. Influencers like Li Ziqi offer relatable content that resonates with a wide audience, thereby building a loyal following. The influencer marketing industry has grown into a \$21.1 billion industry as of 2023, reflecting its significant impact on consumer behavior. [9].

Online celebrities have become integral to marketing strategies due to their ability to engage directly with their audience. Unlike traditional celebrities, online influencers can interact with followers through comments, live streams, and direct messages, creating a more personal and trustworthy relationship. This interaction often leads to higher engagement and conversion rates for brands. (Exploding Topics) [9] [10].

In today's era of self-media, the threshold for online fame is low, allowing ordinary individuals to potentially become online celebrities by showcasing traits such as courage and innovation. Online celebrities actively promote themselves by self-packaging and flaunting their persons on social media platforms to captivate netizens' attention. Backstage manipulators often work behind these online celebrities, orchestrating attention-grabbing events to generate public interest in them. Many online celebrities originally hail from ordinary backgrounds, establishing a relatable connection with consumers and fostering a psychological closeness that boosts consumers' inclination to identify with these celebrities.

Furthermore, online celebrities engage in live streaming, enabling real-time dynamic interaction that provokes consumers' desire to actively participate. This level of interaction surpasses what traditional celebrity endorsement advertisements can achieve, further solidifying the bond between online celebrities and their audience.

The rise of the online celebrity economy is underpinned by strategic adjustments in economic structure and innovation and entrepreneurship policy orientation. As China's economy adopts a new standard, economic structural adjustment becomes necessary to address development challenges. The Internet economy, as a new form of economic development, provides momentum and strength for national development.

Personal value is another critical aspect of contemporary development. Various live-streaming online celebrities, including entertainment-oriented ones, rely on their appearance and unique lifestyle attitudes to influence audiences.

According to relevant data from the National Bureau of Statistics, in 2015, the national online retail sales reached 38.773 trillion yuan," accounting for approximately 29% of the country's gross domestic product, making China's internet retail sales the world's largest.

3.2. The Influence of Online Celebrities on the Economy

Online influencers have a significant impact on consumer behavior and economic trends as they play a key role in driving brand awareness, product sales, and cultural trends. The collective impact of this online content has created a diverse online community and laid the groundwork for the rise of the online celebrity economy. A notable example is Li Ziqi, whose promotion of traditional Chinese products has not only stimulated local economies but also sparked international interest in Chinese culture. Influencers play a significant role in shaping consumer preferences not only in product promotion but also in various sectors such as fashion, beauty, and lifestyle. (Tidio) (Exploding Topics) [10] [11] Influencers also help brands reach specific demographic segments more effectively than traditional advertising methods. The economic impact of online celebrities is evident in the significant increase in e-commerce sales driven by influencers' endorsements. For instance, global e-commerce sales are projected to surpass \$7 trillion in 2024, with a substantial portion attributed to influence marketing [10] [11].

3.2.1. Fans are the Core

One of the core mechanisms of the online celebrity economy is the fanbase. Online celebrities garner the attention and support of their fans by showcasing their lifestyle and values on social media platforms. The posting of content enables the measurement of their influence through indicators like the number of fans and visits to their works.

Online celebrities leverage personalisation to influence market activities, which is a defining trait setting them apart in the industry. Through a distinctive style and charisma, each online celebrity captivates a diverse audience base, drawing fans from varying backgrounds and interests. Consequently, online celebrities establish a strong presence by crafting a personalised brand image that resonates with their followers, engendering love and unwavering support. Fans, in turn, not only consume the content but also act as loyal advocates and promoters of the celebrity's brand identity. In order to cultivate stronger connections and foster loyalty, online celebrities actively engage with their fans through various means such as live broadcasts, book signings, and in-person meet-ups.

Some online celebrities take it a step further by collaborating with brands to launch exclusive merchandise lines, reinforcing their brand image while also reaping significant financial gains. This symbiotic relationship within the personality economy has injected dynamism and innovation into the online celebrity sector, opening up new lucrative opportunities. Noteworthy contributions from scholars such as Wang et al., Zhou & Wang, and Xiao & Gu[12] underline this evolution, highlighting the role of the fan economy in propelling the continual expansion and progress of the online celebrity economy[13].

Li Ziqi, with her captivating online presence, serves as a remarkable example of how online celebrities can effectively utilize personalization and fan engagement strategies to build strong brands. Li Ziqi's strategic interactions with her audience exemplify a successful business model rooted in online fame, underscoring the potential of the online celebrity economy for individuals who can cultivate a compelling personal brand and sustain a loyal fan base.

3.2.2. E-commerce

Online celebrities leverage their influence to drive sales through various channels, contributing to the rapid growth of e-commerce. These influencers engage in live streaming on social media platforms to showcase and endorse products directly to their followers, effectively demonstrating the benefits and usage of the items. By cultivating trust and confidence in the products they endorse, this hands-on approach mitigates consumer hesitations and enhances conversion rates. In recent years, the e-commerce sector has witnessed a surge in collaboration between brands and online celebrities. These partnerships capitalize on the influencers' ability to sway consumer purchasing decisions, contributing significantly to sales figures. Online celebrities can leverage their massive following to recommend products, often convincing fans to pay premiums for endorsed items. Such consumer behavior not only boost product sales but also generates substantial revenue for both the influencers and the e-commerce platforms.

Additionally, by partnering with online celebrities, e-commerce platforms can attract a larger user base and enhance their market presence and reputation. Studies by Liu et al., Zhang et al., and Wang & Li [14] have highlighted the beneficial impact of online celebrities on e-commerce platforms. These celebrities often opt for soft advertising strategies, employing their influence and personal appeal to subtly guide fans' purchasing decisions, as opposed to hard-selling tactics. This approach minimizes consumer resistance and intrusion, leading to higher levels of advertisement acceptance and improved conversion rates within the online celebrity economy.

Li Ziqi's success in e-commerce reveals the adeptness of online celebrities in converting their popularity into tangible sales. Her distinctive brand, rooted in a romanticized depiction of traditional Chinese rural life, resonates deeply with both local and international viewers. Through astute strategic planning, Li Ziqi seamlessly integrates product demonstrations into her videos, demonstrating the items she uses in a subtle yet effective manner. Li Ziqi's triumph in e-commerce highlights the importance of authenticity and the personalized bond that online celebrities cultivate with their followers, underscoring how targeted product placement and a devoted fan following can propel a prosperous business in the realm of online celebrity influence.

3.2.3. Integration of Intellectual Property

In the current development landscape, integrating online celebrities with intellectual property has emerged as a crucial trend. Integrating intellectual property (IP) with online celebrities brings about new business opportunities and development space for both parties. Well-known IPs are opting to collaborate with online celebrities, engaging in activities such as launching co-branded products or holding joint live broadcasting events to enhance the popularity and influence of IPs leveraging the online celebrity's reach. This collaboration enables established IPs to better align with contemporary pop culture and consumer trends, thereby attracting more business opportunities and fan support for online celebrities. For instance, established anime, film, or game IPs engage in partnerships with online celebrities to introduce co-branded merchandise or organize live events, aiming to attract a larger audience and consumer base. Concurrently, online celebrities stand to amplify their influence and visibility through collaboration with reputable IPs, thus paving the way for increased business prospects and fan backing.

Li Ziqi has established herself as an influential figure by creating videos that serve as a form of intellectual property. Her content not only demonstrates a variety of traditional Chinese skills, recipes, and cultural practices but also plays a crucial role in promoting and revitalizing these aspects of Chinese heritage. Through her work, she establishes herself as a powerful ambassador for traditional Chinese culture. Furthermore, Li Ziqi has successfully developed a food brand that is rooted in traditional recipes and natural ingredients. Preserving the integrity and reputation of the "Li Ziqi" brand likely entails safeguarding her intellectual property through measures such as trademarks and potential licensing agreements for production, even though the specifics of any partnerships may not be widely known to the public.

3.2.4. Employment Creation

The rise of online celebrities necessitates the presence of a skilled workforce to brainstorm, create, and perfect captivating content. This phenomenon has led to the emergence of job openings for videographers, editors, and digital artists. Additionally, online brands demand professionals with expertise in social media management, cross-media management, content creation, video editing, and various related fields.

These employment opportunities significantly contribute to the creation of new economic growth. The benefits of the online celebrity economy extend far beyond individual success, as it also fosters job creation and nurtures a thriving job market. Li Ziqi's rise to prominence as a global online celebrity exemplifies the wide range of job opportunities created by the online celebrity economy.

4. Challenges

The online celebrity economy presents both opportunities and challenges. Challenges related to advertising integrity, product quality, and content authenticity must be addressed through regulation and standardization for the industry's healthy development.

The emergence of the Online celebrity economy has introduced a new model for product marketing in the competitive environment of the digital economy. However, the ambiguity surrounding this business model and its low survival rates have resulted in the development of diverse yet uncertain online celebrity marketing approaches. Some strategies are focused on achieving profitability through real-time live streaming on online platforms to promote product sales, while others choose to create short vlogs in order to attract fan traffic. Often, online celebrities employ a combination of these approaches. Nonetheless, this practice frequently leads to the promotion of low-cost products in large quantities, which may be of questionable quality, thus misleading consumers and platforms.

In addition to marketing challenges, online celebrities sometimes find themselves at odds with the Multi-Channel Network (MCN) companies they are affiliated with. The relationship between online celebrities and MCNs is primarily governed by profit-sharing agreements, which can complicate matters.

Furthermore, some online celebrities become overly focused on seeking fame, which can lead to the display of negative behaviors. The pursuit of attention and validation motivates online celebrities to prioritize gaining visibility at the expense of promoting positive values. As a result, some individuals may resort to unethical practices to increase their earnings from consumers, potentially crossing ethical and legal boundaries. In this way, these celebrities may inadvertently transmit negative and unhealthy messages to their audience, thereby bringing consumers close to or even breaking the legal line.

5. Suggestions

Online celebrities have the opportunity to enhance their personal brand on social media by employing innovative content and engaging tactics. Thus, abiding by ethical standards and maintaining a high level of integrity while developing one's personal brand is not only a legal mandate but also a moral duty aimed at fostering a wholesome and trustworthy online environment.

Secondly, online celebrities are responsible for ensuring the quality and safety of the items they endorse when engaging in product marketing. To uphold this responsibility, they should conduct thorough due diligence to confirm that the products adhere to regulatory standards, are ethically produced, and meet the needs of consumers.

Similarly, online celebrities play a vital role in shaping market dynamics, it is essential for online celebrities to avoid sudden price fluctuations on social media that could deceive or exploit consumers. Furthermore, attention should be paid to protecting intellectual property rights, preventing the sale of counterfeit or substandard goods, and ensuring ethical conduct in any secondary resale activities.

To effectively harness the power of online celebrities, brands should follow several key strategies[11] [10].

First of all, collaborating with relevant influencers is crucial. By partnering with influencers whose content aligns with the brand's values and target audience, brands can enhance authenticity and engagement.

Additionally, brands should leverage a multi-platform presence by engaging with influencers across various platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. This approach can maximize reach and impact. [15]

Furthermore, focusing on building long-term relationships with influencers is essential. Sustained partnerships often yield better results compared to one-off campaigns.

Additionally, brands should measure impact using relevant metrics such as engagement rates, conversion rates, and return on investment (ROI) [16]. It is also important for brands to consider cultural nuances in different markets. For example, in China, there is a strong preference for influencers who promote traditional values and local culture, while in Western markets, authenticity and relatability are key factors for successful influencer collaborations.

In summary, online celebrities have a range of responsibilities towards consumers, the integrity of the online marketplace, and their professional relationships. By prioritizing ethical conduct, quality assurance, price stability, and fair business practices, online celebrities can effectively expand their influence in a sustainable manner while also making positive contributions to the digital economy.

6. Conclusions

The surge of online influencers, exemplified by figures like Li Ziqi, has profoundly impacted brand-consumer relations in recent years. Li Ziqi's focus on promoting Chinese culture not only enhances e-commerce but also fosters a deeper cultural understanding among her global audience. As a result, the marketing landscape is being fundamentally reshaped, offering both new opportunities and complexities for brands operating within the rapidly evolving digital realm.

Despite the success enjoyed by online celebrities such as Li Ziqi, they still face various challenges. To sustain and improve their influence, these online figures must remain attuned to reality and demonstrate an openness to adapt to changing trends. By doing so, they cultivate an audience that eagerly anticipates their live broadcasts and vlogs, creating a platform for trading goods influenced by their unique styles. However, the proliferation of influencer marketing also necessitates a heightened focus on protecting consumers' privacy and ensuring ethical practices in advertising.

While this trend undoubtedly drives economic growth, it underscores the importance of striking a balance between commercial interests and consumer rights. As the phenomenon of online influencers

continues to evolve, navigating the ethical complexities and safeguarding consumer trust will be paramount to ensuring the sustainability of this digital marketing paradigm.

References

- [1] National Bureau Statistics of China. "Total Retail Sales of Consumer Goods from January to February 2023."
- [2] Liu, Q., & Lv, X. (2023). Study on online celebrity and MCN management mechanism. *Theoretical Exploration*, 2023(2).
- [3] The China Project. Jenny Feng (2023). Chinese YouTube star Li ziqi is back. But can she beat her copycats? *The China Project*
- [4] The China Project. "Chinese YouTube star Li Ziqi is back. But can she beat her copycats?" *The China Project*, 2024.
- [5] South China Morning Post. "Former hottest influencer in China Li Ziqi's controversial comeback after 2-year hiatus sparks online firestorm over change in appearance" *SCMP*, 23 Sep 2023.
- [6] NetEase News. "Li Ziqi's "cultural export" debate", 2021.
- [7] The QianJiang Evening News. "Li Ziqi has more than 10 million overseas fans, becoming the first Chinese blogger with tens of millions of fans", 2020.
- [8] The Sina Weibo. "Li Ziqi Chao Hua ", 2024.
- [9] Wang, W. (2016). The generating logic, ethical reflection, and normative guidance of online celebrity economy, *Economic theory and practice*, 8.
- [10] Meltwater. "The Most Important Influencer Marketing Statistics for 2024." Meltwater, 2024.
- [11] Exploding Topics. "27 New Online Shopping Statistics for 2024." Exploding Topics, 2024.
- [12] Tidio. "Online Shopping Statistics: Ecommerce Trends for 2024." Tidio, 2024.
- [13] Liu, F., Meng, L., Chen, S., & Duan, S. (2020). May I arouse you - Research the influence mechanism of information source characteristics of online celebrities on consumers' purchase intention. *Nankai Management Review*, 131-143.
- [14] Sang, Z., & Tao, Y. (2020). Research on profit model of IP operation of Li Ziqi- Analysis from the perspective of "distribution media". *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Article 10.19836.
- [15] Xu, M., & Co-authors. (2019). Understanding influencer marketing: A study of consumer-brand engagement on Instagram. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 110, 106416.
- [16] Ao, P. (2016). Why are online celebrities so famous? -Interpretation and thinking based on the phenomenon of online celebrities. *Journal Name*, 4, Article 0040-5.