

Social Commerce and Gender Narratives: How Female Entrepreneurs Build Brand Trust Through Live Streaming

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Abstract

The rapid growth of live-streaming commerce has transformed social commerce into a highly interactive and emotionally driven digital marketplace. While existing studies primarily explain consumer trust through technological affordances, interactivity, and purchase intention, limited attention has been given to the relational and gendered dimensions of trust construction in live-streaming environments. This study aims to explore how female entrepreneurs build brand trust through gender narratives during live-streaming commerce activities. Adopting a qualitative interpretive approach, this research collected data through semi-structured interviews, live-streaming observations, and digital content documentation involving 12 female entrepreneurs actively conducting live-streaming sales on TikTok Live, Shopee Live, and Instagram Live. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis inspired by the Gioia methodology. The findings reveal that brand trust is constructed through five major dimensions: authenticity through everyday storytelling, relational intimacy, emotional labor, gendered credibility, and trust through real-time interaction. Female entrepreneurs strategically utilized emotional engagement, caring communication, authenticity performance, and relational storytelling to cultivate audience trust and emotional closeness. The study further demonstrates that trust in live-streaming commerce is socially negotiated and performatively enacted rather than merely generated through transactional mechanisms. Theoretically, this study extends the social commerce literature by integrating perspectives from emotional labor, parasocial interaction, authenticity performance, and gender studies into the analysis of digital trust formation. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of relational communication and emotionally meaningful engagement in strengthening brand trust within contemporary social commerce ecosystems.

Keywords: Live-Streaming Commerce, Gender Narratives, Female Entrepreneurs, Emotional Labor, Parasocial Interaction

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of social commerce has transformed digital marketplaces into highly interactive and relationship-oriented commercial environments. Among emerging social commerce practices, live-streaming commerce has become increasingly dominant through platforms such as TikTok Shop, Shopee Live, and Instagram Live. Unlike conventional e-commerce, live-streaming commerce enables real-time interaction, product demonstration, and immediate communication between sellers and consumers, thereby enhancing emotional engagement and reducing transactional uncertainty. Existing studies suggest that interactivity, social presence, and streamer credibility significantly influence consumer trust and purchase intention within live-commerce environments (Wang et al., 2022).



Within social commerce ecosystems, Brand Trust has become a central factor shaping consumer engagement and online purchasing behavior. Prior studies largely explain trust formation through technological affordances, information quality, platform reliability, and streamer characteristics (Tian et al., 2023). While these studies provide important insights into digital consumer behavior, the existing literature remains predominantly transactional and technology-oriented. Consequently, limited attention has been given to the socio-emotional and performative dimensions through which trust is constructed during live-streaming interactions.

More importantly, the role of gender narratives in shaping trust-building practices remains substantially underexplored. Existing live-commerce studies tend to position streamers primarily as marketing actors rather than as identity-performing entrepreneurs who strategically mobilize emotional communication, authenticity, and relational intimacy to cultivate audience trust. However, live-streaming commerce is not merely a transactional environment; it is also a performative social space where credibility is continuously negotiated through interaction, storytelling, and emotional expression.

From the perspective of Gender Studies, gender is socially constructed and performed through communication and interactional behavior. Female entrepreneurs often employ relational communication styles emphasizing warmth, empathy, emotional attentiveness, and everyday storytelling. Such gendered performances may function as important trust-building mechanisms within digital marketplaces characterized by uncertainty and intense competition. At the same time, audiences increasingly value authenticity and emotionally engaging interactions in social commerce environments (Zou & Fu, 2024). Nevertheless, current research rarely examines how female entrepreneurs strategically utilize gender narratives and emotional performances to construct brand trust during live-streaming activities.

Furthermore, existing studies generally conceptualize trust as a transactional outcome rather than a socially constructed and performative process. Limited research integrates perspectives from Emotional Labor, authenticity performance, and Parasocial Interaction into the analysis of live-streaming commerce. This creates an important theoretical gap because trust formation in live commerce may depend not only on technological functionality, but also on emotionally meaningful interaction and relational communication between entrepreneurs and audiences.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how female entrepreneurs construct brand trust through gender narratives in live-streaming commerce. Specifically, the study investigates how authenticity, emotional labor, relational communication, and everyday storytelling shape trust-building practices during live-streaming interactions. This study contributes to the social commerce literature in three ways. First, it reconceptualizes trust as a relational and performative phenomenon rather than merely a transactional mechanism. Second, it introduces gender narratives as an important analytical lens for understanding digital entrepreneurial practices in live-streaming commerce. Third, by adopting a qualitative interpretive approach, this study provides richer insight into how trust is emotionally negotiated and socially constructed within contemporary social commerce ecosystems.

This study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How do female entrepreneurs construct brand trust through gender narratives during live-streaming interactions?
- 2) How are authenticity and emotional labor performed in live-streaming commerce practices?

- 3) How do relational communication and everyday storytelling shape consumer trust in social commerce environments?
- 4) How does live-streaming commerce facilitate emotionally embedded relationships between female entrepreneurs and audiences?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Live-Streaming Commerce and Brand Trust

Live-streaming commerce has become an increasingly dominant form of social commerce by integrating real-time interaction, entertainment, and transactional activities within digital platforms. Unlike conventional e-commerce, live-streaming environments enable direct communication between sellers and audiences, thereby enhancing interactivity, transparency, and emotional engagement. Existing studies demonstrate that live-streaming commerce positively influences customer engagement, purchase intention, and trust formation through social presence, streamer credibility, and interactive communication (Wang et al., 2022).

Within digital commerce environments characterized by uncertainty and information asymmetry, Brand Trust functions as an important mechanism reducing perceived risk and strengthening consumer confidence. Prior studies primarily explain trust formation through technological affordances, information quality, interactivity, and platform reliability (Tian et al., 2023). However, existing research remains heavily transactional and technology-oriented, offering limited explanation regarding how trust is socially and emotionally constructed during live-streaming interactions.

Recent studies increasingly highlight the importance of authenticity and emotional engagement in shaping consumer trust within live-commerce ecosystems (Zou & Fu, 2024). Nevertheless, the relational and performative dimensions of trust remain under-theorized, particularly concerning how entrepreneurs strategically utilize communication and identity performance to cultivate trust during live-streaming activities.

2.2. Gender Narratives, Emotional Labor, and Authenticity

From the perspective of Gender Studies, gender is socially constructed and performed through communication, symbolic representation, and interactional behavior. In entrepreneurial contexts, female entrepreneurs often employ relational communication styles emphasizing empathy, warmth, emotional attentiveness, and interpersonal intimacy. Such communicative practices may become strategically valuable in live-streaming commerce environments where trust and emotional engagement strongly influence audience behavior.

The concept of Emotional Labor further explains how entrepreneurs regulate emotional expressions to maintain audience engagement and fulfill interactional expectations. In live-streaming commerce, female entrepreneurs may continuously demonstrate friendliness, enthusiasm, and emotional responsiveness during live interactions. These emotional performances are closely related to perceptions of authenticity, which increasingly shape audience trust and emotional attachment in digital marketplaces (Tedjakusuma et al., 2025).

However, existing live-commerce studies rarely examine how gender narratives, emotional labor, and authenticity interact as mechanisms of trust construction. Most prior studies continue to position streamers primarily as marketing actors rather than emotionally performing entrepreneurs who strategically negotiate credibility and relational intimacy through live-streaming interactions.

2.3. Parasocial Interaction and Relational Trust

Parasocial Interaction explains how audiences develop perceived intimacy and emotional closeness with mediated personalities through repeated interaction and emotional communication. In live-streaming commerce, real-time interaction, personal storytelling, and audience engagement intensify parasocial dynamics between entrepreneurs and viewers.

Previous studies suggest that relational interaction and social presence strengthen consumer participation and emotional attachment in live-commerce environments (Wang et al., 2022). Through repeated live-streaming interactions, audiences may perceive entrepreneurs not merely as sellers but as relatable and trustworthy figures. Consequently, trust in social commerce may increasingly depend on emotionally meaningful relationships rather than purely transactional communication.

Building on these perspectives, this study conceptualizes live-streaming commerce as a performative and relational trust-building arena in which female entrepreneurs strategically utilize gender narratives, emotional labor, authenticity performance, and relational interaction to cultivate brand trust within digital commerce ecosystems.

3. Methods

This study employed a qualitative interpretive approach to explore how female entrepreneurs construct brand trust through gender narratives in live-streaming commerce. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to understand emotional performances, relational communication, and authenticity practices embedded within live-streaming interactions. Previous studies on live-streaming commerce have highlighted the importance of trust, emotional engagement, and social interaction in shaping consumer behavior, yet qualitative explanations regarding how trust is socially constructed remain limited (Sun et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022).

The study focused on female entrepreneurs actively conducting live-streaming sales through platforms such as TikTok Live, Shopee Live, and Instagram Live. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on three criteria:

- 1) Actively conducting live-streaming sales activities;
- 2) Having at least one year of live-commerce experience; and
- 3) Regularly interacting with audiences during live sessions.

A total of 12 female entrepreneurs from fashion, beauty, food, and lifestyle sectors participated in the study. The sample size was considered sufficient to achieve thematic saturation and capture diverse experiences of trust-building practices in social commerce environments. Similar qualitative studies in live-streaming commerce have also relied on relatively small but information-rich samples to explore interactional and emotional dimensions of digital commerce.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, live-streaming observations, and digital content documentation between January and March 2026. Semi-structured interviews enabled participants to describe their communication strategies, emotional performances, audience interactions, and experiences in building brand trust during live-streaming activities. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted online.

To strengthen contextual understanding, non-participant observations of live-streaming sessions were conducted to examine storytelling practices, emotional expressions, and audience engagement in real time. Additional materials, such as audience comments, promotional content, and recorded live sessions, were also analyzed as supporting data.

Combining multiple data sources enabled triangulation and enhanced the credibility of the findings.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis inspired by the Gioia methodology. The analysis began with first-order coding based on participants' own expressions, followed by the development of second-order themes and aggregate dimensions. Initial codes such as "sharing personal stories," "treating customers like friends," and "maintaining emotional connection" were subsequently grouped into broader themes, including authenticity performance, emotional labor, relational intimacy, and gendered self-presentation. This analytical approach enabled the study to capture how trust is socially and emotionally constructed through live-streaming interactions rather than merely treated as a transactional outcome.

To ensure research rigor, this study applied data triangulation by combining interviews, observations, and digital documentation. Member checking and reflective memo-writing were also conducted to improve interpretive consistency and analytical transparency.

All participants voluntarily provided informed consent before data collection. Participant identities and digital materials were anonymized to maintain confidentiality and ethical protection throughout the research process.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed that female entrepreneurs construct brand trust in live-streaming commerce through relational, emotional, and gendered communication practices. Trust was not merely formed through product information or transactional interaction, but through ongoing performances of authenticity, emotional attentiveness, and interpersonal intimacy during live-streaming sessions. Five major themes emerged from the data: (1) authenticity through everyday storytelling, (2) relational intimacy and emotional connection, (3) emotional labor and performative friendliness, (4) gendered credibility and caring identity, and (5) trust through visibility and real-time interaction.

4.1. Authenticity Through Everyday Storytelling

One of the most prominent findings was that female entrepreneurs frequently utilized everyday storytelling to create perceptions of authenticity during live-streaming sessions. Participants often shared personal experiences, daily activities, family-related stories, and behind-the-scenes business processes while interacting with audiences. These practices made audiences perceive sellers as more genuine, relatable, and trustworthy.

Several participants explained that audiences responded more positively when live-streaming sessions felt "natural" rather than overly scripted or aggressively sales-oriented. One participant stated:

"Customers trust me more when I talk casually about my daily life, not only about products. They feel like they know me personally."

This finding suggests that authenticity in live-streaming commerce is closely associated with self-disclosure and informal communication. Rather than relying solely on persuasive selling techniques, female entrepreneurs cultivated trust by presenting themselves as ordinary and emotionally accessible individuals. Such practices align with previous studies emphasizing that authenticity and relational communication significantly influence consumer engagement and trust in live-streaming commerce (Zou & Fu, 2024).

The finding also extends existing social commerce literature by demonstrating that authenticity is not merely an inherent personal characteristic, but an actively performed and strategically managed communication practice. In this context, storytelling functioned as a mechanism for reducing social distance between sellers and audiences, thereby strengthening relational trust.

4.2. Relational Intimacy and Emotional Connection

The study further revealed that female entrepreneurs intentionally cultivated emotional closeness with audiences through relational interaction strategies. Participants frequently addressed viewers using affectionate language, responded personally to comments, remembered repeat customers, and created conversational interactions resembling friendship rather than formal commercial exchange.

Many participants emphasized that successful live-streaming sessions depended heavily on emotional engagement rather than product promotion alone. One entrepreneur explained:

“People stay in the life not only because of the product, but because they enjoy the interaction and feel emotionally connected.”

These findings indicate that live-streaming commerce facilitates the development of parasocial interaction and relational intimacy between entrepreneurs and audiences. Through repeated interaction and emotional responsiveness, audiences began perceiving streamers as trusted companions rather than merely online sellers. Previous studies similarly suggest that emotional engagement and social presence strengthen consumer trust and participation in live-streaming commerce environments (Wang et al., 2022).

This finding contributes to the literature by showing that trust in social commerce is relationally embedded. Brand trust emerged not only through product credibility, but through emotionally meaningful interactions continuously maintained during live-streaming sessions.

4.3. Emotional Labor and Performative Friendliness

Another important finding concerns the role of emotional labor in sustaining audience trust. Participants reported consciously managing emotional expressions during live-streaming activities by continuously appearing friendly, enthusiastic, patient, and emotionally responsive even when experiencing fatigue or negative emotions.

One participant stated:

“Even when I’m tired, I still have to smile and respond positively because audiences can immediately feel negative energy.”

This finding reflects the intensive emotional demands embedded within live-streaming commerce. Female entrepreneurs were required to maintain emotional consistency and audience-oriented friendliness to preserve engagement and trust. Such performances resemble the concept of Emotional Labor, where emotional expressions are strategically regulated to fulfill occupational expectations.

Previous studies have similarly found that emotional expressiveness and interpersonal warmth significantly influence trust formation and audience engagement within digital commerce environments (Tedjakusuma et al., 2025). However, this study extends prior literature by demonstrating that emotional labor in live-streaming commerce is strongly gendered. Participants frequently perceived emotional attentiveness, patience, and friendliness as implicit expectations associated with female entrepreneurial identity.

Consequently, trust-building in live-streaming commerce involved not only communication skills but also continuous emotional performance and affective regulation.

4.4. Gendered Credibility and Caring Identity

The findings also revealed that female entrepreneurs strategically mobilized gender narratives to strengthen perceptions of trustworthiness and credibility. Participants often presented themselves as caring, honest, empathetic, and community-oriented individuals during live-streaming interactions.

Several participants believed that audiences perceived female sellers as more emotionally attentive and trustworthy compared to highly transactional selling approaches. One participant explained:

“I try to interact like a friend or sister, not just as a seller. That makes customers more comfortable and trusting.”

These findings suggest that gender narratives function as symbolic resources in digital entrepreneurial practices. Female entrepreneurs utilized caring communication styles and emotional attentiveness to create a sense of safety and intimacy for audiences. This finding supports arguments from Gender Studies emphasizing that gender identities are socially performed through communication and interactional behavior.

Importantly, the study demonstrates that gender narratives are not merely passive identity expressions, but strategic trust-building mechanisms within social commerce ecosystems. Such findings challenge dominant transactional perspectives in live-commerce research that primarily focus on technological affordances and purchase intention.

4.5. Trust Through Visibility and Real-Time Interaction

The final theme concerns the role of visibility and real-time interaction in strengthening consumer trust. Participants emphasized that live-streaming environments enabled audiences to directly observe product demonstrations, emotional expressions, spontaneous reactions, and interactional authenticity in real time.

Several entrepreneurs explained that audiences trusted live-streaming sellers more than ordinary online stores because live interactions reduced uncertainty and increased perceptions of transparency. One participant stated:

“Customers can directly see how I explain products, how I respond, and how I behave. That makes them feel more confident.”

This finding aligns with previous studies indicating that live-streaming commerce enhances trust by increasing transparency, interactivity, and perceived authenticity (Tian et al., 2023). However, this study further demonstrates that visibility itself becomes performative. Trust was shaped not only by product visibility but also by audiences' continuous observation of emotional behavior, relational communication, and identity performance.

Thus, live-streaming commerce functioned as a performative trust-building arena where audiences evaluated credibility through ongoing interactional and emotional cues rather than purely transactional information.

4.6. Discussion

This study contributes to the growing literature on social commerce by challenging dominant transactional and technology-centered explanations of trust formation in live-streaming commerce. Existing studies largely conceptualize trust as a consequence of platform quality, interactivity, information usefulness, or streamer attractiveness (Tian et al., 2023). Although such perspectives are important for explaining consumer behavior, they often reduce trust to a measurable cognitive outcome while overlooking the social, emotional, and performative processes through which trust is continuously negotiated during live-streaming interactions. The findings of this study demonstrate that trust in live commerce is fundamentally relational and interactional, emerging through ongoing emotional engagement, self-presentation, and narrative performance between female entrepreneurs and audiences.

First, this study extends the literature on Brand Trust by reconceptualizing trust as a socially constructed phenomenon rather than merely a transactional mechanism. In

conventional e-commerce environments, trust is often associated with technological reliability, information quality, and platform security. However, the findings reveal that trust in live-streaming commerce is strongly shaped by emotional accessibility, perceived authenticity, and relational intimacy. Female entrepreneurs cultivated trust not only through product demonstration but also through everyday storytelling, emotional responsiveness, and informal interaction. This finding supports recent arguments suggesting that contemporary consumers increasingly value authenticity and relational engagement in digital marketplaces (Zou & Fu, 2024).

Importantly, the study demonstrates that authenticity in live-streaming commerce is performative rather than purely spontaneous. Participants strategically managed self-disclosure, emotional expression, and conversational style to appear relatable and trustworthy before audiences. This finding advances existing authenticity literature by suggesting that authenticity in digital commerce is not simply an inherent characteristic possessed by entrepreneurs, but an interactional accomplishment continuously enacted during live-streaming sessions. Such findings align with recent discussions emphasizing that digital authenticity is often strategically produced through communicative and symbolic practices (Tedjakusuma et al., 2025).

Second, this study contributes to the literature on Emotional Labor by demonstrating how emotional regulation becomes central to digital entrepreneurial practices in live-streaming commerce. Previous emotional labor studies primarily focus on service occupations where workers are expected to display organizationally desired emotions. In contrast, this study shows that emotional labor in live-streaming commerce is embedded within entrepreneurial self-branding processes. Female entrepreneurs continuously managed friendliness, enthusiasm, patience, and emotional attentiveness to sustain audience engagement and trust. Emotional performance, therefore, became both a commercial strategy and a mechanism for maintaining relational intimacy with audiences.

The findings further suggest that emotional labor in live commerce is strongly gendered. Participants frequently perceived emotional warmth, caring interaction, and interpersonal attentiveness as implicit expectations associated with femininity. Such expectations shaped how female entrepreneurs communicated with audiences and performed entrepreneurial identity during live-streaming sessions. This finding supports perspectives from Gender Studies arguing that gender identities are socially performed through communication and interactional behavior rather than biologically fixed attributes. In this context, femininity functioned as a symbolic and relational resource strategically mobilized to cultivate consumer trust and emotional attachment.

Third, the study advances the understanding of Parasocial Interaction within social commerce environments. Existing parasocial interaction research typically examines how audiences develop emotional attachment toward media personalities, influencers, or celebrities. However, the present study demonstrates that parasocial relationships also emerge within entrepreneurial live-streaming contexts through repeated interaction, emotional disclosure, and everyday communication. Audiences did not merely perceive female entrepreneurs as product sellers, but increasingly viewed them as relatable companions, advisors, or emotionally familiar figures.

This finding is theoretically important because it highlights the convergence between commerce, entertainment, and emotional interaction within live-streaming ecosystems. The boundaries between commercial communication and interpersonal relationships become increasingly blurred as entrepreneurs engage audiences through emotionally immersive and socially interactive performances. Consequently, consumer trust in live commerce may be

shaped less by traditional advertising persuasion and more by relational familiarity and emotional continuity developed over repeated live-streaming interactions. Similar observations have been highlighted in recent live-commerce studies emphasizing the growing role of social presence and emotional engagement in influencing digital consumer behavior (Wang et al., 2022).

Furthermore, this study contributes to broader discussions concerning performativity in digital entrepreneurship. The findings indicate that live-streaming commerce functions as a performative marketplace in which entrepreneurs continuously negotiate credibility, visibility, and emotional connection before audiences in real time. Unlike static online marketplaces, live-streaming environments expose entrepreneurs' communication styles, emotional expressions, and interactional behaviors directly to consumers. As a result, trust becomes highly dependent on visible and emotionally engaging performances.

The study, therefore, proposes that live-streaming commerce should be understood not merely as a technological selling mechanism, but as a socio-emotional interaction space where trust is relationally enacted and publicly performed. This perspective expands current social commerce literature by integrating technological, emotional, relational, and gendered dimensions into a more holistic explanation of digital trust formation.

Finally, this study contributes methodologically to the live-commerce literature by moving beyond dominant positivist approaches that primarily rely on survey-based models and purchase-intention frameworks. By adopting a qualitative interpretive perspective, this research provides richer insight into how female entrepreneurs experience, negotiate, and strategically perform trust-building practices within everyday live-streaming interactions. In doing so, the study addresses recent calls for more socially grounded and context-sensitive approaches in social commerce research (Mai et al., 2023).

5. Conclusion

This study examined how female entrepreneurs construct brand trust through gender narratives in live-streaming commerce. The findings reveal that trust is not formed solely through transactional mechanisms or product-related information, but through relational and emotional interactions embedded within live-streaming activities. Female entrepreneurs strategically utilized authenticity, everyday storytelling, emotional attentiveness, and relational communication to cultivate audience trust and emotional closeness.

The study identifies five key dimensions shaping trust construction in live-streaming commerce: authenticity, performance, relational intimacy, emotional labor, gendered credibility, and real-time interaction. These findings demonstrate that live-streaming commerce functions as a performative and relational trust-building arena where audiences evaluate entrepreneurs through emotional and interactional cues rather than merely through product attributes.

Theoretically, this study extends the social commerce literature by reconceptualizing Brand Trust as a socially constructed and emotionally embedded phenomenon. The study also integrates perspectives from Emotional Labor, Parasocial Interaction, and Gender Studies into the analysis of live-streaming commerce. Practically, the findings suggest that relational communication, authenticity, and emotional engagement are increasingly important for strengthening consumer trust in contemporary social commerce ecosystems.

This study is limited by its focus on female entrepreneurs within selected live-streaming contexts. Future studies may examine cross-cultural settings, audience perspectives, and comparative analyses between male and female entrepreneurs to further understand trust construction in digital commerce.

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