

The Influence of Social Support on Customer Engagement in Live Streaming Commerce: The Mediating Role of Perceived Value

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Abstract – This research leverages social support theory to examine how informational and emotional support affect customer engagement in live streaming commerce (LSC), emphasizing the mediation effect of perceived value. Specifically, this study explores how these types of support influence perceptions of symbolic, utilitarian, and hedonic value. The study establishes its conceptual framework by analyzing 762 valid surveys from Chinese LSC consumers using SPSS and SmartPLS. Findings reveal that customer engagement is influenced by customers' perceptions of symbolic, utilitarian, and hedonic value in LSC, with social support significantly impacting perceived value. Notably, hedonic value is critical in LSC, mediating the interaction between customer engagement and both types of social support.

These insights offer strategic guidance for sector professionals, highlighting the importance of fostering social support to enhance user engagement. The study also underscores the need for platforms and brands to focus on creating engaging and value-driven content to build a loyal customer base. By understanding the intricate dynamics of social support and perceived value, businesses can better navigate the evolving landscape of LSC.

Keywords – Live streaming commerce, Social support, Customer engagement, and Perceived value.

1. Introduction

Combining live video streaming with conventional online retail practices, live streaming commerce (LSC) revolutionizes e-commerce by reshaping how consumers interact with products or services. [1]. This new format challenges traditional online retail paradigms with its immersive and interactive elements [2], [3]. Pioneering platforms like TikTok and Taobao have utilized LSC as an approach to broaden their market presence, providing customers with distinctive shopping experiences, such as virtual product demonstrations as well as real-time interactions [4]. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, LSC has seen significant growth, with a notable increase in user engagement worldwide, especially in China, where over half of the Internet users participate in LSC. [5], [6], [7]. In the dynamic realm of LSC, grasping the significance of social support and perceived value is crucial. Social support, encompassing both informative and emotional elements, significantly shapes customers' shopping experiences and engagement with LSC [3].

Perceived value extends beyond mere transactional benefits, encompassing consumers' overall evaluations of utilitarian, hedonic, and symbolic values provided by LSC.

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It includes both subjective and objective assessments of the shopping experience [4]. While perceived value is recognized as influencing customer engagement, the precise role it plays in LSC settings remains debated, as prior studies have produced inconsistent results [4], [8], [9], [10]. This contradiction highlights the necessity for more investigation on how perceived value, influenced by social support, affects customer engagement in LSC. By analyzing the intricate connections among these constructs, this research intends to deliver theoretical insights and actionable recommendations for utilizing LSC to improve customer engagement.

This study sets out with three primary goals: first, to assess how social support influences customer engagement in LSC, focusing on both emotional and informational aspects; second, to analyze how perceived value affects customer engagement, examining utilitarian, hedonic, and symbolic dimensions; and third, to explore the role of perceived value as an intermediary, connecting social support with customer engagement. The paper is organized with an extensive review of existing literature, hypothesis formulation, detailed methodology, results analysis, discussion, and an evaluation of the study's constraints.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Formulation

This section reviews literature and establishes the hypotheses. Key concepts like social support, perceived value, and customer engagement are analyzed to build the theoretical framework, guiding the empirical analysis.

2.1. Social Support

The concept of social support examines how attributes of social networks affect an individual's ability to manage different life situations [11]. It encompasses both the perceived and actual provision of social resources by non-professionals within formal and informal contexts [12]. According to Lakey and Cohen [13], social support pertains to the impact on a person's cognitive processes, emotional conditions, and behavioral patterns. This phenomenon has been extensively studied across psychology, sociology, and health studies [14], and has also been explored within customer behavior research to gain insights into how individuals perceive and respond to care within a social group [15].

In LSC, the live streaming room can be regarded as a virtual community guided by the streamer [16], who plays an important role in communicating with customers [2], [17] and facilitates interaction among customers to exchange helpful information, thereby enhancing the business activities of all participants [2], [17]. Consequently, the social value provided by consumers, encompassing insights from reviews and emotional feedback on products or services, is crucial in influencing the purchasing decisions of potential buyers [18]. Within the context of LSC, social support involves offering resources to consumers to enhance their comprehension of products or services.

Social support is a complex construct [3], with dimensions that can differ depending on the context [18]. In social commerce, consumers benefit from social support stemming from online interactions, which is often intangible and includes both emotional and informational support [3], [19], [20], [17]. Informational support in this study involves advice, suggestions, or knowledge that helps consumers in understanding a product, service, or resolving issues [3], [17]. Emotional support primarily focuses on the feeling towards a product/service, aiding in forming preliminary evaluations [18]. Qin *et al.* [3] highlight that in LSC, both informational and emotional support play a vital role in influencing consumer experiences and engagement. Prior research indicates social support positively affects various outcomes, including customer engagement [3], [21], consumer-streamer identification [2], relationship quality [17], trust [19], consumer involvement [18], co-creation with brand [14], and participation in social commerce [20]. Nonetheless, the investigation into social support's effects on perceived value and customer engagement in LSC remains limited, warranting further exploration.

2.2. Perceived Value

Appreciating perceived value is fundamental for grasping consumer preferences and behaviors, and perceived value is highly regarded by scholars for its ability to predict consumer actions [7], [22], [23]. Perceived value significantly influences purchasing intentions and decisions, as customers weigh the benefits and drawbacks of an offering in relation to their financial means and knowledge, ultimately choosing the option they perceive as most valuable [24], [25]. This intangible perception crucially directs consumers' decision-making processes in the selection of products or services [26].

Traditionally, perceived value was often viewed through a unidimensional lens, simplifying its complex nature [27]. However, this approach tends to neglect the nuanced facets of value [28].

In response, recent scholarship advocates for a multidimensional perspective, enriching our understanding of perceived value [29]. In the realm of LSC, Wongkitrungrueng and Assarunt [30] propose a model that identifies utilitarian, hedonic, and symbolic dimensions as core to users' perceived value, encompassing the benefits [30], enjoyment [22], and personal identity derived from shopping experiences [31].

Research has underscored perceived value's influence on continuous purchase intentions [7] and customer engagement [8], including its mediating role in purchasing behaviors [32]. However, the influence of perceived value on how customers engage with LSC remains ambiguous, indicating a need for deeper exploration [4], [8], [9], [10]. This research seeks to explore how perceived value enhances customer engagement and its intermediary function between social support and customer engagement within the domain of LSC.

2.3. Customer Engagement

In academic literature, the significance of customer engagement is well-established [33]. However, definitions of customer engagement differ considerably among scholars [34], encompassing not only transactional activities but also mental states, psychological processes, and diverse interactions [35]. In the dynamic and interactive LSC environment, customer engagement involves live interactions between vendors, streamers, and consumers [1], [16]. Here, customers play the role of co-creators, actively participating through voice and interactive elements such as bullet screens within a communal virtual space [3], [8]. Adopting a definition informed by Service-Dominant (S-D) logic [36], in defining customer engagement, this study emphasizes the dedication of cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social resources in brand interactions [37], including both operant (thoughts, feelings, actions) and operand (equipment-related) resources [38], [39]. This broader perspective captures the emotional bond and observable actions customers have with a brand, beyond purchasing [30], and their interactions with various LSC participants [40].

Research in e-commerce and social commerce has explored customer engagement antecedents, focusing on customer-oriented factors such as knowledge seeking, enjoyment, social connections, and social anxiety [41].

Other examined factors include consumer involvement [42], trust in community actors [16], relational connections [1], and perceived value across utilitarian, hedonic, and symbolic dimensions [30].

The idea of experiencing value through brand pages, encompassing aspects such as social interactions, emotional connection, and relationship development [43], alongside the significance of social support [21], has also been examined. Although substantial research exists, the combined effects of social support and perceived value on customer engagement in LSC remain inadequately understood. To address this gap, the study explores the role of social support in influencing customer engagement, with particular attention to the intermediary role played by perceived value. The findings offer crucial guidance for e-retailers and platforms to maximize the benefits of LSC.

2.4. Developing Hypotheses

2.4.1. Social Support and Customer Engagement

In LSC, interactive features like 'thumbs up', 'comments', and 'follow' buttons are crucial as they provide essential informational and emotional support [44]. Streamers, who are central to the live streaming experience, captivate audiences with real-time, dynamic, diverse, and highly engaging content [2]. This engagement provides consumers with both informational and emotional support throughout their shopping journey, significantly influencing their psychology and behavior [2], [3]. In LSC, customers engage in information sharing and mutual influence [45]. Peer support can elicit feelings of being valued, recognized, and supported [46]. This sense of support in LSC has been shown to strengthen customers' willingness to actively participate. Drawing on evidence from online marketing research that underscores the beneficial effects of social support on customer engagement [3], [21], [18], [47], the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1a: Informational support positively influences customer engagement in LSC.

H1b: Emotional support positively influences customer engagement in LSC.

2.4.2. Social Support and Perceived Value

In online communities, social support is crucial for engagement and has a profound impact on customers' assessments of product and service value in LSC. [20]. Utilitarian value, defined by the practical benefits a product or service provides, can be enhanced by informational support through advice and recommendations that improve usage efficiency and effectiveness [30].

Emotional support, through empathetic listening and encouragement, not only strengthens utilitarian value by improving consumers' practical experiences but also amplifies hedonic value by enriching the emotional and experiential pleasure derived from a product or service [22]. Furthermore, emotional support can bolster symbolic value by fostering a sense of community endorsement, encouraging the adoption of products that reflect the social group's preferences and values, thus enhancing a product's identity representation [30], [31]. Informational support, through offering recommendations and valuable insights, assists in informed decision-making and thereby enhances perceived value [18], [23]. Building on these insights, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H2a: Informational support enhances the utilitarian value in LSC.

H2b: Emotional support enhances the utilitarian value in LSC.

H3a: Informational support enhances the hedonic value in LSC.

H3b: Emotional support enhances the hedonic value in LSC.

H4a: Informational support enhances the symbolic value in LSC.

H4b: Emotional support enhances the symbolic value in LSC.

2.4.3. *Perceived Value and Customer Engagement*

Perceived value encompasses users' holistic evaluation of a product or service's utility, balancing received benefits against the costs incurred [24]. Customer engagement extends beyond mere transactional activities, encapsulating all interactions along the customer journey and discussions about the brand among consumers [48]. Empirical evidence suggests that perceived value significantly shapes behavioral intentions, directly influencing consumers' decision-making, satisfaction, and subsequent engagement with the brand [8], [29]. Moreover, the utilitarian and hedonic values are known to elevate satisfaction levels, thereby enhancing the propensity for further purchases via social commerce platforms [49]. Social value perceptions, including social acceptance and positive self-presentation, further drive satisfaction and purchasing intentions in social commerce contexts [49]. Additionally, research has linked customer engagement with consumer identification with both the seller and other viewers, highlighting the importance of symbolic value in fostering deeper customer engagement [1]. Based on these insights, the following is hypothesized:

H5: Utilitarian value enhances customer engagement in LSC;

H6: Hedonic value enhances customer engagement in LSC;

H7: Symbolic value enhances customer engagement in LSC.

2.4.4. *Mediating Effects of Perceived Value*

Liang *et al.* [17] demonstrated that frequent sharing of supportive information boosts consumers' intentions to engage in commercial activities. Similarly, the presence of social support within online communities enhances intentions to participate in social commerce and improves relationship quality [20], highlighting its motivational role in online social interactions [21]. Perceived value, a critical factor in consumer behavior, assesses the benefits received against costs incurred [50]. This assessment, when favorable, fosters intentions like revisits and word-of-mouth, ultimately augmenting customer engagement [8]. Furthermore, perceived value functions as an intermediary, establishing a bridge between social support and customer engagement, thus tying initial influences to engagement results [51].

Given the intricacies of LSC, where both informational and emotional support from streamers and communities enrich the shopping experience, it is anticipated that perceived value mediates these relationships with customer engagement. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H8a: Informational support influences customer engagement in LSC through the mediation of utilitarian value.

H8b: Informational support influences customer engagement in LSC through the mediation of hedonic value.

H8c: Informational support influences customer engagement in LSC through the mediation of symbolic value.

H9a: Emotional support influences customer engagement in LSC through the mediation of utilitarian value.

H9b: Emotional support influences customer engagement in LSC through the mediation of hedonic value.

H9c: Emotional support influences customer engagement in LSC through the mediation of symbolic value.

Informed by the theoretical groundwork and research hypotheses, Figure 1 showcases the conceptual framework established for this investigation.

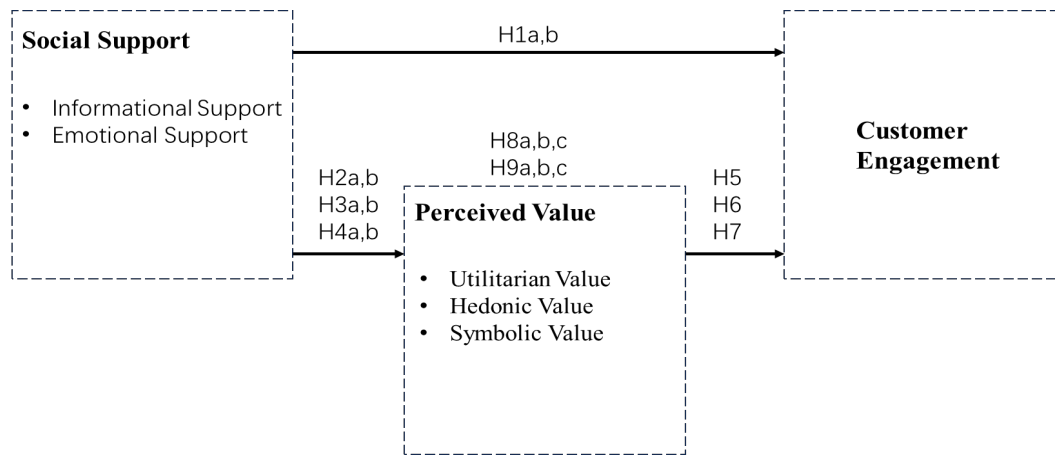


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

3. Methodology for Research

This section outlines the methodology for evaluating the proposed conceptual framework, covering measurement development, sampling, data collection, and analysis methods.

3.1. Measurement Development

To assess the proposed conceptual framework, a questionnaire-based empirical study was conducted, utilizing constructs adapted from existing literature to reflect LSC's unique aspects. Informational support was assessed with three questions, and emotional support with four, based on Zhang *et al.* [47] and Qin *et al.* [3]. To measure utilitarian and hedonic values, items from Sweeney and Soutar [29] and Wu and Huang [7] were utilized. Symbolic value and customer engagement were evaluated through items from [29], [7], [30]. The survey comprised 29 items, each rated on a seven-point scale, where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 7 indicated strong agreement.

3.2. Sampling and Data Collection

The study focused on consumers with LSC shopping experience, using an online survey administered via Wenjuanxing (<https://www.wjx.cn>), accessed on 22 Sep 2023. The survey introduction outlined live streaming sales, stressing the necessity for respondents' LSC experience to ensure data quality. After applying convenience sampling, 762 valid responses were retained from 1079 collected, following exclusions for lack of LSC experience, survey completion in under 1.5 minutes, and standardized or extreme responses. This yielded a 70.6% effectiveness rate.

The sample size meets the criteria for PLS-SEM analysis as determined by the inverse square root method [52]. Participant demographics are detailed in Table 1.

3.3. Method of Data Analysis

This research utilizes PLS-SEM for data analysis [52]. Given the study's focus on understanding and predicting customer engagement based on multiple variables, PLS-SEM offers the necessary flexibility and efficiency for such analysis [52]. Furthermore, our sample size of 762 exceeds the minimum requirement of 619, calculated based on the anticipated minimum path coefficient range of 0.05 to 0.10. This calculation ensures statistical significance at a 5% level, affirming the robustness of our study's empirical evaluation.

4. Analysis of Data and Findings

The analysis commenced with descriptive statistics using IBM SPSS Statistics 22, followed by evaluating the conceptual framework with PLS-SEM in Smart PLS version 3.

4.1. Common Method Bias Testing

To address potential biases due to the self-reported data, the study performed common method bias (CMB) tests [53]. The results from Harman's single-factor test showed that the first factor explained 38.796% of the variance, considerably lower than the 50% threshold, indicating minimal risk of common method bias. Additionally, VIF scores, with a maximum of 2.444, confirmed the absence of multicollinearity, staying below the critical threshold of 3.3 [53].

Table 1. Participant demographic details (n=762)

Characteristic	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	366	48.00
	Female	396	52.00
Age	18~25	182	23.90
	26~30	199	26.10
	31~40	178	23.40
	41~50	117	15.40
	51~60	54	7.10
	60 and older	32	4.20
Level of education	High school or below	160	21.00
	Junior college	221	29.00
	undergraduate	262	34.40
	Postgraduate or above	119	15.60
Monthly income	Student	35	4.60
	Less than RMB 4,000	37	4.90
	RMB 4,001-6,000	218	28.60
	RMB 6,001-8,000	195	25.60
	RMB 8,001-1,0000	138	18.10
	Above 10000	139	18.20
Occupation	Student	37	4.90
	Full-time employee	481	63.10
	Part-time employee	216	28.30
	Unemployed	8	1.00
	Retired	7	0.90
	Others	13	1.70

4.2. Measurement Model Testing

To ensure the measurements' internal reliability and convergent validity, Cronbach's α , factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) were evaluated, all meeting the required criteria: Cronbach's α above 0.7, factor loadings over 0.7, CR surpassing 0.7, and AVE exceeding 0.5 [52] (Table 2).

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT values, where the square root of AVE surpassed inter-construct correlations [54] and HTMT values were below the threshold of 0.850 [52] (Tables 3 and 4). Furthermore, the model fit was confirmed with an SRMR value of 0.034, indicating a good fit within the acceptable range of less than 0.08 [55].

4.3. Assessment of the Structural Model

The significance of the path coefficients in the research model was determined using a bootstrapping approach, conducted with 5,000 iterations. The structural model confirmed predictive validity, as customer engagement's R^2 values exceeded the 0.10 threshold, reflecting significant explanatory power (Table 5) [56]. The model's predictive validity was further validated through the blindfolding technique, revealing all endogenous constructs' Q^2 values to be above 0.00, affirming the model's predictive strength (Table 5). Additionally, the PLS_{predict} approach was utilized to gauge out-of-sample predictive potential, showcasing high predictive accuracy for customer engagement, utilitarian value, and hedonic value, as all Q^2 predict values were positive. Symbolic value displayed medium predictive power, with most items outperforming the LM benchmark in prediction errors (Table 6) [52](Table 6).

The data analysis validates all proposed hypotheses. Both informational and emotional support significantly influence customer engagement ($\beta = 0.154, p < 0.001$), thus confirming H1a and H1b.

Table 2. Assessment of construct reliability and validity

Constructs	Items	Factor Loading	CR	AVE	Cronbach's α
Informational Support(IS)	IS1	.878	.907	.765	.847
	IS2	.873			
	IS3	.874			
Emotional Support (ES)	ES1	.847	.914	.725	.874
	ES2	.848			
	ES3	.857			
	ES4	.854			
Utilitarian Value (UV)	UV1	.836	.923	.705	.896
	UV2	.840			
	UV3	.845			
	UV4	.837			
	UV5	.841			
Hedonic Value (HV)	HV1	.852	.925	.710	.898
	HV2	.842			
	HV3	.840			
	HV4	.837			
	HV5	.843			
Symbolic Value (SV)	SV1	.834	.926	.714	.900
	SV2	.858			
	SV3	.846			
	SV4	.842			
	SV5	.846			
Customer Engagement (CE)	CE1	.832	.931	.658	.913
	CE2	.811			
	CE3	.792			
	CE4	.806			
	CE5	.812			
	CE6	.812			
	CE7	.812			

Notes: CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

Table 3. Correlation matrix and square root of AVE

Constructs	CE	ES	HV	IS	SV	UV
CE	.811					
ES	.410	.852				
HV	.484	.418	.843			
IS	.404	.531	.411	.875		
SV	.430	.380	.621	.332	.845	
UV	.418	.333	.593	.341	.564	.840

Notes: The diagonal values in boldface are the AVE square roots.

Table 4. HTMT ratio of correlations

Constructs	CE	ES	HV	IS	SV	UV
CE						
ES	.458					
HV	.534	.470				
IS	.457	.619	.471			
SV	.472	.426	.690	.379		
UV	.461	.376	.660	.391	.628	

Notes: HTMT = Heterotrait–Monotrait

Furthermore, both types of support were found to positively affect utilitarian values, with coefficients of 0.229 for informational support and 0.212 for emotional support. Hedonic values were also positively affected, with coefficients of 0.263 for informational support and 0.278 for emotional support, confirming hypotheses H2a, H2b, H3a, and H3b.

Symbolic value also significantly increased due to informational and emotional support ($\beta = 0.181$ and $\beta = 0.284$, respectively), endorsing H4a and H4b. Finally, utilitarian, hedonic, and symbolic values were all positively linked to customer engagement, with respective coefficients of $\beta = 0.121$, $\beta = 0.209$, and $\beta = 0.123$, affirming their positive impacts on customer engagement.

Table 5. PLS path analysis results

Hypotheses	β	R^2	Q^2	T-Value	ρ	Results
UV		.149	.103			
H2a:IS->UV	.229			6.102	.000	Support
H2b:ES->UV	.212			5.755	.000	Support
HV		.225	.157			
H3a:IS->HV	.263			6.850	.000	Support
H3b:ES->HV	.278			7.420	.000	Support
SV		.168	.118			
H4a:IS->SV	.181			4.558	.000	Support
H4b:ES->SV	.284			7.375	.000	Support
CE		.330	.215			
H1a:IS->CE	.154			4.234	.000	Support
H1b:ES->CE	.154			4.022	.000	Support
H5:UV->CE	.121			3.048	.002	Support
H6:HV->CE	.209			4.900	.000	Support
H7:SV->CE	.123			2.987	.003	Support

Notes: β = Standardized Path Coefficients; R^2 = Coefficients of Determination; Q^2 = Stone-Geisser's Q^2

Table 6. Result of PLS_{predict} Assessment

Constructs	Items	$Q^2_{predict}$	PLS-SEM	LM
			RMSE	RMSE
CE	CE1	.182	1.486	1.494
	CE2	.145	1.435	1.445
	CE3	.110	1.454	1.462
	CE4	.150	1.502	1.508
	CE5	.122	1.519	1.529
	CE6	.136	1.472	1.478
	CE7	.124	1.497	1.500
HV	HV1	.190	1.515	1.520
	HV2	.147	1.564	1.572
	HV3	.131	1.548	1.557
	HV4	.170	1.536	1.545
	HV5	.136	1.613	1.626
SV	SV1	.092	1.615	1.612
	SV2	.120	1.594	1.601
	SV3	.128	1.604	1.610
	SV4	.100	1.647	1.656
	SV5	.133	1.571	1.577
UV	UV1	.091	1.606	1.616
	UV2	.094	1.565	1.572
	UV3	.100	1.582	1.591
	UV4	.110	1.558	1.568
	UV5	.109	1.620	1.630

Notes: RMSE = root mean squared error; LM = linear regression model

4.4 Mediating Effect Test

To assess mediation effects, particularly the role of perceived value dimensions between social support and customer engagement, this study employed a bootstrapping technique involving 5,000 iterations. Table 7 illustrates that the 95% confidence intervals calculated using the percentile method did not include zero, signifying significant mediation. Furthermore, the extent of mediation by the perceived value dimensions was evaluated using the variance accounted for (VAF) method.

The findings revealed that hedonic value mediates the influence of informational and emotional support on customer engagement, with VAF values of 21.2% and 21.3%, respectively. These findings suggest that hedonic value partially mediates these relationships (given that $20\% \leq VAF \leq 80\%$) [57], supporting hypotheses H8b and H9b. The mediating role of hedonic value highlights its significance within the model, linking informational and emotional support to customer engagement.

Table 7. Path coefficients of mediating effects

Effects	Path Relationship	β	T-Value	ρ	95% Confidence		VAF	Results
					Lower	Upper		
Specific Indirect Effects	IS -> UV -> CE	.028	2.682	.007	.009	.050	10.7%	H8a: Reject
	IS -> HV -> CE	.055	4.026	.000	.030	.084	21.2%	H8b: Support
	IS -> SV -> CE	.022	2.496	.013	.007	.042	8.6%	H8c: Reject
Direct Effects	IS -> CE	.154	4.234	.000	.082	.225		
Total Indirect Effects	IS -> CE	.105	6.198	.000	.073	.139		
Total Effects	IS -> CE	.259	7.085	.000	.187	.330		
Specific Indirect Effects	ES -> UV -> CE	.026	2.711	.007	.008	.046	9.4%	H9a: Reject
	ES -> HV -> CE	.058	4.127	.000	.033	.088	21.3%	H9b: Support
	ES -> SV -> CE	.035	2.730	.006	.012	.062	12.8%	H9c: Reject
Direct Effects	ES -> CE	.154	4.022	.000	.078	.227		
Total Indirect Effects	ES -> CE	.119	6.690	.000	.087	.155		
Total Effects	ES -> CE	.272	7.257	.000	.197	.345		

5. Discussion and Implications

This section discusses the key findings, explaining how social support and perceived value impact customer engagement in LSC. It also highlights the theoretical and practical implications, offering insights for both academic and managerial contexts.

5.1. Key Findings

The outcomes of this research reveal the ways in which social support and perceived value impact customer engagement within LSC, emphasizing hedonic value's crucial mediating function. Our analysis largely validated the proposed model, highlighting that both informational and emotional social supports significantly foster customer engagement [18], [47]. Notably, these forms of support equally enhance engagement, underscoring the comprehensive impact of social support within LSC.

The results highlight the essential role of hedonic value in fostering customer engagement, indicating that LSC users are mainly driven by emotional and entertainment-related factors [58]. This is consistent with observations that live streaming's appeal lies in co-creating enjoyment [41], connection, and an escape from routine [59], rather than purely transactional interactions. Contrary to expectations, utilitarian and symbolic values were not significant mediators linking social support to customer engagement. This finding highlights a unique aspect of LSC, where hedonic value outweighs functional or status-related factors [58]. It appears that LSC viewers prioritize experiences that fulfill emotional needs and offer pleasure [59], which in turn shapes their engagement patterns [58].

These insights enhance the understanding of LSC dynamics by emphasizing the crucial role of

emotional needs [59] and detailing the pathways through which social support fosters customer engagement.

The next section explores the broader implications of these findings, emphasizing their significance both theoretically and practically.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

The investigation widens the application of social support theory, illuminating the intricate dynamics of how customers engage in LSC. By integrating consumer value theory with social support, the research offers a fresh perspective on how multidimensional perceived value encompassing utilitarian, hedonic, and symbolic aspects interacts with social support to enhance consumer engagement.

Importantly, this study advances the digital commerce literature by highlighting the importance of informational and emotional social support in boosting customer engagement. This finding not only challenges but also extends prior understandings of social support's influence [8], [18], [20], [30]. This nuanced view advances our comprehension of consumer behavior in digital environments, particularly emphasizing the critical mediating role of hedonic value. Our findings reveal that hedonic value not only directly influences consumer engagement but also serves as a pivotal mediator between social support and engagement, underscoring the emotional and experiential dimensions of LSC.

Moreover, this study emphasizes the importance of both informational and emotional support in LSC, elucidating the intricacies of online consumer engagement and the diverse aspects of social support [2], [3], [19].

These findings indicate that forthcoming research should examine the diverse impacts of social support on consumer behavior in the constantly changing digital commerce context.

This approach enriches the discussion around LSC, providing a comprehensive framework to understand the interaction between social support, perceived value, and consumer engagement.

This framework paves the way for deeper exploration of the mechanisms driving customer engagement on digital platforms, especially in live streaming.

5.3. Managerial Implications

This research highlights the crucial role of customer engagement in the success of LSC [8]. Based on the findings, several practical suggestions are proposed.

The equivalence of informational and emotional support in fostering consumer engagement suggests a holistic approach to community building. Platforms should facilitate rich and interactive experiences that replicate a sense of belonging [60]. Implementing features that enable dynamic interactions in real-time and fostering an inclusive community via social media or dedicated chat groups can deepen viewer engagement. Streamers are central to this ecosystem. By training them to provide extensive support and foster significant interactions, the sense of community and support within LSC can be strengthened.

Given the prominence of hedonic value in driving engagement, streamers should prioritize content that entertains, informs, and emotionally resonates with the audience. This includes leveraging humor, storytelling, and interactive elements that align with viewer interests and preferences. Simultaneously, ensuring the LSC platform's usability making navigation intuitive and streamlining the shopping process addresses the utilitarian aspects of perceived value. These efforts combined can significantly improve viewer satisfaction and engagement.

For LSC platforms seeking to leverage these findings, aligning operational strategies with the study's insights on social support and perceived value is essential. By doing so, LSC practitioners can not only enhance user engagement but also foster a loyal viewer base that values both the content and the community within LSC.

6. Conclusion

This study offers a comprehensive examination of how social support, encompassing both informational and emotional dimensions, influences customer engagement within the context of LSC.

By integrating social support theory with consumer value theory, the research highlights the pivotal role of perceived value—specifically hedonic value—in mediating the relationship between social support and customer engagement.

The findings underscore that LSC users are primarily driven by emotional and entertainment-related factors, with hedonic value emerging as a critical mediator in this dynamic.

The results provide valuable insights for LSC practitioners, emphasizing the importance of fostering both informational and emotional support to enhance user engagement. The significance of hedonic value in shaping customer engagement suggests that platforms and brands should prioritize creating content that resonates emotionally with viewers. This includes leveraging interactive and entertaining elements that cater to the audience's preferences and enhancing the overall user experience. Furthermore, the study's findings have broader implications for the evolving landscape of digital commerce, highlighting the necessity for platforms to create engaging, value-driven content that builds a loyal customer base.

7. Limitations and Further Research Avenues

Even with this research's contributions to the existing body of knowledge on social support, perceived value, and customer engagement in LSC, limitations are acknowledged, and new directions for future research are recommended.

Firstly, the study initially focused on customers' views of social support within broadcast rooms. Future investigations should consider different sources of social support in LSC, such as contributions from brands, platforms, streamers, and other customers, to achieve a more complete understanding of their effect on customer engagement.

Secondly, this research did not address how personality traits affect consumer perceptions and engagement. Given the documented effects of traits like extraversion and neuroticism on customer engagement, integrating personality frameworks such as the "Big Five" could offer valuable insights into the variability of consumer responses in LSC.

Thirdly, while the study data collection was confined to Mainland China, customer engagement in LSC may vary across different cultural contexts. Future research should consider applying this study's framework in diverse geographical settings to examine cultural influences on LSC engagement.

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