

Study on the "Performative" Live Learning Phenomenon from the perspective of Dramaturgical Theory

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Abstract: This paper attempts to explore the psychological motivations and social effects behind the phenomenon of online learning broadcasts from the perspective of Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory. Using netnography as the method, the study employed online observation, in-depth experience, and remote interviews to conduct a deep analysis of the phenomenon of online learning broadcasts. This was done to understand the meaning of broadcasting behavior as a broadcaster and the psychological reactions and learning effects of viewers.

1. Background and significance of the study

Online learning broadcasts have become a very common type of online broadcast, with learning broadcasts covering various topics such as postgraduate exams, professional exams, and civil service exams on various live streaming platforms. The phenomenon of learning broadcasts caters to the psychological needs of young people seeking emotional "companionship" and establishes a virtual connection between young people during the learning process through long-distance observation. The learning process of a broadcast can be understood as a "theater" experience in which participants play different roles, including broadcasters, learners, and viewers. According to Goffman's dramaturgical theory, this experience can be viewed as a fictional reality in which participants express and understand each other's behavior and intentions through symbols and metaphors.

2. Literature review

2.1 Dramaturgical Theory

"Dramaturgical theory" is a theoretical concept proposed by American scholar Erving Goffman in his book "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life". The theory holds that, like actors on stage, people strive to present themselves in various ways to others and shape their own image. The core concept of the dramaturgical theory is "impression management", which means that in the process of interpersonal communication, actors always use some techniques to shape their own image, such as choosing appropriate words, expressions or actions, so

that others have a specific view of themselves, and make corresponding responses that meet the actor's wishes.

2.2 Live Learning Phenomenon

Live learning is a real-time interactive live broadcast that presents the state of learning. Broadcasters record their learning process through "live learning", and viewers generate an online public learning space through shared learning scenes and real-time interactive communication, hence it is also called "cloud self-study room" or "virtual self-study room".[1]

2.3 "Performative" Live Learning under Dramaturgical Theory

Originally, learning behavior with a certain degree of privacy and self-discipline was an individual behavior. However, with the support of live streaming technology, the learning process of learners is completely exposed to the camera, and learning behavior is viewed by fans. Its nature has changed to some extent. Unlike short videos, live broadcasts are real-time, which means that what the audience sees is what is happening now, making the characters in the broadcast more lifelike. However, under the theory of dramaturgy, when people are under external scrutiny, they will unconsciously regulate their own behavior in order to leave a good impression on others. In learning broadcasts, broadcasters, in order to conform to the learning blogger's image, also have a certain degree of "performance." Secondly, what feedback the broadcaster wants to get from the outside world will also affect the behavior of the broadcaster in front of the camera. In short, the degree of "performance" depends on what the broadcaster wants to achieve through the broadcast.

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3. Research methods and process

3.1 Research methods

In this paper, four representative cases were selected by observing learning broadcasts on three popular interactive social entertainment platforms, observing their broadcast behavior, broadcast interaction, broadcast room layout, and opinions on social platforms. The study explored the purpose of broadcasting learning, analyzed whether there was a "performance" component in the broadcast, and studied the psychological reactions of viewers by joining the fan chat.

3.2 Research process

The author employs the method of digital ethnography to thoroughly observe various learning livestreams on major online platforms with the aim of analyzing the characteristics of learning livestreams and the learning behaviors of most hosts. Additionally, the author observes changes in the emotional state of viewers through their comments in the chatroom. By joining the hosts' fan groups, the author observes interactions between hosts and fans, as well as the effectiveness of the hosts' guidance for their fans' learning.

4. Results and analysis

This section analyzes learning livestreams from four perspectives: emotional companionship, virtual performance, commercialization, and social presence.

4.1 Emotional companionship in live learning

With the increasing number of broadcasters joining learning live streaming, the chance of ordinary users stumbling upon learning live streaming rooms also increases. Learning live streaming rooms can be found on major mainstream platforms. In the stereotype, mainstream video platforms are mainly for entertainment purposes, so finding a calm and immersive learning live streaming room among the entertaining videos can be refreshing for viewers, and it can also raise their awareness of whether they should also learn.

The emotional contagion brought by learning live streaming can have a motivating effect on viewers. The inspiring titles, such as "Daily Improvement, Only Practice Makes Perfect," "If There is a Miracle, It is Another Name for Hard Work," and the image of the learning broadcaster persevering even when tired, the desktop filled with books, and the timer constantly ticking, all these concrete objects combined have a doubled motivating effect.[2]

According to the theory of drama, in learning live streaming rooms, broadcasters are equivalent to actors on a stage, and they will constrain their behaviors under the camera, making certain behaviors that have an "acting" component, striving to create an image of hard work and learning. This image creation also aligns with the initial

purpose of broadcasters to live stream, and this "performance" behavior is beneficial to broadcasters' pursuit of learning efficiency.

For fans, learning live streaming has a companionship and influence effect. When they open a learning live streaming room, they see the broadcaster studying seriously, which can infect fans to calm down and learn alongside the broadcaster. In Bilibili, the learning live streaming content of Case D best reflects the mutual supervision effect. The live streaming page usually consists of 25 small learning windows to display the learning status of fans. Fans do not communicate with each other, and they only have one common characteristic, which is to learn. This learning live streaming room is the simplest of all, and the broadcaster's dominant rights are partly transferred to fans, and the fans' purpose is only to learn. There is a mutual constraint between broadcasters and fans, and the improvement of learning efficiency under supervision is inevitable.

4.2 Virtual performance in live learning

From the perspective of bloggers' performance in live streaming rooms, it is challenging for them not to perform under the invisible constraints generated by fans' attention. They tend to make behaviors that are more suitable for the "learning" theme in the live streaming room. This self-restraint power is precisely the reason why more and more ordinary people are attracted to participate in learning live streaming. Case D said that under the gaze of fans, the broadcaster cannot frequently look at the screen, otherwise, he or she will be considered not focused on learning, which is "embarrassing." It is precisely this "embarrassment" that brings a sense of shame, which can indirectly urge broadcasters to learn better and show viewers a more positive image. This learning behavior itself has an "acting" component.

In addition, the "sense of ritual" in learning live streaming is also a manifestation of the "acting" component to some extent. The brightly lit learning corner, the carefully arranged desktop, the open study materials, the motivational slogans, and even the adjustments of recording equipment are all concrete manifestations of the "sense of ritual" in learning live streaming. The purpose of this "sense of ritual" is to enter the learning state, and it is also a concrete manifestation of presenting the ideal self that fits the learning broadcaster's image to viewers. In interpersonal communication, individuals are not seen as flesh-and-blood people, but as an information whole composed of various pieces of information. Therefore, what fans see in the live streaming room is a two-dimensional image composed of various concrete information. [3]The broadcaster uses the live streaming room as a stage to showcase an idealized self through controllable concrete performances, and this choice of a full-of-ritual concrete performance reflects the "acting" component in learning live streaming.

Moreover, the choice of interaction between broadcasters and fans and the performance during learning also reflect the "acting" component. When broadcasters face fans' questions, they actively reply, which often leads to questioning in the barrage. However, these interactions can also increase the popularity of live streaming rooms and promote the products linked by bloggers to more people. Case A stated that there is indeed behavior of paying attention to his or her posture during live streaming, because someone is watching, and sometimes he or she will look at the screen to reply to fans' questions, but this does not affect his or her learning efficiency. It can be observed in his or her live streaming room that there are indeed bullet screens questioning whether he or she has a performance behavior, but due to the controversy, the live streaming room has high popularity and strong bullet screen activity, and Case A's fans increase at a faster rate than ordinary learning bloggers. Therefore, the phenomenon of learning live streaming is also influenced by traffic to some extent.

4.3 Commercial realization in live learning

The huge dividends brought by live streaming and selling products have attracted more and more ordinary people to enter the field of live streaming, and they try various ways to become popular, even "overnight fame" is no longer a dream. The most direct and fastest way to monetize traffic is to live stream and sell products. It is not difficult to find potential selling or promotion behavior in learning live streaming rooms. The learning blogger with 200,000 fans on Douyin openly displays the small yellow car, and the blogger with 50,000 fans on Bilibili guides viewers to his or her little red book account to share desktop items. Regarding the selling behavior in learning live streaming, Case A said that the satisfaction gained from learning live streaming also includes earning income, and he or she does not avoid hanging a small yellow car in live streaming. Case B said in his or her shared post that earning money and gaining fans through learning live streaming can timely receive positive feedback, which is beneficial to the improvement of learning interests. Undoubtedly, the awareness of being able to benefit from this behavior is also the reason why more and more people are trying to do learning live streaming.

Firstly, the positioning of the live streaming platform chosen by broadcasters determines the difference in viewers' behavior, which in turn affects the frequency of interaction between broadcasters and fans during live streaming. Observing the learning live streaming rooms of bloggers with more than 10,000 fans on various platforms, it can be found that on Bilibili, most of the viewers are young people with a clear learning goal, and the activity of the comment section is not high, so the broadcaster interacts less with the comment section. On Douyin, the viewer's identity is more complex, and the activity of the comment section is high, with abundant topics, so the frequency of interaction between the broadcaster and the comment section is high. The viewers of XiaoHongShu are mostly young women, and

the activity of the comment section is average, so the frequency of interaction between the broadcaster and the comment section is also average.

Interactivity is a way for broadcasters to express themselves, and it can increase fan stickiness. The frequency of interaction can indirectly reflect the degree of the broadcaster's performance behavior. In the live streaming rooms of Douyin and XiaoHongShu, product links can be set, while there is no shopping link that can be set in the live streaming room of Bilibili. This difference in settings can affect whether the broadcaster has a selling behavior during live streaming, which can also affect whether the broadcaster attaches importance to the popularity of live streaming rooms, and thus leads to the performance behavior of broadcasters to obtain popularity in live streaming rooms.

4.4 Social Presence in Online Learning

Social presence refers to the change in people's emotional, thinking, and behavioral states in a specific environment. Network live streaming refers to real-time video live streaming through the Internet. The relationship between the two has attracted much attention because network live streaming can simulate a real-life situation to some extent, thus triggering the social presence of viewers.

In network live streaming, viewers can interact with broadcasters in real-time, discuss topics, and share their own opinions. This sense of participation makes viewers more engaged and experience a sense of presence. In network live streaming, the broadcaster's emotional expression and behavior can affect the social presence of viewers.

Online learning via live broadcasts turns learning into a collective activity. Fans connect with their favorite broadcasters and learn together, making the virtual presence of the host their learning companion and reducing the feeling of loneliness during learning.[4] In the comments section of the live broadcast, some viewers even express that they feel like they are also learning while watching others study.

In Case C, fans have developed a similar sense of attachment to the broadcaster as fans do to celebrities. The live chat is usually filled with encouraging and uplifting messages, and after the study broadcast ends, Case C will publish videos and respond to fans' requests. This creates a "remote intimate relationship" between the broadcaster and the fans. After Case C finished the graduate entrance exam, he expressed his gratitude to fans for their support and encouragement in a summary post. The first comment on this post also expressed the viewer's admiration for Case C's study efforts.

Through observation of a certain civil servant exam broadcaster's fan group, it was found that fans have a high frequency of interaction in their group chat due to a shared goal: passing the exam. Some express their anxiety and find solace from others, while others raise challenging problems and solve them together. An active and interactive fan group can improve the sense of belonging and provide understanding and companionship

for fans throughout their lonely learning journey. Indeed, online learning broadcasts can meet the identity needs of young self-taught learners, allowing them to gather into a temporary community based on shared needs and find learning pleasure in it.[5]

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5. Conclusion and Prospects

In the background of "everyone can broadcast live," online learning broadcasts have become the easiest type of live broadcast for young people to try. However, as more people join this area, the argument that "live broadcasting is merely a pursuit of self-discipline and progress" has been questioned, and there has been criticism that broadcasters may be performing.

The study found that the host's motivations for live broadcasting are complex, involving both the psychological effect of "performance" in the dramatic theory and the desire to share the joy of learning. Some even seek to create a "learning" persona to achieve commercial success. The viewing experience is also influenced by multiple factors, such as emotional "companionship," mutual "dependence" for learning supervision, and "entertainment" viewing. Some even watch others study to relieve their own study anxiety.

Finally, the impact of online learning broadcasts on social presence is twofold: it can stimulate viewers' emotional experiences but also has negative effects. Therefore, online broadcast platforms need to pay attention to content review and regulation to provide a healthy and positive viewing environment. At the same time, viewers also need self-protection awareness to avoid addiction to harmful content and maintain a rational attitude.

(Xiao Zhihan also contributed to this article)

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