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## Exploring the value of shoppable live advertising: Liveness and shoppability in advertising media and future research directions

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### Abstract

Live advertising is on the rise, with many influencers, brands, and retailers investing in the format online. Drawing on liveness theory, this article deconstructs advertising media and illustrates what it means to “go live.” Allowing for the synchronous production and consumption of media, live ads often offer sociable atmospheres and, when online, provides a more frictionless path to purchase. Our typology outlines how shoppable live advertising compares to other advertising media in terms of richness, temporal co-presence, sociability, and shoppability.

### Managerial Slant

- The pandemic has given rise to new forms of live advertising that, while similar to infomercials, offer new functionalities due to their digital nature
- Live ads are defined not only by the temporal co-presence of creators and viewers, but also by affording a sociable atmosphere
- The shoppability of an ad is increased as the friction between an ad’s message and purchase is reduced

**Keywords:** Liveness theory; Temporal co-presence; Sociability; Shoppability; Shoppable media

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## Going Live: The Prospect of Shoppable Live Advertising

During the pandemic many interactions pivoted from in-person events or meetings to being digitally mediated using a variety of live (synchronous) or recorded (asynchronous) media. This shift has been pervasive across educational, cultural, athletic, and sales-oriented activities that have been traditionally delivered live in person. While consumers derive much value from live experiences in theatre, concert, sport, and other contexts (Auslander, 2008), less is known about the benefits of advertising in live contexts.

*Live advertising* describes promotional media that are synchronously produced by brands and consumed by viewers. While live advertising is pervasive in traditional advertising strategies (e.g., branded coffee mugs placed in live morning shows, product testimonials during live infomercials), livestreaming functions on social media platforms (e.g., TikTok, Instagram, Clubhouse) are enabling brands as diverse as Walmart, Louis Vuitton, and L'Oréal to launch live advertising events often in partnership with social media influencers (Edelson, 2021). Their live endorsements are likely to not only attract consumers' attention, interest, and purchase intention, similar to other endorsements (Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018), but also increase purchase likelihood due to the highly shoppable nature of digital platforms.

Ads with a high degree of *shoppability* enable consumers to purchase products or services in a frictionless manner, thus further blurring the lines between advertising and distribution (Batra and Keller, 2016). For instance, online display ads are more shoppable than billboards since a click can bring a consumer directly to a product. Increasingly, digital audio or video livecasts are being infused

with even greater shoppability. In 2020, these shoppable live advertising events attracted over 560 million Chinese consumers and generated more than \$15.5 billion (WARC, 2021). These events are more than simply a live advertisement and instead use online interactivity to create an experience that is qualitatively different than a traditional infomercial.

This article explores live advertising in order to develop standard terms and stimulate both academic and practitioner conversation of the phenomenon. We use Liveness Theory's temporal co-presence and sociability concepts in combination with shoppability to conceptualize live advertising. The resulting typology assists advertising researchers and practitioners in evaluating the value and appropriateness of liveness in advertising, allowing comparison of shoppable livestreams, social media ads, teleshopping, and television commercials.

### Media Liveness: Live Advertising as Performance

While live media is relatively unexplored in advertising research (Zhao et al., 2021), a large body of research in performance studies examines the value of being live (e.g., Auslander, 2008). The *liveness* of a medium (e.g., performance, lecture, tradeshow, ad) relies on two attributes: the temporal co-presence of an agent (e.g., salesperson, advertiser) and a target (e.g., audience, consumer), and the sociability of the interaction. While performance researchers include physical proximity as a necessary component of liveness (Auslander, 2008), such collocation is less typical in live advertising. Liveness in advertising focuses on the temporal and social aspects of the experience, especially in light of new media advertising trends (WARC, 2021).

*Temporal co-presence* is created by the synchronicity of advertisers' production of and consumers' consumption of content (Dennis, Fuller, and Valacich, 2008). Live media, with temporal co-presence, provides consumers a window into 'emerging scenes' where reality freely unfolds before them making it challenging for advertisers to edit or manipulate. Non-live media, without temporal co-presence, presents consumers with 'curated scenes' that have likely been edited.

The *sociability* of live media can stem from interaction not only between advertisers and consumers, but also among consumers. In breaking the 'fourth-wall' of live media, advertisers may foster deeper para-social relationships with their consumers brought on by the enhanced intimacy of synchronous production and consumption of content (Creeber, 2011). The observability of the interactions of other consumers (e.g., applause, laughter, emojis, comments) may promote a sense of community or social proof that encourages further interaction and engagement (Tal-Or, 2019).

Together, temporal co-presence and sociability may alter well-researched effects of advertising. For instance, narrative transportation (van Laer et al. 2014) could arguably be strengthened or weakened in live contexts. Attention may be higher during a live broadcast and this might heighten the effect of fellow consumers being present, while possibly attenuating persuasion knowledge activation. Conversely, in some cases, the presence of others may distract consumers. This, combined with the generally poorer quality of live media, may impede immersion into an ad's narrative.

## **Deconstructing Advertising Media**

Advertisers use different media to communicate their messages and inspire consumer engagement and encourage purchases that vary in terms of richness, liveness, and shoppability (See Table 1). Traditionally, a medium is categorized by describing its richness, which varies from simple static visual representations (text or image) to more complex dynamic representations that move and change (audio or video) (Shahbaznezhad, Dolan, and Rashidirad, 2021). This paper proposes that a medium can also be described as having different degrees of liveness depending on the extent it enables temporal co-presence, sociability, and shoppability.

Digital channels increase the shoppability of live media by simplifying the path to purchase. However, the persuasive abilities of shoppable media lie beyond the social proof afforded by sociability. A live format enhances the power of persuasion techniques, including time-sensitive discounts, limited-edition offers, and other scarcity appeals. For example, if Pepsi runs a YouTube ad some sociability (e.g., likes, comments) is possible, but temporal co-presence and frictionless purchase are not. Instead, if Pepsi hosts a live audio event on a platform such as Clubhouse has temporal co-presence as well as the ability to interact with others in real-time. These elements generate a more sociable atmosphere that may heighten purchase desire and action. At the extreme, an Instagram TV segment hosted by popular influencers likely further intensifies these effects since a visual element is present and the platform itself is more shoppable. In short, digital live advertising likely represents a experiential jump rather than mere extension of the effects of typical advertising.

**Table 1: Deconstructing Advertising Media**

Focal media	Channel type	Media richness		Liveness		Shoppability	Example
		Visual	Auditory	Temporal co-presence	Sociability		
Text	Traditional	√				Low	Newspaper ad
	Digital	√			√	Medium	Tweet
Image	Traditional	√				Low	Magazine ad
	Digital	√			√	Medium	Instagram post
Audio	Traditional		√			Low	Local radio
	Digital		√		√	Medium	Podcast
Video	Traditional	√	√			Low	TV commercial
	Digital	√	√		√	Medium	Ad on YouTube
Live audio	Traditional		√	√	√	Medium	Live radio
	Digital		√	√√	√√	High	Facebook Live Audio
Live video	Traditional	√	√	√√√	√√√	High	The Shopping Channel
	Digital	√	√	√√√√	√√√√	Very high	Live event on TikTok

**The Future of Shoppable Live Advertising**

Consumers are increasingly seeking real, authentic, and trustworthy experiences partly due to the rise of fake and highly edited media (e.g., Campbell et al., 2021). They are also coming to enjoy and expect more shoppable experiences that provide enhanced convenience, easier access to a wider selection, and reviews from fellow consumers. Emerging forms of shoppable live advertising blend marketing communications and retail channels in ways that entertain, educate, and engage audiences.

Shoppable live advertising presents both opportunities and challenges for advertisers. Our deconstruction of live advertising along the facets of liveness (temporal-copresence and sociability) and shoppability offers many potentially fruitful avenues for future study. Research could investigate the place of live ads in the promotional mix and to what extent they complement or substitute for other ad

forms. Live ads may also decrease the mental distance to the endorser due to temporal copresence and sociability that could lead to changes in why and how consumers process these ads. While they typically have human hosts, live ads that employ artificial intelligence (AI) influencers could offer a round-the-clock livestream translated into multiple languages. Future research could scrutinize the potential positive and negative effects of such an ad form. The consumer experience might be further deepened and enriched using augmented or virtual reality technologies; however, further study needs to quantify how extreme levels of media richness might interact with liveness' attributes. Finally, academic-practitioner collaborations are likely especially needed in the context of live advertising since lab and experimental settings may be unable to capture the confluence of effects that characterize real-world live advertising.

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