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The art of selling without selling: Genre collision and identity hybridity in knowledge-driven live streaming commerce

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge-driven live streaming commerce (KDLSC) is a subgenre of live streaming commerce in which knowledge dissemination, rather than product promotion alone, serves as the primary driver of commercial conversion. It is an emerging genre that has received scant scholarly attention. Drawing on a corpus of 167,200 Chinese characters, this study employs a hybrid analytical approach combining bottom-up, corpus-based methods with top-down, theory-driven analysis to map the genre patterns of KDLSC. The analysis identifies 5 moves and 18 steps, some inherited from existing promotional genres, some revised, and others new to promotional genres, resulting in genre collision in KDLSC. This generic hybridity constructs three streamer identities: trustworthy businessman, close friend, and authoritative teacher. Their interplay reconciles direct transactional promotion with long-term relationship building and trust cultivation, achieving the "art of selling without selling". Methodologically, the integrated framework offers a potentially replicable approach for examining emergent streaming discourses. Theoretically, the study contributes to promotional genre scholarship by proposing an initial description of the generic structure of KDLSC.

Keywords: live streaming commerce; genre analysis; move; step; identity

Introduction

Live streaming commerce (LSC) is a digitally mediated promotional activity where streamers demonstrate products in real time online to solicit orders (Yang & Wang, 2022; Liu & Yang, 2025). Previous studies have demonstrated that live streaming selling can offer advantages in real-time seller-buyer interaction and connection (Chen et al., 2023), and significantly boost sales volumes (Chen et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). Figures also show that China's LSC in 2025 reached 6 trillion yuan and attracted 660 million consumers (Xinhua finance, 2026). Central to superior sales efficacy is the role of streamers, especially influencer streamers. In China's LSC, the dominant promotion style is the enthusiastic approach of top streamer Austin Li, whose "Oh my god, buy it" spurs impulse buying (Huang et al., 2020). This hard-sell style focuses on products, price/promotion and payment/delivery details (Wongkitrungrueng et al., 2020), and directly appeals to customers.

In contrast to this is a different mode in which streamers actively advise against impulsive purchases. Paradoxically, this approach has also been financially successful: influencer Dong Yuhui drew over 2 million viewers and generated 0.1 billion yuan in sales in a single stream. Dong's style is labeled by researchers as "knowledge-driven relational selling" (Zhang, Xiong et al., 2024) or

"knowledge-based live streaming sales" (Song & Mo, 2024; Xiao et al., 2025). In this study, we define this specific category as knowledge-driven live streaming commerce (KDLSC). KDLSC is a subgenre of live streaming commerce in which knowledge dissemination, rather than product promotion alone, serves as the primary driver of commercial conversion. Unlike mainstream LSC focusing on "selling goods" (Zhang, Xiong et al., 2024, p.161), KDLSC disseminates knowledge—e.g., bilingual promotion and cultural quotes (Xiao et al., 2025)—to fulfill customers' intellectual, emotional, and psychological needs (Song & Mo, 2024).

While existing literature predominantly focuses on typical LSC discourse, studies on KDLSC remain scarce. To our knowledge, no genre analysis has so far investigated the structural pattern of this distinct discourse type.

Although knowledge-driven streamers often diverge from promotion, KDLSC's ultimate goal remains commercial. How, then, can these seemingly divergent tactics align with driving sales? To address this puzzle, we unpack KDLSC's generic structure, examining how its move patterns construct identities that in turn facilitate selling. Two research questions guide this study: (1) What are the generic patterns (moves and steps) of KDLSC? and (2) What identities are constructed through these patterns?

Drawing on live streaming discourse from leading KDLSC streamers, this study employs a hybrid bottom-up corpus-driven and top-down deductive framework. This integrated design is expected to contribute to genre analysis by offering a replicable methodological framework for emerging streaming discourses and mapping the move-step structure of the KDLSC genre.

Theoretical framework: genre analysis

The most influential contributions of genre analysis come from Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993, 2004), both of whom emphasize the goal-oriented nature of genres. Swales (1990) defines genre as "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes" (p. 58). Similarly, Bhatia (1993) defines genre as "a communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purpose(s)" (p. 13). Building on this shared emphasis on communicative purposes, live streaming selling can be understood as a promotional genre (Camiciottoli, 2014); more specifically, KDLSC is a subgenre of LSC that integrates knowledge dissemination with commercial intent, engaging viewers through relational and emotional resonance rather than solely through transactional appeals.

To operationalize genre analysis, Swales (1990) proposes a three-level framework: communicative purpose, move structure, and rhetorical strategies. Moves are textual sections performing coherent communicative functions, while steps are specific sub-units realizing each move (Moreno & Swales, 2018). Both are functional, each contributing a distinct purpose to the genre's overall goal, and can be obligatory or optional.

While Swales offers a robust textual foundation, Bhatia (2004) extends genre analysis by

shifting focus from textual patterns to genre as social action, later developing this into critical genre analysis that emphasizes genre mixing (Bhatia, 2017). He notes that expert writers often violate generic boundaries "to communicate their 'private intentions'," which may "sometimes create conflict in genres" (p.142). This perspective is particularly relevant to KDLSC, as it embeds multiple discourse types—e.g., educational content—within a commercial live-streaming event. Such embedding suggests boundary crossing and identity hybridity (Zhang, Xiong et al., 2024) that warrant closer examination.

This study therefore adopts an integrative theoretical perspective that combines Swales' structural framework with Bhatia's socio-cognitive lens: Swales' move-step analysis maps the organizational structure of KDLSC, while Bhatia's critical approach allows us to decode the social functions and identity construction.

Studies on LSC discourse

With the rapid growth of LSC, scholarly attention has emerged first from marketing (e.g., Wongkitrungrueng et al., 2020) and subsequently from linguistics. Given the pivotal role of streamers in LSC (Liu & Cheng, 2025), research has examined various discursive strategies used by streamers, including gender-preferential addressing (Yang & Wang, 2022), metadiscourse (Liu & Cheng, 2025), ostensible offence (Liu & Yang, 2025), and speech act types (Chen et al., 2023). Some of these studies further link discursive strategies to identity construction. For instance, ostensible offence by state-affiliated streamers constructs hybrid performative, institutional, and shared cultural identities (Liu & Yang, 2025), while interactional metadiscourse resources present streamers as experts and trustworthy product endorsers (Liu & Cheng, 2025).

In terms of genre analysis, however, LSC remains relatively underexplored. To our knowledge, only one study has examined LSC as a genre (Shi & Dou, 2023), identifying 13 moves, of which 7 are obligatory—namely, greeting, introducing, promoting, recommending, stimulating, instructing, and real-time Q&A. These moves occur largely in sequential order.

Although LSC has been recognized as a distinctive business genre (Shi & Dou, 2023; Liu & Cheng, 2025), its sub-genre KDLSC has received considerably less attention. Among the few existing studies, Song and Mo (2024) examined how Dong Yuhui, a top KDLSC streamer, employs encyclopedic knowledge, storytelling, and poetic language to meet viewers' intellectual, emotional, and psychological needs. Zhang, Xiong et al. (2024) proposed that KDLSC streamers deploy pedagogical, therapeutic, and rapport discourses to construct three identities: star language tutors, friendly counselors, and cultural meaning-makers. Similarly, Han (2025) identified three pragmatic identities constructed by leading KDLSC streamers: educator, cultural promoter, and social advocate.

These studies, while informative, leave two gaps for further research. First, the generic structure of KDLSC—its specific move and step organization—remains unidentified; it is unclear

whether and how it differs from the general LSC model proposed by Shi and Dou (2023). Second, although existing research has documented hybrid identities in KDLSC, it has not explained how these identities are constructed through specific generic moves and steps. To address these gaps, the present study aims to map the structural patterns of KDLSC and to examine how identity construction is enacted through its move-step configurations.

Methodology

Research design. According to Biber et al. (2007), genre analysis typically employs either a top-down framework (predefining moves and steps), or a bottom-up one, where categories emerge from corpus patterns. Given that LSC research is "in its infancy" (Shi & Dou, 2023, p. 592), a purely top-down approach risks prescriptively "imposing" patterns (Bhatia, 1993, p. 40) and overlooking the unique realities of real-time communication. On the other hand, as KDLSC is a sub-genre of promotional genres, a purely bottom-up approach would unduly neglect existing knowledge from related promotional studies.

To mitigate these risks, this study adopts a hybrid framework that systematically integrates bottom-up corpus procedures with top-down theory-informed categories. Epistemologically, we draw on Multi-Grounded Theory (MGT) (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010), which advocates supplementing inductivism with explicit external theories. Rather than applying MGT as a full methodology, we appropriate its dual-anchoring logic: we follow Biber et al.'s (2007, p.14) bottom-up procedures while also drawing on functional categorizations from previous promotional genre studies. This combination enables generic analysis of KDLSC as a new subgenre to achieve "pattern seeking rather than pattern imposing" (Bhatia, 1993, p. 40), while reducing the potential subjectivity inherent in classifying generic patterns.

Data collection. This study selected seven top-tier KDLSC streamers as data sources. This selection was motivated by their status as quintessential knowledge-driven hosts (Zhang, Xiong et al., 2024) and aligns with Bhatia's (1993) conceptualization of "expert" members of a discourse community, ensuring that the data reflect the genre's prototypical linguistic features.

Sessions between July 2022 and December 2025 were randomly sampled for temporal representativeness. Video data were screen-recorded and transcribed using iFlytek speech-to-text software. Entertaining segments (e.g., singing) were excluded, as they do not contribute to move/step identification. The final dataset comprises 780 minutes and 167,200 Chinese characters. The first author proofread transcripts against videos and corrected errors; the second author checked and verified the final version.

Consistent with prior research (Yang & Wang, 2022; Shi & Dou, 2023) and our focus on communicative purposes, transcription was limited to verbal output. Multimodal resources (e.g., intonation, facial expressions, on-screen text) were excluded from structural coding, despite their importance to the genre.

Data processing. The discourse was segmented by product item into 133 texts (T1–T133), each representing one sales episode, ranging from 626 to 6,347 characters (mean = 1,257). Boundaries are signaled by explicit product announcements and visual cues (e.g., close-up repositioning).

Coding followed Biber et al.'s (2007) bottom-up framework, which comprises seven stages, from segmentation to discourse organizational tendencies. Since our aim is to identify functional categories (moves/steps) rather than formal linguistic features, we excluded the detailed linguistic analysis stages (2–4) and made functional segmentation our starting point. The authors first reviewed the full corpus holistically, then determined functional categories by communicative purpose rather than literal wording.

For inductive coding, 25% of the corpus (33 texts) was randomly sampled to generate a preliminary scheme. Each text was segmented by functional topic shifts (e.g., price to usage) and described by communicative function, drawing on post-hoc analysis (Biber et al., 2007) and prior promotional genre studies (Lam, 2013; Shi & Dou, 2023). The two authors independently coded, compared results, and discussed discrepancies to consensus. This iterative process produced a tentative step list with definitions which served as the coding manual for the remaining corpus. Only steps were annotated, as they are subordinate to moves.

The remaining 100 texts were coded in NVivo 15. For reliability, 20 texts (20%) were independently coded by both authors (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.858$, adequate per Rust & Cooil, 1994); discrepancies were resolved via discussion. The first author then coded the remaining 80 texts independently. In the coding process, segments that did not fit any of the steps were left uncoded, with the result that a small amount of the data remained uncoded.

Ethical issues. All video data were sourced from public archives and used for academic analysis only. Following standard practice for public data in social media research, active consent is unnecessary (Yang & Wang, 2022); streamers' awareness of their public broadcasts makes this use a negligible risk.

Results

KDLSC as a (sub)genre. Coding identified 18 steps, which were consolidated into higher-level moves by shared functions and in light of prior promotional genre studies (see Table 1). Table 1 presents only the 100 second-phase texts coded in NVivo 15; the 33 pilot texts are not included.

Table 1 Move-step pattern in KDLSC

Moves and steps in KDLSC	Occurrence in sources	Frequency (%)	Reference codes	Characters coded (%)
M1: Establishing rapport	**100**	**100%**		**15.81%**
S1: Greeting	12		25	0.48%
S2: Seeking attention	37		69	3.03%
S3: Reacting to comments	76		222	6.39%
S4: Engaging audience	59		124	4.74%

S5: Expressing gratitude	33		68	1.17%
M2: Introducing and describing products	**100**	**100%**		**17.57%**
S1: Identifying	100		111	1.17%
S2: Describing	96		232	8.32%
S3: Contextualizing usage scenarios	54		116	6.65%
S4: Pricing	58		94	1.43%
M3: Promoting sales	**92**	**92%**		**14.33%**
S1: Mitigated promoting	68		136	2.70%
S2: De-selling	40		58	1.69%
S3: Stimulating purchase	82		268	9.12%
S4: Endorsing with corporate narrative	19		22	0.82%
M4: Revealing authentic self	**73**	**73%**		**18.39%**
S1: Personal narrative	67		167	15.90%
S2: Personal reflection	23		29	1.13%
S3: Self-deprecation	28		44	1.66%
M5: Sharing and inspiring	**72**	**72%**		**33.60%**
S1: Sharing product-related knowledge	63		169	15.09%
S2: Inspiring wisdom	43		159	18.51%

In Table 1, "Occurrence" refers to the number of texts (out of 100) containing a given move or step; for moves, occurrence is counted if any constituent step appears. "Reference codes" denote total coded step instances and are reported only for steps, as steps were the coding unit. "Frequency" indicates the number of texts per move, and "Percentage of characters coded" refers to the proportion of coded characters for each move relative to the total number of coded characters.

No consensus exists in the literature on the threshold for defining obligatory vs. optional moves (Önder, 2013), and promotional genre studies have adopted varying thresholds (Lam, 2013; Önder, 2013; Shi & Dou, 2023). Following Önder (2013), we adopt 80% as the threshold for obligatory moves in KDLSC. This yields three obligatory moves: M1 Establishing rapport, M2 Introducing and describing products, and M3 Promoting sales, and two optional moves: M4 Revealing authentic self and M5 Sharing and inspiring.

Both Swales (1990) and Martin and Rose (2009) emphasized the sequential structure of genres. Bhatia (1993), however, argued that moves are not rigidly ordered but show "a certain degree of freedom in the sequencing" (p. 56). To capture this variability, Bhatia (1993) preferred the term "strategy" over "step". Biber et al. (2007) maintain that Bhatia's perspective reflects genre pattern flexibility. In our KDLSC corpus, moves and steps generally follow a stable sequence, though deviations occur. M1 is notably flexible in its positioning, likely due to the interactive nature of live streaming. Steps show greater sequential variability than moves.

Certain steps show notably high reference counts. For example, M1S3 (Reacting to comments), M2S2 (Describing), and M3S3 (Stimulating purchase) each occur over 200 times, suggesting recursivity rather than linear occurrence. These steps also reflect KDLSC's core functions: M1S3 captures interactivity, while M2S2 and M3S3 embody its commercial objective of product introduction and purchase stimulation.

Moves and steps also vary considerably in length (see "Characters coded" in Table 1). M2S1 (Identifying) is typically concise—the shortest instance is only two characters. In contrast, M4 (Revealing authentic self) and M5 (Sharing and inspiring), though optional, account for 18.39% and 35.16% of total coded characters respectively. Their substantial coverage grants them considerable weight in qualitative interpretation, suggesting that streamers adopt a high explicitness strategy when performing these moves.

Moves and steps in KDLSC.

Move 1 Establishing rapport. M1 is an obligatory move that fosters real-time interaction and encourages audience participation and attentiveness. Its five mostly formulaic steps are not rigidly sequenced but emerge organically across selling units.

Step 1 (M1S1) Greeting. M1S1 is the streamer's welcoming address to the audience, typically at the start of a live session or selling unit. This step adopts the label from Shi and Dou (2023).

(1) 欢迎来到东方甄选 APP，欢迎回家。Welcome welcome。欢迎大家。(T1)

"Welcome to the Oriental Selection APP. Welcome home. Welcome, welcome. Welcome everyone."

Here, multiple overlapping greetings are used: "welcome home" builds belonging and intimacy, while the code mixed "welcome, welcome" adds a playful tone. Unlike the phatic salutation in conventional retail, this relational greeting creates a warm, inclusive atmosphere and primes viewers for subsequent interaction and promotion.

Step 2 (M1S2) Seeking attention. This step is characterized by routine forms and content, in which the streamer prompts the audience to "join the membership or click 'follow'". This step occurs somewhat arbitrarily—embedded occasionally in the middle of a product demonstration, or at its conclusion. Functionally, this aligns with the "Soliciting attention" move identified by Shi and Dou (2023).

Step 3 (M1S3) Reacting to comments. M3S2 involves reading and responding to real-time platform comments. In this study, "Reacting to comments" extends beyond product-related Q&A (a move identified by Shi & Dou, 2023) to include responses to non-transactional comments.

(2) 有朋友的那个评价比较尖锐啊，说，呃，就是一个农村。说实话，我去上学那个地方就是农村。(T21)

"A friend made a rather sharp comment, saying that it's basically a village. To be honest, the place where I went to school is exactly that—a village."

Here, the streamer acknowledges a critical comment and candidly confirms it rather than deflecting. While Shi and Dou's (2023) Q&A move serves a transactional function, responding to non-transactional comments serves a relational one: by openly accepting a face-threatening comment, the streamer builds trust and authenticity, rather than simply targeting a sale.

Step 4 (M1S4) Engaging audience. M1S4 involves real-time interactional strategies to engage the audience and forge emotional connection. This step, not identified in Shi and Dou (2023), captures the interactivity intrinsic to live streaming. One of its key linguistic markers is direct address of audience. Prior research identifies addressing as an engagement mechanism in offline service encounters (Bresin, 2019) and online live streams (Yang & Wang, 2022). But unlike the common use of endearments in LSC like "sister" or "babe" (Yang & Wang, 2022), KDLSC streamers predominantly employ singular "you", inclusive "we", and "friends" to address audience. These forms cultivate interpersonal intimacy (Yang & Wang, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022) while also embodying relational equality.

(3) 《平凡的世界》，送给平凡的你。(T23)

"Ordinary World, for the ordinary you."

In Example (3), direct "you" address simulates face-to-face interaction, thereby personalizing the message and fostering direct viewer engagement. More importantly, framing the audience as "ordinary you" is not pejorative but aligns with their authentic self-perception. By revaluing ordinariness, the streamer dissolves the buyer-seller dynamic and builds shared understanding and emotional resonance.

Step 5 (M1S5) Expressing gratitude. M1S5 is a step in which the streamer expresses gratitude to the audience. This step corresponds to Move 11 (Appreciating) identified in Shi and Dou (2023).

(4) 谢谢大家的善良与宽容啊，都讲成这样了，直播间点赞还能过亿。(T31)

"Thank you all for your kindness and tolerance. I've rambled on like this [imperfectly], yet the livestream likes have still surpassed 100 million."

Our data reveal two subtypes of gratitude: routine and customized, each serving a distinct strategic function. The routine type consists of repeated generic thanks, functioning primarily as phatic communion. The customized type, exemplified in (5), frames audience support as benevolence, thereby reinforcing parasocial interaction (Labrecque, 2014) and strengthening viewer loyalty.

Move 2 Introducing and describing products. M2 is an obligatory move present in all texts. It introduces and describes the product in each selling unit. It comprises four steps.

Step 1 (M2S1) Identifying. This step identifies the brand and product name, serving as a structural marker that signals the boundary between selling units. It is typically concise: the streamer simply states the product name, occasionally with its brand. Example:

(5) 佳沛奇异果。(T10)

"Zespri kiwifruit."

Here, the streamer states the product name without elaboration, marking a new unit and smoothly transitioning to the next segment.

Step 2 (M2S2) Describing. M2S2 details product contents, specifications, delivery, etc. Descriptions

are mostly factual and objective (e.g., specifying weight), but the data also reveal 18 instances which employ figurative and poetic language. Example:

(6) 榴莲的香气在唇齿之间散开来，你的每一个味蕾都能捕捉到这个样子，仿佛你捕捉到了东南亚热带的阳光，仿佛你捕捉到了一些热带阳光里，每一个挂在树上，静静地让时间熟透的榴莲一样。(T3)

"The scent of durian spreads between the lips and teeth; every taste bud can capture this sensation—as if you have captured the tropical sunshine of Southeast Asia, as if you have captured, in that tropical sunlight, every durian hanging on the tree, quietly ripening through time."

Such figurative language adds humanistic and emotional dimensions to commercial attributes, and distinguishes KDLSC streamers from others (Song & Mo, 2024). Moreover, as Zhang, Shi et al. (2024) observed, figurative language in live streaming enhances consumer appraisal and purchase intentions, suggesting that these distinctive linguistic resources may drive commercial success.

M2S1 and M2S2 correspond to Shi and Dou's (2023) "Introducing" and "Presenting" moves.

Step 3 (M2S3) Contextualizing usage scenarios. M2S3 builds usage scenarios by turning product features into situational narratives. This step, absent from Shi and Dou (2023), appears unique to KDLSC. M2S3 immerses viewers in imagined usage scenarios, and potentially lowers the barriers to purchase decisions. It moves the product from something to be considered later to something to be experienced now. Example:

(7) 这个虾很大哈，特别适合你跟朋友相聚的时候，拿出来稍微解冻，虾线一挑，放在锅里一蒸，或者一煮，后来你们俩手撕着，那样吃才热闹，边吃边碰一杯酒。(T6)

"These shrimps are really big. They are perfect for when you're getting together with a friend. Just take them out, do a quick thaw, and remove the vein, steam or boil them in the pot. Then, you two can peel them by hand. It's more fun that way—eating, chatting, and clinking glasses."

Here, the streamer embeds the product use in a convivial dining experience and uses "you" to engage viewers. This narrative may evoke real-time sensory and emotional immersion.

Step 4 (M2S4) Pricing. M2S4 conveys price information. Crucially, pricing in KDLSC is purely informative, which is different from that in mainstream LSC where price serves as a promotional hook—hosts aggressively negotiate discounts to create perceived bargains and drive impulse purchases (Liu et al., 2024). In KDLSC, prices are announced straightforwardly, without negotiation. This downplaying may be deliberate: its target demographic—white-collar workers aged 25–35 in first-tier cities (Xiao et al., 2025)—is less price-sensitive, allowing streamers to prioritize content and relationship-building over transactional appeals.

Given this informational function and the absence of bargaining, we classify M2S4 under M2 rather than M3 (Promoting sales). This step is not labeled in Shi and Dou (2023), though it has a counterpart in other promotional genres (Lam, 2013). Example:

(8) 4 肋牛排，5 斤啊，一共有 5 斤，然后 170。还行啊，一斤 30 来块钱。 (T13)

"Four rib steaks, five *jin*, there's a total of 5 *jin*, and 170 *yuan*. Not bad, around 30 yuan per *jin*."

Here, the streamer states total weight, total price, and unit price plainly. The mild "not bad" lacks the urgency or hyperbole typical of promotional discourse.

Move 3 Promoting sales. M3 is an obligatory move that aims at promoting sales. While M3 corresponds to the "Promoting" move identified in Shi & Dou (2023), its realization in KDLSC is distinctive.

Step 1 (M3S1) Mitigated promotion and Step 2 (M3S2) De-selling. M3S1 is a restrained promotional strategy with two features: (a) streamers qualify purchases with conditional clauses (e.g., "if you like it"), thereby limiting rather than expanding the buyer pool; (b) they adopt understated, unhurried language and calm demeanor.

M3S2 normally follows immediately, actively counteracting the initial solicitation by urging caution, frugality, or even directly advising viewers *not* to buy.

These two steps are new to our corpus: they are not identified in Shi and Dou's (2023) LSC study, nor in other promotional genres. Its dual structure diverges sharply from the aggressive style by other streamers (Huang et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2024). Example:

(9) 想吃自己去拍。喜欢的再拍，不喜欢别买，别浪费钱。少花点，给你爸妈省点。(T3)

"Go buy it yourself if you want to eat. Only buy it if you like it; don't buy it if you don't. Don't waste money. Spend a little less, save some for your parents."

In this example, the streamer first sets a condition for purchase rather than aggressively pushing. Even this mitigated promotion is immediately undercut by the "don't-buy-it" de-selling advice. This dual structure projects sincerity and builds trust, and may thus ultimately facilitate sales (Liu & Sun, 2024).

Step 3 (M3S3) Stimulating purchase. M3S3 stimulates purchase through three actions: recommending products (corresponding to Shi and Dou's (2023) "Recommending"), announcing remaining stock ("Stimulating" in Shi and Dou (2023), and providing after-sale assurance. Although this step moves viewers from "don't buy" (M3S2) to "buy now", its tone remains restrained. For instance, stock announcements are delivered in a low-key, factual manner, unlike the intense "scarcity appeals" common in LSC that create urgency and impulse buying (Effendi, 2026). Example:

(10)还有 100 单啊，大家可以来拍一拍。(T29)

"We still have 100 orders left; feel free to order."

Unlike the typical "hurry or miss out" pressure, the tone in this example is mild and casual. The stock update is presented as routine information, and the gentle wording reduces urgency.

Step 4 (M3S4) Endorsing with Corporate Narrative. M3S4 promotes sales by enhancing viewer

trust through explicit endorsement of two corporate entities: (a) the streamer's platform company (e.g., New Oriental), and (b) the product's company. Example:

(11)这里是俞老师在对新东方转型，给大家推荐好物的平台，叫做东方甄选。(T39)

"This is Teacher Yu's platform for recommending quality goods amidst New Oriental's transformation, called Oriental Selection."

Here, the streamer invokes New Oriental's well-known transformation from education to e-commerce, framing it as a credible and resilient enterprise, thereby potentially enhancing sales.

Move 4 Revealing authentic self. M4 is an optional move in KDLSC. It is absent from Shi and Dou's (2023) LSC model and other promotional genres. It comprises three steps that collectively construct the streamer as a trustworthy friend. This resonates with Lee and Eastin's (2021) concept of authenticity through "visibility"—i.e., disclosing hardships, personal life, and flaws. Such authenticity, as Liu and Sun (2024) argue, fosters emotional connection and may boost purchase intention. Accounting for 18.39% of the corpus, this move reflects deliberate self-disclosure that prioritizes relational bonding over direct promotion, suggesting authenticity building is central to the genre's design.

Step 1 (M4S1) Personal narrative. M4S1 involves autobiographical stories that, while tangential to the product, position the streamer as a credible friend rather than a mere salesperson. This step accounts for the majority of M4. A notable example is a 1,127-character narrative in Text 59, in which the streamer recounts a self-driving trip to Tibet with friends. By sharing personal stories, the streamer fosters a sense of acquaintance rather than host-audience hierarchy. Though product-unrelated, this lengthy story creates deeper emotional engagement, which builds implicit trust that later enhances receptivity to promotional messages.

Step 2 (M4S2) Personal reflection. M4S2 typically follows M4S1. It foregrounds the streamer's subjective feelings and value judgments about past events, effectively moralizing personal experiences to project humility, integrity, or gratitude.

(12) 那时候觉得自己真幸福，能够得到那么多纯真的闪着光的年轻人对你的祝福，怎么就莫名其妙对我那么好呢？我当时觉得我真幸运，我一定是上辈子做大善人。(T8)

"At that time, I felt truly happy to be able to receive the blessings of so many innocent, shining young people. I wondered, why are they being so inexplicably good to me? I felt so lucky at that moment; I must have been a great philanthropist in a past life."

Here, the streamer reflects on former students' affection and reframes his fortune as a moral debt, thereby projecting humility and integrity. This moral positioning enhances his credibility as a sincere influencer while softening the commercial context: it softens the inherent persuasiveness of the streamer's role and reduces consumer skepticism.

Step 3 (M4S3) Self deprecation. M4S3 refers to explicit self-belittlement, a term borrowed from

Bhatia (1993), who used "self-degradation" and "adversary-glorification" to describe job application strategies that magnify social distance and elicit sympathy. In KDLSC, however, the pragmatic effect is reversed: self-deprecation narrows the streamer–audience gap by lowering prestige and fostering solidarity rather than hierarchy. Example:

(13)我弟弟是一个非常有生活气的人，我好像整天是一个，是一个脑子不太正常，不太接地气，连自己都照顾不好的人。(T28)

"My younger brother is a very down-to-earth person, whereas I seem to be someone who is, well, not quite right in the head, not grounded, and unable to even take care of myself."

Here, the streamer's explicit self-belittling disrupts the authority gradient typical of commercial hosting. By presenting himself as flawed and unpolished, the streamer appears relatable. This aligns with Liu and Yang (2025), who show that self-deprecating strategies foster parasocial engagement.

Move 5 Sharing and inspiring. M5 is an optional move in KDLSC, consisting of two steps: Sharing product-related knowledge and Inspiring wisdom. Though not directly transactional, these steps construct the streamer as an authoritative teacher—a persona congruent with their pre-broadcast careers as educators (Zhang, Xiong et al., 2024). This teacher identity indirectly serves commercial ends by enhancing credibility and fostering viewer loyalty.

Despite being optional in occurrence, M5 carries substantial discursive weight: the two steps together account for 35.16% of the corpus (15.82% and 19.34%, respectively)—the highest coverage among all moves. This prevalence positions knowledge transmission as central to KDLSC's design. Unlike M4, which builds authenticity through personal disclosure, M5 builds authority through intellectual engagement, transforming the livestream into a learning space where viewers are positioned as learners rather than consumers. This sustained educational framing cultivates long-term trust and differentiates KDLSC from purely transactional commerce.

Step 1 (M5S1) Sharing product-related knowledge. M5S1 provides cultural, historical, or literary background related to the product. This contextualization, though not strictly product-centric, elevates the product's symbolic value and constructs a knowledgeable streamer persona. Example:

(14) 其实猕猴桃好些年是发现于陕西秦岭的山里。诗经里头有一句话叫做，叫什么来着，猗傩其枝，其实就说的猕猴桃。(T10)

"Years ago, kiwifruit was discovered in the Qinling Mountains of Shaanxi. There is a line in the *Classic of Poetry* that reads... '*Yi nuo qi zhi*' [O luxuriant are the branches], which actually refers to the kiwifruit."

Here, bridging kiwifruit with classical literature transforms a mundane product into a culturally resonant artefact. This enriches the viewing experience and positions the streamer as an educated educator, which may enhance credibility and indirectly prime viewers for subsequent promotional messages.

Step 2 (M5S2) Inspiring wisdom. M5S2 disseminates knowledge unrelated to the products and is fully detached from commerce. It adopts a classroom register, using pedagogical discourse and an authoritative tone. In our corpus, a typical instance involves a streamer using a whiteboard, posing questions, and summarizing to adopt an expert stance to share parenting advice. A more concise example is given below.

(15) Hard work pays off. Pay off 什么意思呀，叫“值得的”。Hard work 叫“努力的工作”。hard work pays off. 勤奋的工作将会回报于你。(T20)
“Hard work pays off. What does ‘pay off’ mean? It means ‘*zhide de*’. ‘Hard work’ means ‘*nuli de gongzuo’*. Hard work pays off. Diligent work will reward you.”

Here, the streamer positions viewers as students by adopting a prototypical classroom register: defining vocabulary, providing translation, offering moral exhortation. This pedagogical framing constructs an authoritative teacher identity and cultivates respect and trust that may indirectly enhance promotion.

Discussion

Genre inheritance and genre collision in KDLSC. This section compares the patterns of KDLSC with other promotional genres. Since moves and steps differ only in specificity (Biber et al., 2007), our step-level units may correspond to moves in prior work. Table 2 (next page) presents the comparison.

As shown in Table 2, moves and steps are classified into three categories based on their relation to established promotional genres: Inherited, Revised, and New. Inherited items share the same function as those in prior genres (particularly Shi & Dou, 2023). Revised items share partial functions. New items are unique to KDLSC, though they may resonate with some non-promotional genres.

As a sub-genre of LSC, KDLSC shares 8 functional categories with Shi and Dou’s (2023) framework about LSC, indicating a fundamental functional alignment. Beyond LSC, the steps in the obligatory moves (M1, M2, and M3) also correspond to those identified in group buying (Lam, 2013), online advertisements (Labrador et al., 2014), and advertorials (Zhou, 2012). This cross-genre consistency reinforces KDLSC’s intrinsic identity as a promotional genre.

Table 2 Relation of moves and steps to other genres

Moves and steps in KDLSC	Relation to established genres	Moves in LSC (Shi & Dou, 2023)	Moves or steps in other genres
M1 Establishing rapport	New		
S1 Greeting	Inherited	Greeting	
S2 Seeking attention	Inherited	Soliciting attention	
S3 Reacting to comments	Revised	Real-time Q&A	
S4 Engaging audience	Revised	Instructing	Involving the reader in the text (online book blurbs) (Önder, 2013) Committing users to the deal (Lam, 2013)
S5 Expressing gratitude	Inherited	Appreciating	
M2 Introducing and describing products	Inherited	Introducing	Detailing the product or service (advertorials) (Zhou, 2012)
S1 Identifying	Inherited	Introducing	Identifying (online ad) (Labrador et al., 2014) Introducing the title (online group buying) (Lam, 2013)
S2 Describing	Inherited	Presenting	Describing (Labrador et.al., 2014); Giving full details (Lam, 2013)
S3 Contextualizing usage scenarios	New		
S4 Pricing	Inherited		Indicating price details (Lam, 2013)
M3 Promoting products	Inherited	Promoting	
S1 Mitigated promoting	New		
S2 De-selling	New		
S3 Stimulating purchase	Inherited	Stimulating	Indicating the time left; Indicating the number of buyers (Lam, 2013)
S4 Endorsing with corporate narrative	Revised		Introducing a company/an organization/a leader in a company (Zhou, 2012)
M4 Revealing authentic self	New		
S1 Personal narrative	Revised	Self-promoting	Record (recounts) (Martin & Rose, 2009)
S2 Personal reflection	New		Comment (observations) (Martin & Rose, 2009)
S3 Self-deprecation	Revised		Self-degradation (scholarship application) (Bhatia, 1993)
M5 Sharing and inspiring	New		
S1 Sharing product-related knowledge	Revised	Sharing	Pedagogical discourse (Zhang, Xiong et al., 2024)
S2 Inspiring wisdom	New		Pedagogical discourse (Zhang, Xiong et al., 2024)

Revised steps share partial functions with established genres, but their KDLSC enactments reflect genre-specific characteristics. M1S2 (Reacting to comments) parallels Shi and Dou's (2023) “Real-time Q&A” but extends it to non-transactional comments. M4S1 (Personal narrative) partially resembles “Self-promoting” in LSC (Shi & Dou, 2023), yet its primary function is revealing authenticity to construct an authentic persona—not merely image enhancement. This step also bears affinity to the “Record” stage in narrative genres (Martin & Rose, 2009). M5S1 (Sharing product-related knowledge) differs from LSC's “Sharing” (Shi & Dou, 2023) in its pedagogical discourse style (Zhang, Xiong et al., 2024). These revisions consistently shift from transactional effectiveness toward relational and intellectual engagement, which reflects the hybrid nature of KDLSC.

Five steps are unique to KDLSC with no counterparts in other promotional genres. Three belong to obligatory moves: M2S3 (Contextualizing usage scenarios), M3S1 (Mitigated promoting), and M3S2 (De-selling). M2S3 employs poetic language to depict imagined usage. M3S1 and M3S2, while ostensibly contradicting promotion, downplay commercial urgency to prioritize trust and long-term relationship management over immediate transactions. These steps develop a distinctive promotional ethos in KDLSC.

Two unique steps are in optional moves: M4S2 (Personal reflection) and M5S2 (Inspiring wisdom). M4S2, together with M4S1, generates emotional resonance, transforming commerce into parasocial friendship. M5S2 adopts pedagogical discourse, positioning viewers as learners and reframing live streaming as personal growth rather than mere consumption. Though new to promotional genres, M4S2 aligns with the Comment stage in story genres (Martin & Rose, 2009); M5S2 draws on pedagogical discourse (Zhang, Xiong et al., 2024).

Taken together, the new steps serve a dual function: the first three soften KDLSC's commercial edge, while the latter two elevate the consumer experience from transaction to emotional and intellectual engagement.

Thus, KDLSC exhibits both genre inheritance and collision with other promotional genres. Viewing moves/steps as “micro-genres” (Andersen & van Leeuwen, 2017) clarifies this dynamic. The foundational micro-genre is LSC, manifest in obligatory moves M1–M3 that prioritize sales. Yet KDLSC extends beyond promotion: M4 employs storytelling genres, while M5 adopts a pedagogical register. These micro-genres coexist within a single stream, creating a collision of generic expectations—promotional, narrative, and instructional discourses in rapid succession.

This collision may appear contradictory, as each micro-genre carries a distinct purpose—selling, sharing, or teaching. Yet they are harmonized through the streamer's strategic deployment of multiple personae: seller, friend, and teacher. Each serves a specific function, but collectively they fulfill the genre's overarching goal (Biber et al., 2007). The hybridity of these personae is examined in Section 6.2.

Identity hybridity in KDLSC. Identity construction is intrinsic to many forms of communication (Anderson & van Leeuwen, 2017). KDLSC is no exception. From the genre collision discussion in 6.1, this section examines how multiple micro-genres (moves) jointly construct hybrid streamer identities (see Table 3).

Table 3 Identity hybridity in KDLSC

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Communicative goals	audience engagement	product promotion		relation building	knowledge provision
Goal temporality	short-term			long-term	
Identity constructed	trustworthy businessman			close friend	authoritative teacher
Discursive functions	transactional			relational	instructional
Comparable discourse type	LSC			personal narrative	instructional discourse
Distance from promotional core	⟶				

M1–M3 perform the core transactional function of LSC: engaging viewers, introducing products, and promoting sales. Collectively, they enact a trustworthy businessman identity. This configuration is strategically designed to achieve short-term transactional goals.

M4 adopts a storytelling register and constructs a close friend identity. By disclosing an authentic self, the streamer generates emotional resonance and fosters parasocial friendship. This persona prioritizes long-term relationship building over immediate sales, yet ultimately facilitates transactions by enhancing perceived authenticity (Sun et al., 2022; Liu & Sun, 2024).

M5 employs a pedagogical discourse and enacts an authoritative teacher identity. Through knowledge dissemination (M5S1) and wisdom-inspiring (M5S2), the streamer demonstrates expertise—defined by Lee and Eastin (2021) as being skilled, knowledgeable, and competent. This display reduces viewer decision costs (Liu et al., 2018), enhances attitudes and follow intentions (Lee & Eastin, 2021), and positively influences purchase intentions (Li et al., 2022; Liu & Sun, 2024). The optional moves M4 and M5, in particular, differentiate KDLSC from traditional e-commerce by adding relational and intellectual dimensions to the purely transactional streamer persona.

Thus, as the discourse shifts from M1 to M5, the distance from direct transactional intent progressively increases. Yet these identities are not discrete alternatives; they are strategically orchestrated. The businessman identity drives immediate conversion, while the friend and teacher identities cultivate trust and emotional attachment, which indirectly sustain commercial outcomes. In sum, drawing on genre ecology theory (Wall & Spinuzzi, 2018), KDLSC can be understood as a macro-genre encompassing distinct micro-genres, each constructing a specific identity. These identities form a “double orientation to selling and not selling” (Wall & Spinuzzi, 2018, p. 144). It

is this generic and identity hybridity that cultivates the distinctiveness of KDLSC.

Conclusion

This study constructed a KDLSC corpus and identified five moves with 18 steps—some inherited, some revised, and others new to promotional genres. As micro-genres, these moves manifest genre inheritance and collision and construct a composite identity (businessman, friend, teacher) that serves the overarching goal of selling through direct appeals or relationship-building, achieving the art of "selling without selling" (Wall & Spinuzzi, 2018).

Methodologically, we offer an integrative bottom-up/top-down framework which may offer a replicable approach for examining emergent streaming discourses. We also document the generic patterns of KDLSC and identify it as a knowledge-driven LSC variant distinct from hard-selling models. Nevertheless, two limitations should be acknowledged. First, we did not test causal effects on viewers, though sales data offer indirect evidence. Second, our Chinese-only corpus precludes cross-national comparison. Future research could address these gaps by incorporating viewer-centric data (e.g., behavioral traces or post-viewing surveys) and adopting cross-cultural comparative designs.

Data availability

The datasets generated during and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Author contributions

Author 1 was responsible for data curation, methodology, and formal analysis (lead). Author 2 was responsible for conceptualization and formal analysis (supporting). Both authors contributed equally to writing–original draft and to writing–review & editing. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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