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# Pragmatic Identity Construction of TikTok Internet Celebrity Dong Yuhui Based on Rapport Management-Adaptation Model

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**Abstract:** This study examines the construction of pragmatic identity in the live-streaming discourse of Douyin host Dong Yuhui by integrating Spencer-Oatey's Rapport Management Theory with Verschueren's Adaptation Theory. It proposes a "Rapport Management — Adaptation" framework to move beyond traditional adaptation-based analyses and offer a more nuanced understanding of identity formation in digital contexts. The research addresses three key questions: what types of pragmatic identities are constructed across various live-stream scenarios, what rapport-adaptation strategies are employed from a relational perspective, and what interpersonal functions these identities serve. A multi-level analysis reveals that Dong's discourse functions as guidance at the macro level, demonstrates specific communicative purposes at the meso level, and negotiates interpersonal elements such as face, rights, obligations, and equality at the micro level. By examining the contextual factors that shape identity choices, the study highlights the dynamic and strategic nature of identity construction in live-streaming interactions. Theoretically, it enriches the study of pragmatic identity by introducing a relational and adaptive perspective. Practically, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how online influencers like Dong Yuhui construct and manage their public personas, offering valuable implications for the analysis of celebrity discourse in emerging digital platforms.

**Keywords:** Rapport Management-Adaptation model; e-commerce live streaming; pragmatic identity; identity construction

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## 1. Introduction

The construction of identity in relation to discourse has become a central topic across various academic disciplines. Identity, as a sociological concept, reflects the role or status of individuals or groups within specific social relationships, encompassing both personal attributes and social affiliations. Theoretical approaches have evolved from essentialist views to social constructivist perspectives, the latter offering significant insight into the pragmatic aspects of identity. Zhang defines pragmatic identity as the identity adopted by language users, either consciously or unconsciously, within communicative contexts [1]. While much research has focused on institutional discourse such as classroom interaction, gendered communication, and legal settings, studies on pragmatic identity within literary discourse remain limited. This paper aims to address this gap by examining business-related discourse in online platforms, with particular focus on Dong Yuhui's livestream communication. Existing research often applies theories of politeness and face; however, few studies consider the relational dynamics shaped by pragmatic identity. This study

adopts Spencer-Oatey's Rapport Management Theory, which offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding both cooperative and conflictual aspects of interpersonal communication. Influencers like Dong Yuhui must negotiate transactional and relational goals through discursive practices. Applying this theoretical model provides a nuanced understanding of identity construction in online celebrity discourse.

This study explores the dynamic construction of pragmatic identities in Dong Yuhui's TikTok discourse through Rapport Management Theory, offering a fresh perspective beyond the commonly used adaptation theory. It identifies identity types, examines rapport strategies, and analyzes their interpersonal functions. Theoretically, it offers a new analytical lens; practically, it fills a gap in the research on celebrity discourse within digital media. The paper includes five chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, Analytical Discussion, and Conclusion, covering background, literature, theoretical basis, data analysis, and final insights.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1. Studies on Pragmatic Identity Construction*

Pragmatic identity refers to the identity a speaker adopts within specific communicative contexts to fulfill particular interactional goals. It is a dynamic, situational representation of the speaker's social identity, emerging as a strategic linguistic resource shaped by context. Identity, as a sociological and psychological concept, has been studied across disciplines, including linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and psychology.

From a social constructionist perspective, identity is inseparable from social relations and shaped through interaction. Influential scholars such as George Mead emphasized that identity forms through symbolic interaction, while Foucault and Bourdieu explored how discourse, power, and institutional structures shape self-representation. Foucault's "order of discourse" and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power illustrate how social hierarchies influence language use and identity formation. Similarly, Stryker, Antaki, and Sue examined identity through social roles and group membership, though these approaches sometimes overlook the fluidity of identity in actual discourse.

In psychological frameworks, identity is seen as a cognitive and emotional construct shaped by group affiliation, personal values, and social interaction [2-4]. These models underline that identity is multidimensional — individual, relational, and group-based — manifested through dynamic social and cognitive processes.

### *2.2. Linguistic and Pragmatic Perspectives*

Pragmatic approaches view identity as discursively constructed and context-dependent. Guo and Li argue that speakers actively construct different identities depending on the interactional context [5,6]. Halliday's interpersonal function further supports this by showing that language expresses relationships, attitudes, and social roles.

Zhang was among the first to systematically define "pragmatic identity" [1]. He outlined its key characteristics: it is consciously or unconsciously selected, driven by communicative needs, reflected in discourse choices, and responsive to contextual demands. His framework emphasizes identity's dynamic, strategic, and adaptive nature in communication.

### *2.3. Pragmatic Identity in E-Commerce Discourse*

Research on pragmatic identity in e-commerce, especially Taobao live-streaming, is relatively new. Most existing studies focus on communication strategies or advertising effectiveness rather than linguistic identity construction. Song analyzed how sellers use address terms to construct identity, while Niu examined vague language through critical pragmatics to understand psychological manipulation in advertising [7,8]. Wang and Luo found that perceived authenticity is crucial in influencer marketing, as audiences respond better to influencers who appear genuine [9]. Dua explored how cultural markers and

localized expressions on Taobao help build rapport and enhance persuasion, highlighting the strategic nature of identity construction in commercial contexts [10].

#### 2.4. Research Gaps

Despite growing attention to pragmatic identity, few studies apply Rapport Management Theory to examine identity construction in live-stream discourse. Existing literature predominantly uses Adaptation Theory alone, lacking frameworks that fully capture the relational and strategic aspects of identity negotiation. Moreover, there is limited analysis of specific individuals, such as Dong Yuhui, whose discourse practices provide rich material for investigating nuanced identity construction.

This study addresses these gaps by integrating Rapport Management Theory and Adaptation Theory into a unified analytical framework. This combined approach offers deeper insight into how identities are formed, adapted, and strategically managed in real-time online interactions. Applying this to Dong Yuhui's live-streaming discourse on Douyin enables a context-sensitive analysis of pragmatic identity, offering both theoretical enrichment and practical insights into celebrity communication in digital environments.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical foundation for analyzing pragmatic identity construction, particularly in the case of Dong Yuhui on the Douyin platform. It first examines Rapport Management Theory, followed by Adaptation Theory, and ultimately proposes an integrated framework combining both to account for the dynamic, context-sensitive construction of identity in e-commerce discourse.

#### 3.1. Rapport Management Theory

Rapport Management Theory, developed by Spencer-Oatey, builds on earlier politeness theories, particularly those by some researchers, who introduced the concepts of positive and negative face. Positive face refers to the desire for approval, while negative face involves autonomy. However, Spencer-Oatey critiques their model for its individual-centric and overly simplistic view, proposing a more nuanced framework that accounts for the management of face, sociality rights, and interactional goals. Her theory incorporates the social interdependence and cultural variability of interpersonal communication, thus providing a more comprehensive approach to understanding how rapport is managed.

In collectivist cultures such as those in East Asia, the concern for maintaining harmony often supersedes the assertion of negative face. Critics like Wang and Zhu have highlighted that traditional face theory inadequately addresses such cultural norms [11,12]. Spencer-Oatey therefore distinguishes between face needs and social rights, suggesting that the latter are more appropriately conceptualized as expectations regarding equitable and appropriate behavior in social interaction.

Face management in Spencer-Oatey's theory involves three interrelated dimensions: individual, group, and relational face. These represent the evaluation of self, collective identity, and interpersonal relationships, respectively. She further divides face into quality face, which reflects personal attributes and self-esteem, and identity face, which involves recognition of social roles and public worth.

The management of social rights refers to expectations about fairness and involvement in social interaction. Equity rights address the need for reciprocal benefit and freedom from imposition, while association rights pertain to emotional and relational inclusion. These rights are context-dependent, influenced by cultural norms, social relationships, and communicative intentions.

Interactional goals relate to the purposes communicators aim to achieve, such as transmitting information or maintaining social bonds. Transactional interactions emphasize task completion, whereas relational interactions involve emotional expression and

connection. Misalignment in achieving these goals can threaten rapport and potentially lead to conflict.

### 3.2. *Adaptation Theory*

Adaptation Theory, proposed by some researchers, views language use as inherently adaptive, driven by the necessity to maintain equilibrium between speakers and their communicative environments. It emphasizes that language choices occur across structural levels and involve both strategic planning and spontaneous responses. These choices reflect varying degrees of awareness and operate in both production and interpretation.

Three core properties underpin linguistic adaptation: variability, negotiability, and adaptability. Variability allows for a range of linguistic options, negotiability highlights the flexible principles guiding choice-making, and adaptability refers to the ability to match communicative strategies with specific contexts.

Adaptation can be analyzed through four perspectives: contextual correlates, structural objects, adaptability dynamics, and salience. Contextual correlates include the physical, social, and mental worlds. The physical world involves spatial and temporal elements, the social world encompasses cultural norms and interpersonal roles, and the mental world reflects psychological and emotional states. These contextual elements shape how speakers make linguistic decisions to construct meaning dynamically.

### 3.3. *The Rapport Management-Adaptation Framework*

The integration of Rapport Management and Adaptation Theory forms the foundation of the proposed analytical model. Rapport Management offers insight into the interpersonal motivations behind linguistic choices, especially the management of face and social rights. Adaptation Theory complements this by explaining how language users dynamically adjust their linguistic strategies in response to context.

While Rapport Management excels in accounting for why certain strategies are chosen, Adaptation Theory provides the mechanisms through which those strategies are actualized. Their integration allows for a more holistic understanding of how pragmatic identity is constructed through both motivational and contextual factors.

Spencer-Oatey's rapport orientation concept is central to this integration. Speakers aim to either maintain harmony or disrupt it, depending on their interpersonal goals. These goals are reflected in their linguistic strategies, which serve to manage rapport by addressing communication breakdowns or mitigating interpersonal threats.

Pragmatic identity emerges at the intersection of rapport management and adaptation. Language users draw on their cognitive and linguistic resources to make context-sensitive choices that serve both information transmission and relational orientation. These strategies aim to repair communication problems, reduce emotional distance, and prevent or resolve conflicts.

Dong Yuhui's case exemplifies this model, illustrating the dynamic interplay between relational and transactional aspects of his identity. His live-streaming persona is shaped by adapting to the mental world of his audience (cognitive and emotional expectations), the physical world (visual and environmental elements), and the social world (his dual role as educator and salesman). These adaptations allow him to fulfill multiple pragmatic roles — cultural communicator, mentor, and product promoter.

His rapport orientation is reflected in his ability to maintain both positive and negative face. He uses humor, cultural references, and a respectful tone to build trust and avoid offense. By maintaining social rights and obligations, he fosters mutual respect and emotional engagement.

The resulting pragmatic identity combines relational and transactional functions. His cultural storytelling enhances trust, while his persuasive techniques serve commercial aims. The interplay between these functions exemplifies how pragmatic and transactional goals are interdependent.

The model also emphasizes the role of the linguistic repertoire, which comprises the range of linguistic resources available to the speaker. Negotiation involves aligning these resources with situational demands. Through adaptation, speakers mobilize specific linguistic forms to fulfill both rapport and functional goals. These forms include speech acts such as evaluations, suggestions, and commitments, all of which contribute to the construction of pragmatic identity.

Linguistic variation is the manifestation of these choices, shaped by context and communicative intent. Pragmatic functions are realized through these variations, which support face management and relational harmony. Ultimately, pragmatic identity is constructed through the cumulative effects of these strategic linguistic decisions.

This theoretical framework underscores the dynamic and cyclical nature of identity construction in discourse. By integrating the motivational focus of Rapport Management with the contextual flexibility of Adaptation Theory, it provides a comprehensive approach to analyzing how individuals like Dong Yuhui navigate complex communicative environments to construct and perform multifaceted identities.

#### **4. An Analysis of Pragmatic Identity Construction of TikTok Internet Celebrity Dong Yuhui**

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the pragmatic identity construction of Dong Yuhui, a prominent livestreamer on the Douyin platform, by applying the framework of Rapport Management and Adaptation Theory. Dong's popularity and communicative strategies exemplify how an individual can construct multiple pragmatic identities through linguistic adaptation, emotional engagement, and the management of interpersonal relationships in real-time digital discourse.

Dong Yuhui is widely recognized for his ability to integrate educational content, personal narratives, product promotion, and cultural discourse within a single livestreaming session, making his broadcasts more engaging and multifaceted. His case serves as a valuable subject for studying how linguistic resources are mobilized to construct identity dynamically in response to varying communicative contexts. In particular, This chapter explores how Dong negotiates interpersonal relationships, manages face and sociality rights, and adapts to contextual factors to construct multiple identities simultaneously.

The data analyzed in this study consist of approximately one hundred hours of livestream video, covering the period from January to June 2024. Supplementary data were drawn from user interactions, comments, and posts across other platforms such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu. Supplementary data were drawn from user interactions, comments, and posts across other platforms such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu. The selection criteria focused on segments where audience engagement was high and identity construction was salient. These materials were transcribed and manually corrected to ensure analytical accuracy.

To conduct a structured analysis, this chapter categorizes identity construction into three levels: macro, meso, and micro. Each level reflects a different aspect of the interplay between discourse, context, and identity performance.

At the macro level, Dong Yuhui constructs his identity in alignment with broader socio-cultural and institutional discourses. One prominent identity constructed at this level is that of the educator. Dong frequently references Chinese classical literature, traditional festivals, and historical figures in his livestreams, positioning himself as a cultural mediator. For instance, his explanations of works such as *Dream of the Red Chamber* or commentary on the Dragon Boat Festival demonstrate his role in transmitting traditional knowledge to contemporary audiences. This educational identity enhances his credibility, increases viewer trust, and aligns with national cultural narratives.

Additionally, Dong constructs the identity of a cultural promoter by emphasizing the aesthetic and philosophical values embedded in traditional practices, including calligra-



phy, tea culture, and music. By incorporating these elements into commercial presentations, he reinforces a collective cultural identity and promotes cultural continuity among his audience.

Dong also adopts the identity of a social advocate by engaging in discourse that emphasizes environmental awareness and social responsibility. His references to topics such as sustainability, public welfare, and ethical consumption contribute to the construction of an ethically conscious persona. These discursive choices align his image with prevailing social values and strengthen his rapport with a morally attentive audience.

At the meso level, Dong adapts his identity to the specific livestreaming context and the communicative goals of each session. His identities shift in accordance with audience expectations, product types, and interaction formats. One of the most prominent meso-level identities is that of a commercial promoter. During product endorsements, Dong utilizes vivid and poetic language to enhance the appeal of commodities. His metaphorical descriptions elevate consumer goods into emotionally resonant experiences, thereby increasing their symbolic value.

In addition to this, Dong constructs a relational identity based on intimacy and emotional connection. He frequently employs a friendly and conversational tone, referring to viewers as close companions and expressing gratitude for their support. Such linguistic strategies reduce social distance and promote a sense of belonging. His bilingual code-switching between Chinese and English, especially when describing product features, reinforces his role as a knowledgeable yet relatable figure.

Narratives that evoke nostalgia and family memories also contribute to identity construction at this level. For example, when promoting hawthorn-based products, Dong recounts childhood experiences involving his father. These personal anecdotes serve to create emotional resonance and construct a shared memory space with the audience, thereby humanizing the commercial interaction and reinforcing relational ties.

At the micro level, Dong's pragmatic identity is constructed through real-time interaction and immediate audience feedback. Here, his identity as an entertainer becomes particularly salient. When faced with critical or provocative comments, Dong frequently responds with humor and self-deprecation, transforming potential conflicts into opportunities for connection. This demonstrates his communicative flexibility and emotional intelligence, which are essential for maintaining a positive interactive environment.

Dong also assumes the identity of an opinion leader by expressing clear stances on topics related to education, personal development, and social behavior. He frequently delivers motivational monologues that encourage diligence, critical thinking, and self-discipline. These rhetorical performances enhance his authority and influence, allowing him to shape audience attitudes beyond product promotion.

The construction of these multiple identities is underpinned by a set of pragmatic strategies that reflect the principles of speech act theory and adaptation theory. From a locutionary perspective, Dong exercises control over discourse content through careful topic selection, frequent use of evaluative expressions, and the integration of cultural references. These strategies contribute to a coherent and authoritative identity performance.

From an illocutionary perspective, Dong employs speech acts that serve both relational and transactional functions. Assertive statements reinforce his expertise, expressive utterances build rapport, and directive speech acts guide consumer behavior. These forms of linguistic behavior facilitate facework and the management of sociality rights, as articulated in Rapport Management Theory.

From a perlocutionary perspective, Dong's speech aims to produce emotional and behavioral reactions in his viewers. His use of countdowns, promotional urgency, and gratitude expressions are designed to influence audience engagement and decision-making, while simultaneously maintaining relational harmony.

In addition to speech act strategies, Dong Yuhui's identity construction reflects his adaptation to the physical, mental, and social worlds, as outlined in Adaptation Theory. Within the physical world of livestreaming, Dong utilizes visual demonstration, spatial

referencing, and interactive cues to simulate face-to-face interaction. Real-time product testing, packaging displays, and dynamic lighting serve to enhance product credibility and user immersion.

In adapting to the psychological world, Dong responds to the emotional and cognitive needs of his audience. He selects products with emotional significance, frames them in relatable narratives, and employs simplified language to accommodate cognitive processing limitations. His use of vivid descriptions, symbolic associations, and familiar metaphors enhances audience comprehension and retention.

Furthermore, Dong adapts to the social world by aligning his behavior with platform regulations and societal norms. He complies with Douyin's content guidelines, avoids controversial topics, and demonstrates ethical conduct in product endorsement. For instance, he refrains from marketing cosmetics to minors or alcohol to pregnant women, thereby reinforcing his socially responsible image and enhancing audience trust.

This multidimensional analysis reveals that Dong Yuhui's pragmatic identity is not a fixed trait but rather a dynamic construct shaped by linguistic strategies, contextual sensitivity, and interpersonal alignment. His case illustrates the practical application of Rapport Management and Adaptation Theory in understanding digital identity performance. It demonstrates that successful identity construction in livestream e-commerce relies on the speaker's ability to balance transactional objectives with relational maintenance, cultural authenticity with emotional resonance, and institutional compliance with audience engagement.

In conclusion, Dong Yuhui's case exemplifies the intricate interplay between language, identity, and context in the digital age. His success as a livestream host is not merely the result of charisma or content quality, but rather of strategic and adaptive language use grounded in an understanding of interpersonal dynamics and contextual demands. This analysis contributes to broader discussions on digital pragmatics, online identity formation, and the evolving nature of mediated communication in commercial and cultural spheres.

## 5. Conclusion

This study explores the pragmatic identity construction of Dong Yuhui, a leading livestream host on the Douyin platform, using the theoretical frameworks of Rapport Management and Adaptation Theory. Drawing upon discourse data collected from his livestreams, the research reveals how Dong employs linguistic and contextual strategies to construct multiple dynamic identities in response to varying communicative goals and situational factors.

The analysis confirms that identity construction in Dong's livestreams operates across macro, meso, and micro levels. At the macro level, societal, cultural, and institutional forces shape Dong's overarching identity, particularly his alignment with traditional Chinese cultural values and educational discourses. At the meso level, his interactions with the livestream audience are influenced by group-specific expectations and community norms. At the micro level, individual speech acts and linguistic choices reflect real-time identity performance, tailored according to audience feedback and transactional intent.

Findings demonstrate that Dong's pragmatic identity is highly adaptive. While his primary role is that of a salesperson, he often adopts the identities of a cultural educator, emotional companion, or product expert to engage the audience and maintain interest. These identities are not static; rather, they shift flexibly according to the livestreaming context. Through strategic adaptation, Dong not only promotes product sales but also fosters trust, builds rapport, and enhances viewer engagement.

Specifically, his discourse aligns with the physical, mental, and social dimensions of the livestreaming environment. He emphasizes product functionality and utility in the

physical domain, appeals to emotional needs and aesthetic preferences in the psychological domain, and adheres to platform norms and ethical standards in the social domain. His identity transformations, such as from seller to consumer, or from host to friend, are deliberate and context-sensitive, reinforcing his persuasive impact and communicative effectiveness.

Nonetheless, this study has certain limitations. It focuses solely on one individual's discourse, which restricts the generalizability of findings. Additionally, while the study touches on multimodal aspects such as gestures and vocal delivery, it does not systematically explore these elements. Given the multimodal nature of livestreaming communication, future research should consider integrating visual and auditory modes of expression into the analysis.

Further studies could also compare Dong Yuhui's identity construction with that of other livestreamers across different platforms, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of stylistic variation and identity performance within the livestreaming industry. Such comparative research would enhance the representativeness of the findings and contribute to broader discussions on digital identity in e-commerce contexts.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of linguistic adaptation and interpersonal relationship management in pragmatic identity construction. It demonstrates how a successful livestream host negotiates multiple identities to meet communicative goals while maintaining audience rapport. The findings provide both theoretical insights and practical implications for researchers and practitioners in digital communication, discourse studies, and online marketing.

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