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## Bigo Live

### 1. Introduction

Bigo Live is a live streaming platform founded in 2014 by BIGO Technology, a Singapore-based company. Live streaming platforms allow for simultaneously recording and broadcasting in real-time. The Bigo Live platform was made available in the Android and iOS App Stores in March 2016 and rapidly grew in popularity, gaining a total of 26.7 million users per month in less than 2 years (TechinAsia, 2016). To date, Bigo Live has an estimated total of 400 million users and a global reach of 150 countries, including Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore etc., which most of its streamers and viewers residing in Asia (Business Today Malaysia, 2020). Each live streaming room also has a chatbox for viewers to send messages for the streamer to receive in real-time, thus facilitating timely engagement between streamers and viewers. In this paper, I shall be reviewing relevant literature on live streaming, analysing Bigo Live based on Crystal's (2006) classification schemes, and discussing the platform's properties and its effects on language and society.



Figure 1: Screenshot of Bigo Live broadcast (Bigo, 2019).

## **2. Summary of relevant literature on Live streaming**

Over the last few years, the proliferation of smartphones with high-quality cameras has given rise to a growing group of live-streamers, from gameplay to talk shows and so on. Twitch.tv, a popular gamer live streaming platform has more than 2.2 million active streamers per month (Haimson, et al., 2017). An essential aspect of live streaming is user interaction between streamers and their viewers via chat rooms, and the interaction styles vary in accordance with the type of content offered on different live-streams (Weller, 2017). Today, the two most popular streaming genres are talent shows and gameplay. In gameplay streaming, where streamers exhibit their gameplay skills, viewership is more streamlined and specified to those who share a common interest in the game, and engagement levels tend to be high, with greater use of relevant jargon. On the other hand, the focal point of the performative live streams is on the streamers themselves, who present various talents such as singing, dancing, playing instruments etc. These live-streams tend to attract a more common crowd and conversation topics between streamer and viewers are likely to have greater variation.

In a study conducted by Lu., et.al, he noticed an interesting phenomenon of stylistic difference between North America and China streamers. He reported an observable trend of US and Canadian streamers focusing on live events (Tang, 2016) with their content more targeted towards friends, while Chinese streamers were highly interactive and personal, revolving around conversations and the sharing of personal stories, injected with an element of pan-entertainment (i.e performative live streaming, such as singing, playing instruments, dancing etc.) (Zhou, 2017). In fact, these types of streams are so well-liked that many live-streamers have made it into a career, whereby companies such as Hallowink sign contracts with full-time streamers, and live streaming becomes a substantial source of income for them (Weller, 2017). Given that the live streaming platform I am focusing on is founded and concentrated in Asia, I will be discussing the motivations for the popular choice of content amongst Asian streamers.

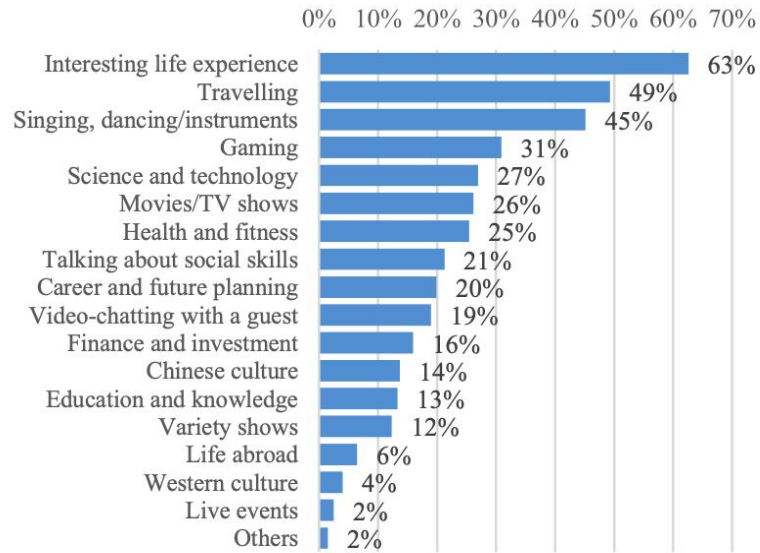


Figure 2: Responses to “What kinds of live streams do you enjoy watching the most?”  
(Lu, 2018)

According to his research conducted on 525 participants, it was shown that almost 70% of them frequently viewed live streams, with the view time being an average of 7.2 hours per week. In response to their motivations for watching, roughly 70% of the users answered that watching live streams help them relax, with the others listing reasons such as killing time, making friends, interaction and forming connections. Some respondents also expressed that live streaming provides them with a sense of comfort to cure their loneliness, and to socialize with people outside their usual social circle. As most streams were described to centre around highly relatable and weighty discussions such as work-life, personal development and interpersonal relationships, live streams provide an avenue for de-stressing and act as a support system, especially since working adults (26-35 years old) are dealing with immense pressure regarding work-life balance and expectations for marriage. Viewers are also able to remain anonymous while they view and interact with live-streamers, which appeals to the negative face under Brown’s politeness theory. Privacy and anonymity grant viewers the autonomy and freedom to express their thoughts independent of any consequential judgment that might be imposed upon their real identity.

### 3. Crystal's (2006, Ch 3-6) Features of Speech and Writing

<b>Speech-like</b>		<b>Text-like</b>	
time-bound	yes	space-bound	yes
spontaneous	yes, but with restrictions	contrived	no
face-to-face	no	visually decontextualized	yes, but with restrictions
loosely structured	yes	elaborately structured	no
socially interactive	yes, but with restrictions	factually communicative	no
immediately revisable	varying degree	repeatedly revisable	varying degree
prosodically rich	varying degree	graphically rich	yes

Figure 3: Crystal's (2006) features of speech and writing.

In analysing Bigo Live based on Crystal's Features of Speech and Writing, we should take into consideration that the features differ with regard to streamers and viewers. Generally, the Bigo Live platform aims to mimic a real-life conversation between the streamer, who poses a question or thought, thus warranting instantaneous replies or comments, and engaging the viewers in a two-way discussion with the streamer - mirroring a real-life conversation. While the Bigo Live platform exhibits both speech-like and text-like features, the speech-like features are mostly observed amongst the streamers, while the viewers demonstrate a mix of speech like and text like communicative patterns.

The Bigo Live platform displays time-bound, space-bound and spontaneous features in that the messages are time-governed and demands immediate responses in relation to the streamer's current topic of discussion, alike a real-like conversation that calls for prompt and pertinent contributions. This also calls for viewers to abide by the Gricean Maxim of Relevance, in order to keep a conversation going. Further, the messages in the chatbox are transient and might be lost to attention as new incoming messages replace the older ones on the screen. This motivates their messages to display as much urgency as that of a real-life conversation. However,

the degree of spontaneity still has its restrictions, limited to the speed at which viewers can type, and the speed at which the streamer can read the messages, hence creating a slight time-lag. Additionally, due to the messages being time-bound and space-bound, it pressurizes the audiences to be quick in responding, which limits the degree of contrivance.

As with texts published on the internet, messages sent in the chatbox are immediately seen, and arguably not immediately revisable nor repeatedly revisable, but I have noticed that viewers often correct typos or small errors by re-sending a corrected form of the message, followed by an asterisk ‘\*’, to mark the correction. Similarly, as with verbalized speech, the streamers are unable to retract words once spoken due to the synchronicity of a live-stream.

Due to the nature of this social platform, which seeks to form “friendships” and connections between streamers and viewers, most of the streamers’ speech are loosely structured and casual, mimicking the interaction between close friends. Thus, the choice of speech is more suited to social or ‘phatic’ functions, rather than for relaying formal, factual information. Colloquial terminology and slangs are also employed to increase amiability and convey a tone of friendliness, along with suitable prosody and accompanying non-verbal features. Moreover, this convivial mood can also be reciprocated by viewers who can use emoticons in their messages, and send virtual “gifts” and “hearts” to support the streamers. This is made possible by the graphical richness allowed by the application’s technology, and the live streamers’ use of smartphone cameras and webcams which changes the dynamics of interaction, allowing the communication to be visually decontextualized.

#### **4. Properties of Bigo Live and its effects on communication**

The linguistic features observed on Bigo Live, as with other live streaming platforms, differ from other forms of internet media most greatly in terms of its affordance of real-time, simultaneous communication, whereby streamers and viewers are able to react promptly to utterances and messages produced. Most popular social media websites such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook lack this affordance, which creates a larger time-lag between the creator and recipient of posts and messages. As such, live streaming sites differentiate themselves from other communicative platforms, seeking to simulate a real-life conversation, which establishes a greater sense of intimacy, thus encouraging more personal sharing and greater engagement between content creators and recipients. Seemingly, this pushes closer “friendships” and

connections to form between both parties. Besides, this platform enables individuals with the opportunity to interact with people beyond their usual social circle, thus promoting a greater variety of discourse and cross-linguistic interaction.

Furthermore, as with synchronic chatting platforms, the possibilities for confusion are enhanced on Bigo Live and further exacerbated when there is a high volume of viewers responding. It is hard to facilitate orderly turn-taking on live streaming platforms due to the continuous and rapid stream of messages being sent in the chatbox, and this disruption of turns and interruption of adjacency pairs contributes to confusion. Thus, this differs from the social conventions followed in face-to-face conversations, such as orderly turn-taking. Moreover, in an attempt to grab the attention of the streamer, some viewers may spam messages in the chatbox, which flouts the Gricean maxim of quantity.

## **5. Conclusion**

Ultimately, Bigo Live is a multimodal platform that affords real-time communication and establishing networks between people through mimicking a real-life conversation, thus acting as an effective channel for interaction and communication. Also, by understanding the motivations behind the popularity of live streaming, we analysed the properties of the platform which meet the viewers' requirements. By having technological affordances and properties which display more speech-like features, Bigo Live fosters connections by creating a virtual space for casual, informal conversations, hence increasing the viewers' desire and willingness to speak more directly and comfortably, offering a platform for de-stressing and relaxation.

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