Live Shopping, what Bloomberg Media calls “a Gen-Z version of the Home Shopping Network”

1.What has the digital evolution of live/social shopping looked like?

The COVID-19 pandemic prevented people from shopping in person, and hurt many small businesses. Live and social shopping has provided a solution in a way that not only boosts the economy, but is representative of the evolving role of technology in daily life. According to Forbes, “The next phase of retail lies in "live shopping" — interactive content from which a consumer can directly make a purchase — spurring a shopping experience starkly different from the days when HSN and catalogs once dominated”. According to digital commerce 360, social commerce “blends ecommerce and social media best practices as an exciting, lucrative evolution in retail marketing”. Essentially, live or social shopping is a marketplace for culture.

Currently, China is the largest ecommerce market in the world, as [social commerce drives 13% of total retail ecommerce sales](https://www.emarketer.com/content/china-social-commerce-makes-up-11-6-of-retail-ecommerce-sales). Chinese e-commerce is projected to be $1 trillion dollars in 2020, up from $862 billion in 2019. In 2020 over 700 million Chinese are expected to shop online vs. 600 million in 2018. According to eMarketer, China has the highest rate of e-commerce of any country as a percent of total retail sales (over 35% in 2019), the highest absolute sales level (more than 3 times the U.S. total, the second largest country), and one of the fastest growth rates of any country, off an already high base (Forbes, to read the article, see [here](https://www.forbes.com/sites/michellegreenwald/2020/12/10/live-streaming-e-commerce-is-the-rage-in-china-is-the-us-next/?sh=ebf6c7a6535e)).

TaoBao Live is an example of the origin of shopping apps in Asia. According to [Marketing To China](https://marketingtochina.com/taobao-live-a-key-feature-to-increase-your-sales-in-china/), [Taobao Live](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taobao#Taobao_Live) is the live streaming service integrated into the Taobao App, divided into categories of interest such as food, travel, lifestyle, etc. Taobao live is first on the list by popularity and market share. According to the latest Taobao Live data, the gross volume of goods generated by the platform has grown by 150% per year for three consecutive years. At the end of 2019, consumers spent over 350,000 hours every day viewing content on the platform. In the meantime, the newly registered accounts have almost doubled.

“The future of shopping will be more dynamic, interactive, and driven by real-time feedback. Live streaming offers a peek into that future and new possibilities,” said Yuan, head of content operations at Taobao Live. Read [this article](https://www.businessinsider.com/live-commerce-china-influencers-taobao-instagram-facebook-us-tiktok-2020-6) for more information about the live commerce boom in China.

The model of TaoBao Live has contributed to the growing success in the US with apps like [PopShop Live](https://popshop.live/discovery): [a standalone business](https://techcrunch.com/2021/07/08/popshop-live-raises-around-20m-at-a-100m-valuation-for-its-livestream-shopping-platform-for-hipsters/) that taps into the millennial taste for shopping from smaller and more edgy brands and individuals as much as bigger retailers. PopShop Live allows users to browse products, stream a store, and increase sales. The Popshop Live app lets sellers host shows from their iPhones, create clickable links for purchases instantly by snapping a photo of an item—or in the case of retail stores, by linking their e-commerce inventory software to the app—and engage with customers in real time. PopShop Live is not disclosing how many sellers are now on its platform, but says that the figure went up by [500% in the last three months](https://techcrunch.com/2021/07/08/popshop-live-raises-around-20m-at-a-100m-valuation-for-its-livestream-shopping-platform-for-hipsters/) (tech crunch).

2. What is the current range of social shopping features and live shopping capabilities available across platforms?

The pandemic accelerated online shopping adoption and many platform’s plans of offering a seamless shopping experience in their apps. Currently, there is a wide range of social shopping features available on platforms like Instagram and Amazon. “Instagram is widely regarded as a critical component of e-commerce and even brick-and-mortar buyer journeys. It is a powerful store-front that supersedes every mall, shopping district or fashion magazine. A user’s ability to buy natively through Instagram radically shortens the buyer journey allowing businesses to easily find, inspire and convert a window shopper into a customer” ([Forbes](https://www.forbes.com/sites/anthonysvirskis/2020/05/26/instagram-shoppinga-new-dawn-for-social-commerce/?sh=4fccaa3b3637)). Instagram is now shortening the buyer journey even further [by adding shopping features directly into the app](https://about.instagram.com/features/shopping). Most b2c businesses are already marketing on Instagram, which makes an in-app shopping experience a logical next step. Now, businesses can “tag” products, allowing shoppers to click on the product tag, which takes them directly to a purchase screen. Instagram stores credit card and shipping information, and the whole transaction can be completed in a matter of seconds.

In terms of spending on Instagram, “Estimates place the revenue upsides at $30B across transactional fees, increased advertising and a deeper customer relationship. The timing is precise. Surging online shopping figures and the extended state of the pandemic will have accelerated internal plans. Further benefit is gained from aiding the large number of small business customers at a critical time, and expanding revenue sources beyond ads” ([Forbes](https://www.forbes.com/sites/anthonysvirskis/2020/05/26/instagram-shoppinga-new-dawn-for-social-commerce/?sh=4fccaa3b3637)).

In order to achieve success with Instagram and Facebook marketplace shopping, products need to be featured in “Instagram style”- meaning that the content needs to be something that consumers can relate to, instead of just presenting the product in front of a blank screen with no context. Click [here](https://openinfluence.com/how-to-understand-gen-z-a-design-guide/) for a blog post about Gen Z design, and [here](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1MMi8AV-KeBH6N7znAtJgD3SmUs97PINeuvd8UZYfEIE/edit?usp=sharing) for an extended presentation. Click [here](https://trendhero.io/blog/product-placement/) for information about product placement on Instagram. Click [here](https://blog.planoly.com/how-to-photograph-products-for-instagram-planoly) for information about how to photograph products for Instagram. And, click [here](https://instasize.com/blog/why-lifestyle-photography-helps-to-sell-more-on-instagram) for information on why lifestyle photography helps to sell more on Instagram, according to this article, the secret sauce is to tell a story about your product or brand.

Another example of social shopping features can be seen through Amazon’s TikTok landing page (#[FoundItOnAmazon](https://www.amazon.com/ideas/amzn1.account.AG72TYOQWLEUKCZJV6ZO2ALAWMDQ/K8N8MMM8W8O9)). Amazon launched a storefront of viral TikTok products in April 2021 called [Internet Famous](https://www.amazon.com/s?rh=n%3A21602650011&fs=true&language=en_US&linkCode=ll2&linkId=bbc8db2265d2ee5b43c1862c8c0e80cd&ots=1&tag=poamzfamzhtiktokstorefrontcbutan0421-20&ref=as_li_ss_tl). See [this article](https://www.helium10.com/blog/get-amazon-sales-with-tiktok-ads/) about increasing your amazon sales with TikTok ads.

The future of social shopping capabilities are endless. Facebook has recently introduced [live shopping](https://www.facebook.com/business/help/880609949031868), and says that “Live Shopping on Facebook combines the fun of live video with the convenience of online shopping. ... For shoppers, this means you can discover the latest products from your favorite brands and ask questions about size, fit and tips in real time” ([Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/business/help/571129137086513)).

Last year, TikTok partnered with Shopify as they began to move into the ecommerce space. According to a Financial Times report, TikTok plans to integrate live shopping, affiliate linking, and product catalogs. Soon, users will be able to buy goods in the app, and there will be new in-app features like live-streamed shopping, similar to QVC and existing live shopping apps like Taobao Live and PopShop Live. To read the report, click [here](https://www.businessinsider.com/tiktok-live-stream-shopping-feature-in-app-purchases-2021-2).

YouTube recently announced that it is going to begin a pilot livestream shopping experience with a handful of creators and brands. The decision by YouTube to move away from affiliate linking and towards their own system of eCommerce demonstrates an acknowledgment of the influential role of the live shopping experience. To read the article, click [here](https://techcrunch.com/2021/07/21/youtube-to-pilot-test-shopping-from-livestreams-with-select-creators/?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS91cmw_cT1odHRwcyUzQSUyRiUyRnRlY2hjcnVuY2guY29tJTJGMjAyMSUyRjA3JTJGMjElMkZ5b3V0dWJlLXRvLXBpbG90LXRlc3Qtc2hvcHBpbmctZnJvbS1saXZlc3RyZWFtcy13aXRoLXNlbGVjdC1jcmVhdG9ycyUyRiZzYT1EJnNvdXJjZT1lZGl0b3JzJnVzdD0xNjI2OTgyNDk0NzY4MDAwJnVzZz1BT3ZWYXcwZy13QUZXVVpUY0hSQzNPcVBncEJf&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAABNKTwHHTVbTGYObGGilPJZdxIm7hZUwbs6UdYr9F7f8IzWAvtvgKqkfjfZ4BVl5jJ5yo6GZ0rQqSQHB_eZ8hKsJDZ7ymLdx_QYEPKoV1woylp5VjUIWysddQgvPygb-Oj-MN7p23kJmlYkOn-l9T_hy9SGzcLzNbFov9MKr2QQu).

3. How are influencers getting involved in social shopping? What are future opportunities going to look like with the rapid rise in live shopping? How have brands effectively tapped into the social shopping space?

At this point in the digital revolution, companies are recognizing the importance of devoting resources to social media marketing, as well as the major revenue streams that can come through social platforms, and therefore have created a multitude of opportunities for influencers to become involved in social shopping. Amazon has an [Amazon Influencer program](https://affiliate-program.amazon.com/influencers), Instagram has a [storefront](https://business.instagram.com/blog/introducing-shops-on-instagram), and platforms such as [LikeToKnowIt](https://about.liketoknow.it) have further validated and supported the essential role of influencer marketing in our new technology-filled world.

Influencers are currently supporting social shopping by centering their brand, and therefore their business, on social platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. In 2021, there is a clear shift in the industry from blog-focused and web-exclusive content to almost solely social content. The pandemic gave people both the time, and sometimes the urgency (due to extremely high levels of unemployment) that they needed to quickstart a personal brand or business. Influencers are using features such as [Linktree](https://linktr.ee) on TikTok, and swipe-ups on Instagram stories to linkout to Amazon storefronts, LikeToKnowIt profiles, or other methods of affiliate marketing to earn a commission on items they promote, or sell themselves. Platforms such as [Depop](https://www.depop.com), essentially a virtual thrift store, are also popular. Brands like [Princess Polly](https://us.princesspolly.com) are especially well versed in promo code marketing, and do a great job of targeting Gen Z influencers to promote their content on social media. Members of Gen Z specifically seem to embrace promo code marketing, because in many cases, the brand will provide merchandise to the influencer, and will give them a code to share with their followers for a discounted price. Sometimes, the influencer will even get a kickback off of the total sales collected from their discount code, in an exchange that is a win-win for both participating parties. Furthermore, influencers and business owners are hosting live shopping events on platforms like [Popshop Live](https://popshop.live/discovery).

According to Cision, the global eCommerce market is estimated at $89.4 billion in 2021 and is set to reach $604.5 billion by 2027. The pandemic in 2020 jumped eCommerce forward by 5 years. In order to be a part of this consumer shift, brands need to realize that now and in the future, the key to marketing to Millennials and Gen Z will be through understanding the unique language they use to communicate online with each other. For more information, see [this article](https://www.curemedia.com/how-social-commerce-is-changing-shopping-habits/) by Cure Media.

5. In a post-pandemic world, how are brands combining social shopping and in-store moments for hybrid experiences?

The biggest question for brands in our post-pandemic world is: how do you create a plan that is pandemic proof? As global leaders battle with vaccine distribution, COVID variants and fluctuating mask requirements, global companies must find a way to stay relevant, accessible, and trendy. I can’t give advice about vaccine distribution, but I can say with confidence that brands need to combine social shopping and in-store moments for hybrid experiences, and that customer support and outreach within brands is more important now than ever before.

See [this article](https://www.shopify.com/blog/post-pandemic-trends) for insights about post-pandemic shopping trends.

Further Reading:

* <https://techcrunch.com/2020/08/25/facebook-shop-instagram-live-shopping/>
* <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-05-11/tiktok-begins-testing-in-app-shopping-to-challenge-facebook>
* <https://techcrunch.com/2021/05/13/pinterest-to-test-live-streamed-events-this-month-with-21-creators/>
* <https://techcrunch.com/2020/07/15/amazon-influencer-program-opens-to-livestreamers-for-broadcasting-to-amazon-live/>