Exploring the determinants of consumers' repurchase intention on E-retailing platforms in China: A mediation of consumer satisfaction

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Abstract

The study investigates how perceived Internet risk (PIR), brand trust (BT), platform image (PI), and consumer satisfaction (CS) impact repurchase intention (RI) in the Chinese e-commerce context. It also explores the mediating role of consumer satisfaction (CS) in the relationships. Based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework, the study conducts a quantitative method. Data from 530 valid responses were collected via a Chinese commercial survey platform and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the proposed hypotheses. The results reveal that perceived Internet risk (PIR) significantly influences consumer satisfaction (CS) and repurchase intention (RI) through the mediating variable consumer satisfaction (CS). The findings help academics and online platform managers, especially valuable for managers. It provides practical evidence for enhancing positive consumer satisfaction and then attracting as well as retaining valued consumers and finally fostering online business profits. The study also employs the applicability of the S-O-R model in explaining consumer behavior in digital marketplaces. By empirically testing the mediating role of consumer satisfaction, the study offers a novel perspective to shape repurchase decisions, contributing to both academic and practical marketing strategies in the existing literature.

Keywords: Brand trust, consumer satisfaction, perceived internet risk, platform image, PLS-SEM. Repurchase intention.

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Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.
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1. Introduction

Online shopping has changed people's consumption habits; it enables online users to purchase goods at any time from anywhere [1]. Especially in the digital era, the increasing number of smartphones makes online purchases more convenient and time-saving [2]. According to the data from Statista, as shown in Figure 1, the number of online shoppers in China from 2014 to June 2024 has increased from 361.42 million to 904.6 million. As the world's largest e-commerce market, China has witnessed an increasingly competitive market; attracting and retaining valued consumers is an essential component of online purchasing platforms [3]. However, the question is, what can retailers do to attract valued consumers? How can they retain these valued consumers, enhance their repurchase intentions, and increase sales?

Given that online consumers differ considerably, it becomes more important to learn which elements work best and which ones should be improved.
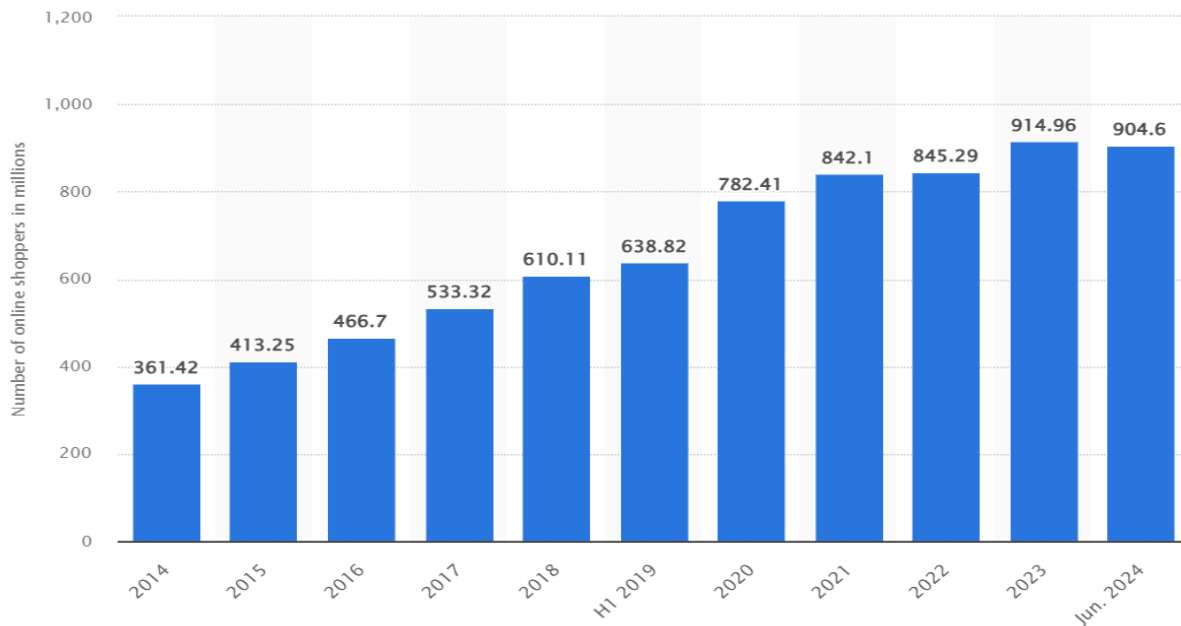

Figure 1.
Number of online shoppers in China from 2014 to June 2024(in millions).
Sources: https://www.statista.com/statistics/277391/number-of-online-buyers-in-china/.

Some studies focused on e-commerce adoption and consumer loyalty [4, 5], and some based on consumer behavior theory [6, 7]. Others concentrated on brand satisfaction and trust, Prahiawan et al. [2] and Hwang et al. [8]. Aparicio et al. [9] indicated that trust positively impacts the intention to use in e-commerce and repurchase intention. The present study proposes a theoretical model and assesses it via PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling). Therefore, this study aims to assess the relationship between perceived Internet risk, platform image, brand trust, consumer satisfaction, and repurchase intention. The primary contribution of the research is its focus on the research gap and adds to the existing literature by contributing to the integrating framework in the e-commerce context.

The current study is structured as follows: Section 1 contains the introduction part of this study. Section 2 investigates the theoretical basis and the hypotheses. Section 3 defines the methodology used in the research. Section 4 shows the data analysis and outcomes of validity and reliability, and then provides a discussion. Finally, it provides conclusions and limitations of the study.

2. Theoretical Basis and Research Hypotheses

2.1. Stimulus-Organism-Response （SOR）Model

Mehrabian and Russell [10] S-O-R model is the dominant work exploring the impact of factors on customer behavior. Additionally, the S-O-R model describes the interrelationship among stimulus (external factors in a certain market environment), organism (consumer internal feeling), and response (subsequent outcome). For example, prior studies applied the SOR model to investigate the impacting factors for consumer repurchase intention regarding fashion products [11], luxury goods [12], and organic food [13] in all selling platforms within the contexts of e-commerce. Moreover, consumer satisfaction, trust, perceived risk, and platform image are often considered key factors in the decision-making procedure in the present competitive market. Then, to enrich the existing literature, the current research takes brand trust, platform image, and perceived Internet risk as the stimulus factors, and consumer satisfaction as the organism factor that motivates consumer response. Lastly, repurchase intention is an established response in the research conceptual model to further learn consumer behaviors.

2.2. Perceived Internet Risk

Perceived risk is considered a critical determinant of consumers' shopping behavior [14]. It assesses an individual's anxiety about using the Internet, which is known for privacy data abuses and threats that threaten online users and related businesses. A higher level of perceived Internet risk may result in online users experiencing amplified uncertainties and distrust about websites. Thus, consumers' perceived Internet risk has become an essential component due to its significant impact on consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions. Similarly, prior studies have examined the impacts of consumer-perceived Internet risk on online shopping behavior. Loh and Hassan [15] demonstrated that consumers' perceived risk determines their repurchase intention in the food truck industry. Moreover, perceived risk negatively affects repurchase intention in the web wine industry [16]. Accordingly, Ghotbabadi [17] found that reducing perceived Internet risk can improve consumer satisfaction in the airline industry. However, after the epidemic, it is unknown whether consumers perceive Internet risk as still negatively impacting consumer satisfaction and repurchase. Thus, the following hypotheses are developed:

H_1: *Perceived Internet risk negatively affects consumer satisfaction.*
H_2: *Perceived Internet risk negatively affects repurchase intention.*

2.3. Platform Image

A platform image is essentially a platform's reputation and perception created in the minds of online consumers. Positive consumer relationships are built on a good platform image because consumer trust is a critical factor for a promising platform. Liu and Li [18] found that platform image positively influences consumer satisfaction in community group purchasing platforms. Additionally, a negative platform image of a brand will result in the consequence of neglect [19]. Furthermore, the platform image has a positive effect on repurchase intention in on-demand service platforms [20]. Similarly, Liu et al. [21] showed that platform image emphasizes the practical consumers' behavior. On the other hand, a good platform image enhances the consumers' repurchase intention in the context of tourism [22]. Hence, we postulate the following hypotheses:

H_3: *Platform image positively affects consumer satisfaction.*
H_4: *Platform image positively affects repurchase intention.*

2.4. Brand Trust

Brand trust can be considered as a consumer's belief that the brand is reliable and honest while fulfilling certain transactions [23]. Brand trust affects consumer satisfaction [24]. Moreover, Diputra and Yasa [25] stated that brand trust positively and significantly affects customer satisfaction. Similarly, brand trust has a positive and significant impact on consumer satisfaction [26]. Furthermore, according to Subawa et al. [26], consumers rely on brand trust to guide their purchasing intentions. Rachbini et al. [27] also demonstrated that brand trust positively impacts repurchase intention. Based on the above discussion and referencing prior studies, we propose the following hypotheses:

H_5: *Brand trust has a positive effect on consumer satisfaction.*
H_6: *Brand trust has a positive effect on repurchase intention.*

2.5. Repurchase intention

Consumers who had repeated purchases depend on consumers' ratings from previous transactions [28]. That is, repurchase intention appeals to consumers because they have satisfaction achieved from their previous transactions [26]. In addition, Yun and Park [29] demonstrated that customer satisfaction positively impacts repurchase intention. Similarly, Miao et al. [30] also stated that e-satisfaction has an effect on repurchase intention in e-retailers of the B2C e-commerce context. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H_7: *Consumer satisfaction has a positive effect on repurchase intention.*

The following Figure 1 presents the structural equation model, the relationships of the determinants regarding consumer satisfaction towards online repurchase intention. The proposed antecedents to consumer satisfaction on online shopping platforms include perceived Internet risk, platform image, and brand trust.
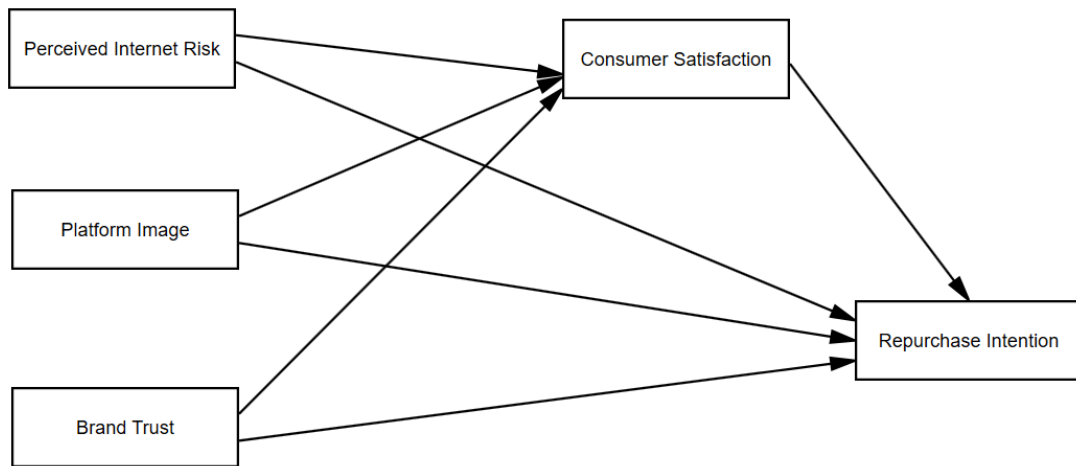
Figure 2.
Research model.

3. Research Methodology

To assess the research model, a questionnaire survey was conducted. Data collected from the online survey were analyzed using SPSS 27 and Smart PLS 4.0.

3.1. Measurement Items

The questionnaire is made up of three sections, with the first one being a screening question (i.e., "Have you ever shopped online before? (Yes/No)"); If the respondents answered "No", they had to terminate the completion of the questionnaire. The participants who answered "Yes" were then required to continue to the next section. Then, Section 2 includes the demographic profiles of respondents, while Section 3 comprises questions on the constructs researched. The research uses a 7-Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The measurement independent variables brand trust and platform image, had four items each, whereas perceived Internet risk had three. The mediating and dependent variables, consumer satisfaction and repurchase intention, comprised three items. All of the measurement items were adopted from the existing studies [1, 27, 31-33] and were modified to fit into the research aim. The study used a questionnaire survey in a Chinese context, then translated into Chinese and checked by relevant experts in the field.

3.2. Data Collection

The collection period lasted from May to July 2024 and was conducted using a non-probability sampling method. The questionnaire was created on the website of Wenjyanxing (www.wjx.cn) through WeChat or WeChat groups for respondents who had online shopping experience in China. Finally, 700 questionnaires were distributed, with 530 valid ones, and the response rate was 75.7 %. Table 1 illustrates the questionnaires in detail.

Table 1.
Demographic information of respondents

Demographic variables	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	247	46.6
	Female	283	53.4
Age	20 and below	101	19.1
	21-30	166	31.3
	31-40	162	30.6
	41-50	68	12.8
	51 and above	32	6.0
Education	High school, Secondary school and below	97	18.3
	College	273	51.5
	Undergraduate	124	23.4
	Graduate and above	36	6.8
Monthly income	Less than 3000	126	23.8
	3000-4999	221	41.7
	5000-7999	117	22.1
	8000-10000	46	8.7
	More than 10000	20	3.8
Number of valid responses	530		

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1. Common method variance (CMV)

In the current research, some efforts were made to minimize common method variance before conducting the PLS assessment [34]. First, as shown in the following Table 2, the full collinearity assessment produced variance inflation factor (VIF) values between 1.649 and 2.907, all below the established threshold of 3.0 [35]. Therefore, it demonstrates that CMV was not an issue in the research. Then, the finding of Harman's single-factor test performed in SPSS 27 shows that the maximum variance explained by a single factor is 30.28%, which is lower than the threshold of 50% [36]. Thus, it also offers evidence that common method bias was not an issue in the current research.

Table 2.
Multicollinearity statistics.

Item codes	VIF
PIR1	2.453
PIR2	2.459
PIR3	2.806
PI1	2.785
PI2	2.577
PI3	2.847
PI4	2.907
BT1	2.000
BT2	1.987
BT3	1.840
BT4	1.807
CS1	1.804
CS2	1.810
CS3	1.649
RI1	1.740
RI2	1.696
RI3	1.734

Note: VIF stands for variance inflation factor

The data was tested and explained in two stages, as recommended by Hair Jr et al. [37], named the assessment of measurement model and structural model respectively.

4.2. Measurement Model

The study used structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis to assess the quality of the measurement instrument and to test the research hypotheses employing partial least squares (PLS) methodology, utilizing Smart PLS 4.0. Factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha (α), rho_A, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were applied to test convergence validity [38]. All items have factor loadings greater than the threshold of 0.7 [38]. Moreover, all variables with alpha, rho_A, CR, and AVE values are in excess of 0.7, 0.7, 0.7, and 0.5, respectively [38]. As a result, convergent validity was established in the present research.

Table 3.
Assessment of measurement model on reliability and convergent validity.

Items	Factor loading	alpha >0.7	rho_A>0.7	CR > 0.7	AVE > 0.5
PIR1	0.908				
PIR2	0.882	0.887	0.898	0.929	0.815
PIR3	0.916				
BT1	0.867				
BT2	0.867	0.848	0.888	0.894	0.679
BT3	0.752				
BT4	0.804				
PI1	0.898				
PI2	0.889	0.912	0.904	0.931	0.772
PI3	0.810				
PI4	0.914				
CS1	0.853				
CS2	0.863	0.806	0.888	0.894	0.679
CS3	0.829				
RI1	0.840				
RI2	0.851	0.802	0.804	0.883	0.716
RI3	0.848				

Note: alpha=Cronbach's alpha, CR= composite reliability, AVE=average variance extracted.

Next, Heterotrait—Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) was assessed for discriminant validity among constructs [39]. As shown in the following Table 4, the HTMT values of all constructs do not violate the threshold value of 0.85 [40], therefore demonstrating there is no discriminant validity issue in the study.

Table 4.
Assessment of the Discriminant Validity.

	BT	CS	PI	PIR	RI
BT					
CS	0.066				
PI	0.837	0.04			
PIR	0.033	0.26	0.038		
RI	0.032	0.746	0.081	0.17	

Note: HTMT<0.85

4.3. Structural Model

Given that the calculation of path coefficients in PLS-SEM results from regression analyses, it is crucial to ensure that collinearity issues do not impact regression outcomes. In particular, VIF scores greater than 5.0 indicate multicollinearity problems among constructs [38]. According to Table 2, all VIF values are less than 5.0, thus confirming that collinearity is not an issue in the structural model. Then, the structural model was tested using a bootstrapping procedure with 5000 subsamples to assess the hypotheses [38]. Therefore, the following Figure 2 represents the structural model for the study. R^2 is 0.368 for the dependent construct repurchase intention, which means consumer satisfaction can explain 36.8 percent of the variance in the repeated purchases.
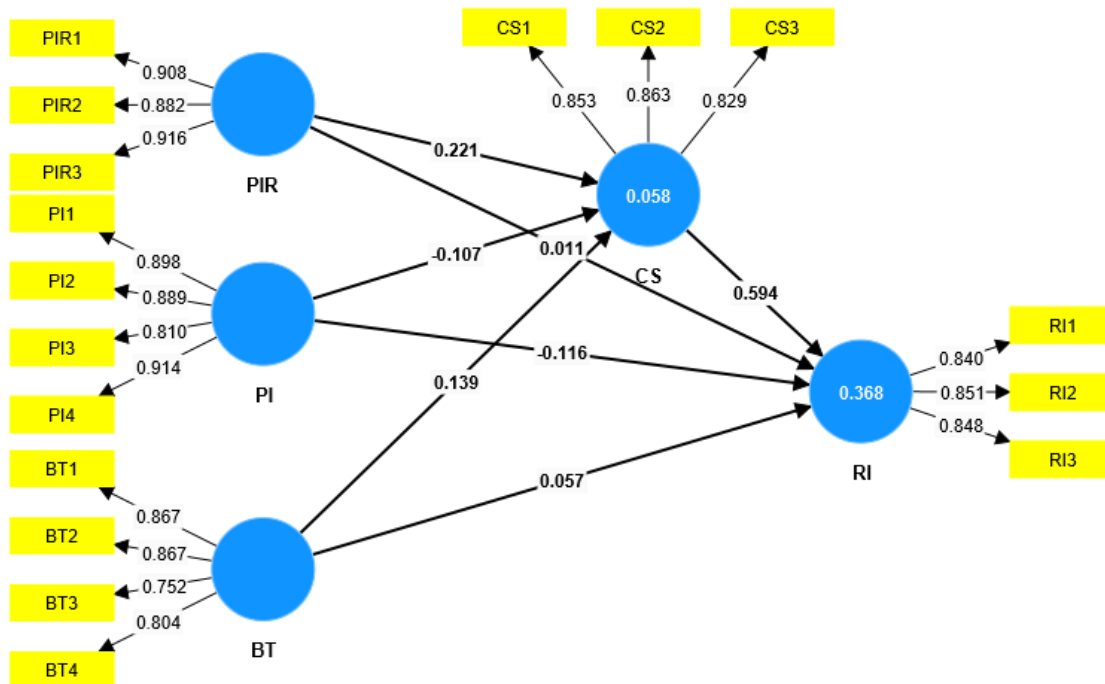
Figure 3.
Structure model results.

In the study, bootstrapping was employed to assess the statistical significance of the path coefficients and calculate the t-values. The findings in Table 5 show the relationship between each construct. The T values of the hypothesized path of PIR and CS, PIR and RI, CS and RI are 5.337, 3.055, and 15.813 respectively, which are all higher than 2.57 (a=0.01, two-sided test) and $p<0.001$, the paths are statistically significant, Meanwhile, 95% confidence interval excludes zero in the three paths. Therefore, H1, H2 and H7 are supported.

Table 5.
Assessment of structural model

Path hypotheses	Sample mean	Std.	T-value	P value	Bias-corrected Confidence Interval (95%)	Supported
H1) PIR -> CS	0.222	0.041	5.337	***	[0.142, 0.303]	YES
H2) PIR -> RI	0.144	0.047	3.055	***	[0.052, 0.234]	YES
H3) PI -> CS	-0.100	0.067	1.605	0.109	[-0.223, 0.040]	NO
H4) PI -> RI	-0.165	0.081	2.225	*	[-0.296, 0.047]	NO
H5) BT -> CS	0.136	0.075	1.837	0.066	[-0.042, 0.264]	NO
H6) BT -> RI	0.126	0.087	1.599	0.110	[-0.066, 0.274]	NO
H7) CS -> RI	0.592	0.038	15.813	***	[0.515, 0.662]	YES

Note: * $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$.

5. Discussion and Implications
5.1. Discussion
The present study aims to examine the impact of various determinant factors on consumer repurchase intention among online users in China. Our findings indicate a significant negative impact of perceived Internet risk (PIR) on consumer satisfaction (CS). Meanwhile, consumer satisfaction (CS) significantly positive effect on online repurchase intention (RI). A possible explanation is that a higher perception of Internet risk negatively influences consumer satisfaction, potentially determining repeat purchases from the same online platform retailer. Consumers' prior shopping experiences and related behaviors are considered significant positive factors in influencing consumer satisfaction. These findings are in line with previous studies such as Subawa et al. [26], Syahputra et al. [32], and Rachbini et al. [27]. Our findings further indicate that consumer satisfaction serves as a significant mediator in the relationship between perceived Internet risk and repurchase intention. Consequently, the relationship between perceived Internet risk and repurchase intention is significantly impacted by consumer satisfaction.

5.2. Theoretical Implications
The study examined how the relationship of determinants affects consumers' repurchase intention on e-commerce platforms in China. Our study provides a significant contribution to e-commerce literature by assessing online consumer behavior in the Chinese e-retailer context. The research provides perspective from the Chinese insight, as consumer behavior in the largest population of a developing country may not be the same as that in emerging economies and developed countries.

It is also one of the primary studies that use the mediating role of consumer satisfaction between perceived Internet risk, brand trust, platform image, and repurchase intention, as few studies have been investigated in the e-commerce context.

5.3. Practical Implications

The results of this study have significant practical implications for academicians, policymakers, and marketing managers within platform businesses who are interested in exploring the e-commerce market in China. The results also suggest that customers' perceived Internet risk negatively impacts repurchase intentions among Chinese online consumers. Furthermore, consumer satisfaction emerges as a critical concern in online shopping due to the absence of physical stores and face-to-face interactions. Consequently, policymakers and business managers can take measures to enhance the elements impacting online consumer satisfaction, such as increasing consumer privacy data security, improving the consumer online shopping experience, post-purchase service, and even price levels, and so on.

6. Conclusion and Limitations
6.1. Conclusion

The study explores how determinant factors influence consumers' repurchase intentions in the Chinese e-commerce context. To obtain this, based on the SOR model, a conceptual framework was established, and hypotheses were formulated. Furthermore, the empirical findings provided both theoretical and practical contributions.

6.2. Limitations

Despite the practical and theoretical implications, the study has some limitations like other studies. The research was conducted in China, which has the largest population of online users. Consequently, the findings may not apply to other countries and regions. Furthermore, this study exclusively assessed online repurchase intention. Future research could investigate actual consumer behavior to validate the conceptual model and hypotheses proposed. Lastly, the constructs of this research were measured only once, resulting in a cross-sectional design. Future studies should employ a two-wave approach with multiple measurements to account for seasonal variations and provide a more comprehensive analysis and findings.

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