

DETERMINANTS OF CUSTOMER TRUST IN RURAL E-COMMERCE IN ZHENGZHOU, CHINA: A CASE STUDY OF TAOBAO VILLAGES

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Abstract

Trust is the potential key to unlocking the competitiveness of online businesses. Building trust can help businesses maintain long-term relationships with their stakeholders. This research studied the effects of marketing factors, including product quality, service quality, security, reputation, ease of use, and usefulness, on customer trust and the mediating role of customer satisfaction in the rural e-commerce businesses in Zhengzhou, China, based on the foundation of the social exchange theory. Self-administrative questionnaires were used to gather survey data from 420 Taobao Village customers. The PLS-SEM results showed that perceived security, perceived reputation, perceived ease of use, and perceived usefulness directly affected customer trust. In addition, the Sobel test results illustrated that customer satisfaction mediated between all but perceived usefulness and customer trust. The findings provided new insights into the roles of these marketing factors in fostering customer trust directly and indirectly through customer satisfaction and an expansion to the application of the social exchange theory, especially in the rural e-commerce business.

Keywords: Perceived Product Quality, Perceived Security, Perceived Reputation, Customer Trust, Customer Satisfaction

Introduction

The rapid growth of e-commerce has transformed the global retail landscape, offering convenient consumer shopping experiences (Wang et al., 2021). In China, this revolution has extended beyond urban areas to rural communities (Li, 2017). According to the ministry of agriculture and rural affairs of China, 2023, rural online retail sales surged from 180 billion to 2.17 trillion yuan between

2014 and 2022, indicating significant growth potential. One prominent example is Taobao Village, known for its role in rural e-commerce development (Lin & Tao, 2024), improving the livelihoods of rural residents by tapping into vast consumer markets (Yin & Choi, 2022).

China's rural e-commerce has entered a phase of high-quality development (Guo & Chen, 2022), attracting an increasing number of sellers to platforms like Taobao Village.

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However, intense competition has led some businesses to struggle or close (Liu et al., 2021). According to previous studies, various factors can promote business competitive advantages (Farida & Setiawan, 2022; Ratasuk & Gajesanand, 2023). Among them, customer trust which is crucial for sustaining rural e-commerce growth, facilitating long-term customer relationships (Blanchard et al., 2021). Zhengzhou, a major city in China, exemplifies the growth of rural online consumption (Henan Province Government, 2022). As the capital of Henan Province, Zhengzhou benefits from strong agricultural sectors and advancing digital infrastructure (Luo & Qiao, 2021). Government policies supporting rural empowerment and digital integration have fostered the spread of online enterprises across Zhengzhou's rural areas (Li, 2017). E-commerce in Zhengzhou grew by 13% in 2023, driven by increased internet access, mobile commerce, logistics improvements, and pandemic-related shifts in consumer behavior (Luo & Qiao, 2021).

This research focuses on Zhengzhou's Taobao Villages to explore the determinants of customer trust in rural e-commerce (Wei et al., 2020; Xiao et al., 2024), aiming to contribute insights to academia and practice. By examining marketing factors, including product quality, service quality, security, reputation, ease of use, and usefulness, and having customer satisfaction as mediators through the lens of social exchange theory (Dhingra et al., 2020; Giao et al., 2020), the study seeks to enhance understanding and develop sustainable marketing strategies for

rural e-commerce businesses and platforms.

However, despite existing research on customer trust in e-commerce, gaps remain, particularly concerning rural e-commerce in Zhengzhou, China. This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating how specific marketing variables influence customer trust and satisfaction in the unique context of Zhengzhou's Taobao Villages. By filling these gaps, the research aims to provide new knowledge and practical guidelines for enhancing the competitiveness and sustainability of rural e-commerce ventures.

Literature Review

Social Exchange Theory

The social exchange theory proposed by Homans (1958) explains that the relationship between two parties is developed and maintained through a cost-benefit analysis rather than their emotions. In business contexts, the theory suggests that customers and businesses enter into trade partnerships with the expectation of receiving surplus benefits from each other (Ratasuk, 2022; Zhang et al., 2020). For example, Ratasuk and Gajesanand (2022) employed the theory to frame a business study on the essence of food safety in promoting Bangkok street food customers' repurchase intentions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, a study by Ferm and Thaichon (2021) investigated the influence of customer pre-participatory social media drivers on attitudinal loyalty in the retail banking industry based on the social exchange theory.

Customer Trust

Customer trust refers to customers' optimistic outlook or expectation of relying on businesses to fulfill their obligations through products and services (Ratasuk & Gajesanand, 2023). Customer trust has been proven to be a determinant to various business outcomes, for instance, perceived risk on products and services, purchase and repurchase intentions, and others (Ratasuk, 2023a; Wang et al., 2022). Qalati et al. (2021) investigated the mediating roles of customer trust on the impacts of perceived service quality and website quality on reputation purchase intention. In addition, Ratasuk and Gajesanand (2022) also included customer trust in their study as a mechanism of how perceived food safety predicts Bangkok street food customer repurchase intentions.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction refers to the degree to which customers' expectations are met or exceeded regarding a product or service, encompassing their cognitive evaluations, emotional responses, and subsequent behaviors such as repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth (Eren, 2021; Oliver, 2014). Research in various business areas showed that satisfaction leads to increased loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, repurchase intentions, and other factors that contribute to long-term business success. (Dam & Dam, 2021; Ginting et al., 2023). For example, a study by Majeed et al. (2022) investigated how customer satisfaction and engagement on social media affect repurchase intention in the Ghana hospitality industry.

Perceived Product Quality

Perceived quality describes how a customer feels about a product or service (Sinurat et al., 2021). According to Ariffin et al. (2016) the perception of product quality is the customer's perspective and general judgment of the product quality they encounter. Product quality is a fundamental determinant of consumer trust in e-commerce platforms (Blanchard et al., 2021). In rural settings like Zhengzhou's Taobao Villages, where access to physical stores may be limited, ensuring high product quality is crucial for establishing and maintaining consumer trust (Wei et al., 2020). High-quality products enhance perceived value and reliability, contributing to positive consumer experiences and repeat purchases (Xiao et al., 2024). Maintaining superior product quality can differentiate e-commerce platforms in competitive markets, fostering trust and loyalty among rural consumers (Farida & Setiawan, 2022).

Perceived Service Quality

On the other hand, Qalati et al. (2021) defined customer perception of service quality as the result of comparing customers' expectations of service and actual service performance. If the service performance exceeds the service expectations, the customer perceives the service quality as good aligning with Hariani et al. (2021). In rural e-commerce, where personal interactions are limited, service quality becomes a critical factor influencing customer trust (Dhingra et al., 2020). High service quality enhances customer

satisfaction, leading to positive word-of-mouth and repeat business (Giao et al., 2020). Effective service delivery builds trust and fosters long-term relationships with customers in Taobao Villages, where personalized service can mitigate the challenges of distance and digital transactions (Ratasuk & Gajesanand, 2023).

Perceived Security

Perceived security is a user's sense of functionality and protection of personal data information on an online platform (Raninda et al., 2022). The security offered by online merchants is the customer's perceived security of the entire transaction (Ardiansah et al., 2020). Falk et al. (2016) found that perceived security prohibits e-commerce consumers from using digital payment systems. Security concerns, including data protection and payment security, significantly impact consumer trust in e-commerce (Giao et al., 2020). Rural consumers may have heightened concerns due to lower digital literacy levels and perceptions of online risks (Liu et al., 2021).

Implementing robust security measures reassures consumers of the safety of their personal and financial information, thereby enhancing trust and willingness to engage in online transactions (Wei et al., 2020). Adherence to data protection regulations and transparent security practices are essential for building credibility and trust in rural e-commerce environments like Taobao Villages (Xiao et al., 2024).

Perceived Reputation

Perceived reputation refers to people's shared emotional response to a company due to its actions over an extended period. It is also the consumers' assessment of a firm's overall image (Loureiro et al., 2017). Kim et al. (2021) argued that companies must manage perceived reputation to maintain long-term customer relationships. Additionally, online consumers prefer reputable vendors in e-commerce because of lower risk and easier access to help when things go wrong (Oghazi et al., 2021). Reputation encompasses local and online perceptions of the e-commerce platform's reliability, credibility, and ethical standards (Lin & Tao, 2024). In rural contexts, local reputation is crucial in shaping consumer trust and adopting e-commerce platforms (Yin & Choi, 2022). A positive local reputation fosters trust and facilitates word-of-mouth recommendations within rural communities, driving adoption and sustained usage of e-commerce platforms (Zhengzhou, 2022). Building a strong reputation aligns with social exchange theory, where trust is nurtured through reciprocal interactions and positive perceptions of the brand's integrity (Dhingra et al., 2020).

Perceived Ease of Use

Perceived ease of use is a fact that people evaluate a product or service based on how easily and quickly they can learn and use the new thing without difficulty (Alfadda & Mahdi, 2021; Usman et al., 2022). This variable has been studied as a determinant of various

outcomes, such as customer repurchase intention, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and others (Anugrah, 2020; Keni, 2020; Wilson et al., 2021). In e-commerce, ease of use refers to the user-friendliness and practicality of the e-commerce platform in facilitating transactions and meeting consumer needs (Farida & Setiawan, 2022). A seamless and intuitive interface enhances user satisfaction and trust, encouraging repeated interactions and reducing transactional friction in rural e-commerce settings (Luo & Qiao, 2021).

Perceived Usefulness

Perceived usefulness is the degree to which consumers erroneously believe that a specific product or service increases their productivity when they use it (Karim et al., 2020; Mailizar et al., 2021). It can create trust, risk, purchase intention, and many other favorable outcomes (Kripesh et al., 2020; Ventre & Kolbe, 2020). In e-commerce, perceptions of platform usefulness influence consumer trust and satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of aligning technological functionalities with rural consumer expectations (Guo & Chen, 2022).

Hypothesis Development

Drawing upon the concept of the social exchange theory, this study hypothesizes the effects of six marketing variables, including product quality, price competitiveness, website usability, seller reputation, service

quality, and perceived risk, on customer trust in rural e-commerce businesses within Taobao Villages in Zhengzhou (Sinurat et al., 2021; Suhaily & Darmoyo, 2017; Wang et al., 2020). It is posited that higher perceived product quality, price competitiveness, website usability, seller reputation, and service quality should increase customer trust; on the other hand, higher perceived risk should decrease trust. (Giao et al., 2020; Paparoidamis et al., 2019). Ratasuk and Gajesanand (2023) found that food safety offsets perceived risk and promotes customer trust in Bangkok Street food. Additionally, customer satisfaction should mediate the relationships between these marketing variables and customer trust since positive experiences with the marketing variables can enhance overall satisfaction, thereby reinforcing trust and loyalty, while perceived risk is anticipated to diminish satisfaction and erode trust (Ibrahim et al., 2019; Jin & Lim, 2021; Quoquab et al., 2020). Through empirical examination of these relationships, this study should determinants of customer trust and the mediating role of customer satisfaction in rural e-commerce, offering insights pertinent to both academia and practice in enhancing trust and fostering sustainable growth in rural online marketplaces (Bimaruci et al., 2020; Karim et al., 2020). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of Hypothesis

Hypothesis
H1a Customers' perceived product quality has a positive effect on customer trust in rural e-commerce.
H1b Customer satisfaction positively mediates the relationship between perceived product quality and customer trust.
H2a Customers' perceived service quality has a positive effect on customer trust in rural e-commerce.
H2b Customer satisfaction positively mediates the relationship between perceived service quality and customer trust.
H3a Customers' perceived security has a positive effect on customer trust in rural e-commerce.
H3b Customer satisfaction positively mediates the relationship between perceived security and customer trust.
H4a Customers' perceived reputation has a positive effect on customer trust in rural e-commerce.
H4b Customer satisfaction positively mediates the relationship between perceived reputation and customer trust.
H5a Customers' perceived ease of use has a positive effect on customer trust in rural e-commerce.
H5b Customer satisfaction positively mediates the relationship between perceived ease of use and customer trust.
H6a Customers' perceived usefulness has a positive effect on customer trust in rural e-commerce.
H6b Customer satisfaction positively mediates the relationship between perceived usefulness and customer trust.

Methodology

The quantitative research focuses on rural e-commerce customers within the Taobao Village online community in Zhengzhou, China, whose exact population size is unknown. A stratified purposive sampling method was utilized to address this. Initially, 600 individuals aged 18 and above were

targeted from all six administrative districts of Zhengzhou city to ensure representation across the population and to validate the adequacy of our sample size. This approach was guided by methodologies outlined by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and Leavy (2022), along with principles proposed by Neyman (1934).

Data collection was conducted online through self-administered questionnaires. Local online communities in each district were engaged, inviting eligible members to participate. Prior to participation, participants received information about the survey and were assured of anonymity. Participation was voluntary. This method facilitated effective data gathering while ensuring a diverse and representative sample from the rural e-commerce customer base in Taobao Village, Zhengzhou.

Measurements

All question sets in this study were adapted from relevant previous research with good validity and reliability. Adjustments were made to an existing scale to fit better the specific requirements and context of the current study on customer trust in rural e-commerce while ensuring validity and reliability were maintained through appropriate adaptations. The five-point Likert scale was used. 1) Customer trust was measured using a four-item scale adapted from Beldad et al. (2010). 2) Customer satisfaction was measured using a four-item scale adapted from Nazari et al. (2020). 3) Perceived product quality was measured using a four-item scale adapted from Sullivan et al. (2018). 4) Perceived service quality was measured using a four-item scale adapted from Jani et al. (2011). 5) Perceived security was measured using four-item scale adapted from Eriksson et al. (2021). 6) Perceived reputation was measured using a four-item scale adapted from Hong (2015). 7) Perceived ease of use was measured using a

four-item scale adapted from Ahmed (2017). 8) Perceived usefulness was measured using a four-item scale adapted from Vinya (2022).

Data Analysis

PLS-SEM was used to compute the obtained data. It is effective with a complex research model with several variables and relationships (Ratasuk, 2023a). PLS-SEM tends to produce less bias than covariance-based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) for non-normal distributed data (Hair Jr et al., 2017). In this study, the WarpPLS 8.0 program was used. However, before the analysis for hypothesis testing, the collected data was tested for adequate construct validity, including convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability, as well as multicollinearity and Common Method Bias (CMB). Moreover, the Sobel test will examine the mediating effects, as Preacher and Hayes (2008) suggested.

The Research Ethics Committee (REC) approval has been granted with reference number PIM-REC 004/2567.

Results

Out of six hundred Taobao Village customers, only 420, or 70%, responded to the survey. The results revealed that most respondents were female, 243 or 57.86%, and the remaining 177 males, 42.14%. 212, or 50.48%, were between 18-25 years old, followed by 124 or 29.52% were between 26-30 years old. 208, or 49.52%, earned less than 50,000 yuan annually, and 136, or 32.38%, earned between 50,001 and 100,000 yuan annually. Most respondents, 230 or

54.76%, spend less than 500 yuan per month on Taobao Village, followed by 125 or 29.76%, who spend between 501 and 1,000 yuan per month.

Before the PLS-SEM analysis, the convergent validity was assessed using the factor loadings, the Composite Reliability (CR), and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (Cheung & Wang, 2017). The results demonstrated that all factor loadings of all constructs ranged from 0.698 to 0.856, aligning with Cheung et al. (2023), who stated that all factor loadings should not be lower than 0.5 to be acceptable. It also illustrated that the lowest CR value is 0.831, higher than 0.7 satisfactory criteria (Ratasuk, 2023b). Lastly, the AVE values range from 0.552 to 0.702, more significant than the 0.5 thresholds recommended by Hair Jr et al. (2017). Thus, the convergent validity of the data is satisfactory.

The discriminant validity of this study was tested using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT). The results reported that the highest HTMT value is 0.815, which is

lower than 0.85, indicating a good level of discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

A comparison of the square root values of AVE and correlation of variables, as recommended by Fornell et al. (1981), was used to confirm the discriminant validity. Table 2 indicated that all square root values of all variables' AVE are more significant than their involving correlations, confirming the satisfactory level of discriminant validity. Also, composite reliability and each variable's Cronbach's alpha values were used to measure reliability, which should be no lower than 0.7 to be acceptable, and results shown in Table 2, ranging between 0.729 and 0.904, indicated that the reliability is satisfactory. Moreover, multicollinearity and CMB were tested using full collinearity VIFs to be no greater than 3.3 to be ideal and 5 to be acceptable, as Kock (2015) recommended. Table 2 shows that the highest full collinearity VIF value is 3.208, indicating that this research model has no serious multicollinearity issue or CMB.

Table 2 Correlations and Reliability

Constructs	CT	CS	PPQ	PSQ	PS	PR	PEOU	PU
CT	(0.809)							
CS	0.750	(0.802)						
PPQ	0.626	0.584	(0.743)					
PSQ	0.530	0.573	0.511	(0.771)				
PS	0.628	0.520	0.557	0.448	(0.766)			
PR	0.635	0.631	0.554	0.601	0.492	(0.757)		
PEOU	0.646	0.594	0.548	0.499	0.536	0.521	(0.765)	
PU	0.622	0.568	0.499	0.489	0.479	0.517	0.555	(0.838)
Composite Reliability (CR)	0.884	0.879	0.831	0.854	0.850	0.843	0.849	0.904
Cronbach's Alpha	0.824	0.816	0.729	0.772	0.764	0.751	0.763	0.859
Full Collin. VIF	3.208	2.801	2.072	1.853	1.861	2.166	2.043	1.965

Source: CT = Customer trust, CS = Customer satisfaction, PPQ = Perceived product quality, PSQ = Perceived service quality, PS = Perceived security, PR = Perceived reputation, PEOU = Perceived ease of use, PU = Perceived usefulness

Lastly, ten measurement criteria in the total quality of this research model is model fit indices in Table 3 indicate that satisfactory.

Table 3 Model Fit Indices

Model fit indices	Coefficient	Result
Average Path Coefficient (APC)	0.100 ^{**}	Significant
Average R-Squared (ARS)	0.652 ^{**}	Significant
Average Adjusted R-Squared (AARS)	0.643 ^{**}	Significant
Average Block VIF (AVIF)	2.262	Ideally
Average Full Collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	1.914	Ideally
Tenenhaus GoF index (GoF)	0.695	Large
Simpson's Paradox Ratio (SPR)	0.857	Acceptable
R-squared Contribution Ratio (RSCR)	0.996	Acceptable
Statistical Suppression Ratio (SSR)	0.952	Acceptable
Nonlinear Bivariate Causality Direction Ratio (NLBCDR)	0.952	Acceptable

Source: ^{**} = p-value ≤ 0.01

Moreover, the normality results showed that none of the variables were normally distributed, confirming that PLS-SEM is suitable for this study (Ratasuk & Charoensukmongkol, 2020).

Consequently, the overall quality of this research model was considered satisfactory, and all proposed hypotheses were ready to be tested. Figure 1 presents the results from PLS-SEM analysis.

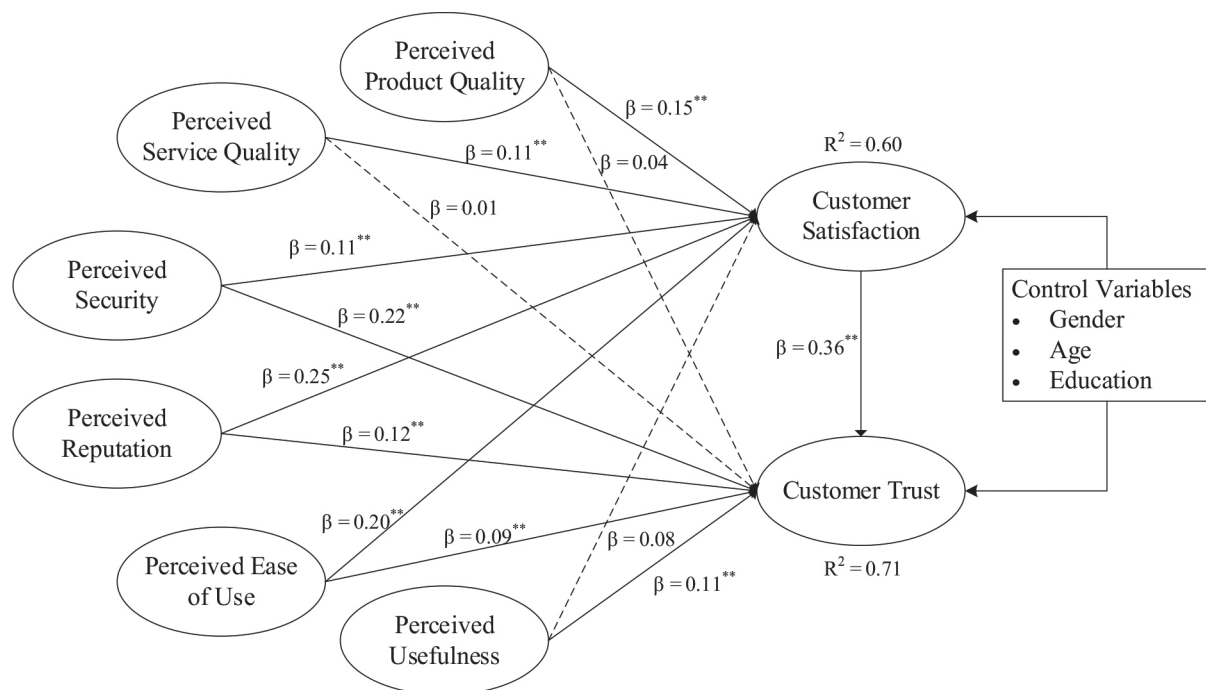


Figure 1 The PLS-SEM results

Note: ** p-values ≤ 0.01 , * p-values ≤ 0.05

Figure 1 presents the outcomes of the PLS-SEM analysis, indicating that 9 out of 12 hypotheses were supported. The results can be summarized by focusing on direct effects and indirect effects, respectively.

Hypothesis 3a is supported since customer trust significantly and positively impacts perceived security ($\beta = 0.217$; $p < 0.01$).

Hypothesis 4a is supported because customer trust significantly and positively influences perceived reputation ($\beta = 0.116$; $p < 0.01$).

Hypothesis 5a is supported due to the significant and positive impact of customer trust on perceived ease of use ($\beta = 0.093$; $p < 0.05$); hence, this hypothesis is supported. Hypothesis 6a is also supported because of the significant and positive effect of perceived usefulness on customer trust ($\beta = 0.108$; $p = 0.01$); hence, this hypothesis is supported.

Based on the results, including the significant positive impact of customer satisfaction on trust ($\beta = 0.364$; $p < 0.001$), the Sobel mediation test suggested by

Preacher and Hayes (2008) was used to test the mediating roles of customer satisfaction only between perceived product quality, service quality, security, reputation, and ease of use, and customer trust and the results are as follows.

Hypothesis 1b is supported since customer satisfaction fully mediates between perceived product quality and customer trust ($t = 2.856$, $p = 0.004$).

Hypothesis 2b is supported since customer satisfaction fully mediates between perceived service quality and customer trust ($t = 2.220$, $p = 0.026$).

Hypothesis 3b is supported since customer satisfaction partially mediates between perceived security and customer trust ($t = 2.275$, $p = 0.023$).

Hypothesis 4b is supported by the partial mediation of customer satisfaction between perceived reputation and customer trust ($t = 4.390$, $p = 0.000$).

Hypothesis 5b is also supported as perceived ease of use and customer trust are partially mediated by customer satisfaction ($t = 3.643$, $p = 0.000$).

Moreover, the results showed that there is no meaningful association between all control variables and customer satisfaction and trust.

Discussion

The research explored the influences of marketing factors, namely perceived product quality, service quality, security, reputation, ease of use, and usefulness, on customer

trust and the mediating roles of customer satisfaction among Taobao Village customers in Zhengzhou, China. The results identified direct positive associations between perceived security, reputation, ease of use, and usefulness with customer trust, which are consistent with several previous research (Bimaruci et al., 2020; Paparoidamis et al., 2019). For instance, Rosa et al. (2018) demonstrated how social commerce attributes like reputation and security impact trust in online shopping on Instagram. Similarly, Sarkar et al. (2020) discovered that perceived ease of use and usefulness significantly affect trust in mobile commerce.

Additionally, the results indicated a positive correlation between customer satisfaction and trust, corroborating earlier findings (Islam et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020). For instance, Mansouri et al. (2022) observed that when customers rely on sales staff for product selection, their satisfaction with the entire process and the purchased items bolsters their trust.

Moreover, the study revealed that customer satisfaction mediates between perceived product quality, service quality, security, reputation, ease of use, and customer trust, aligning with prior studies (Giao et al., 2020; Keni, 2020). For example, the study by Setiawan et al. (2020) found positive impacts of high service quality and fair pricing on trust through customer satisfaction in airlines. Djakasaputra et al. (2020) discovered that ease of use and service quality on the Blibli website have a significant impact on customer

satisfaction while also affecting trust. The insignificant impacts of product and service quality on customer trust suggesting that in Taobao Villages, where product authenticity and reliability might be concerns, perceived product quality alone may not sufficiently influence customer trust. Other factors, such as service reliability and transaction security, could play more pivotal roles. Also, this underscores the importance of reliable service in enhancing customer satisfaction despite the insignificant relationship with trust, implying that while service quality improves satisfaction, trust formation might require additional trust-building measures.

Conclusion

In rural e-commerce, customer trust is shaped by a business's reputation, security measures, ease of use, and perceived usefulness. Positive perceptions of a business's digital payment system, online ratings, and effectiveness strongly influence trust by ensuring customer satisfaction throughout the buying process and beyond. Satisfied customers trust businesses more because they consistently exceed expectations, fostering trust through each positive interaction. While good product and service quality contribute to customer satisfaction, in Taobao Villages where product authenticity is a concern, trust also hinges on service reliability and transaction security. This highlights the need for businesses to prioritize trust-building measures alongside service quality to cultivate lasting trust among customers.

Academic Contributions and Implications

The study offers new and additional knowledge to the customer behavior literature, particularly the contributions of all the factors to customer trust and the mediating roles of customer satisfaction in the rural e-commerce industry in China, which is still limited. Finally, this study offers more evidence of the extension of the social exchange theory to explain the determinants of customer trust in rural e-commerce in China. These academic contributions can also be applied as valuable guidelines for rural e-commerce businesses, marketers, and others interested in entering the e-commerce business, as well as online platforms, to develop business models and marketing strategies that can build customer trust effectively. The findings suggested the following: 1) Rural e-commerce businesses should pay attention to product procurement, packaging, delivery, and other aspects to ensure that products are delivered to customers in the best condition. 2) Providing sincere services, efficient responses, and professional answers to customers are helpful for businesses to gain satisfaction. 3) Rural e-commerce businesses can display a good website design and image quality and show a clear privacy statement to give customers a sense of security. Finally, businesses should practice user-centered product design concepts, improve their experience to increase customer satisfaction and build a trusting relationship between businesses and customers.

Limitations and Recommendations

Some limitations need to be considered in this study. 1) Despite efforts to use stratified purposive sampling, the study may still be prone to sampling bias. Certain demographics or types of rural e-commerce customers within Taobao Village communities in Zhengzhou may be underrepresented or overrepresented due to the sampling method. 2) The findings of the study may have limited generalizability beyond the specific context of Zhengzhou, China. Taobao Villages in other regions or countries may exhibit different characteristics or customer behaviors. 3) The reliance on self-administered questionnaires introduces the potential for self-report bias. Participants may provide socially desirable responses or inaccuracies, impacting the validity of the data

collected. Lastly, conducting data collection online may exclude potential participants who are not proficient in using digital platforms or lack reliable internet access, potentially limiting the inclusivity of the sample.

Therefore, there are a lot of other elements that may lead to increasing customer trust and should be investigated. Recommendations for future research. 1) Explore the contribution of other elements to customer trust, such as transparency, perceived risk, and identity. 2) This study model can also be applied in other industry settings, such as banking, hospitality, and service industries. 3) Explore the role of the six factors on other desirable business outcomes, for example, purchase intention, customer loyalty, and brand equity.

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