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Impact of online reviews in virtual communities on cross-border e-commerce platform reputation

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Purpose: This article aims to reveal how online reviews in virtual communities affect the reputation of platform sellers. Through research, consumers are encouraged to make effective use of online reviews, and it also provides enlightenment for the marketing management of cross-border e-commerce platform sellers.

Design/methodology/approach: Based on the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theoretical framework, this article uses structural equation modelling (SEM) to empirically investigate how online reviews in virtual communities affect the perceived reputation of cross-border e-business (CBEB) platform sellers.

Findings/results: The results of the study show that online reviews significantly influence the perceived reputation of CBEB platform sellers. Among them, platform market institution trust and platform shopping efficacy play a chain mediating role in the influence of online reviews on the perceived reputation of platform sellers, and customer stickiness plays a significant moderating effect in the i`nfluence of online reviews on the perceived reputation of CBEB platform sellers.

Practical implications: The study provides actionable strategies for e-commerce platforms to incentivise user review participation while enhancing market institutional frameworks and customer shopping efficiency.

Originality/value: Based on the SOR theory, this study examines the impact of online reviews on the reputation of platform sellers within the context of a virtual community, from the perspective of reviewer characteristics. It explores the moderating effect of customer stickiness and the mediating role of platform market institution trust and platform shopping efficiency.

Keywords: online reviews; SOR theory; institution trust; shopping efficacy; perceived reputation.

Introduction

In the digital age, reputation has become a core competitiveness that determines the survival of a business in China. Online reviews and user ratings on e-commerce platforms such as Taobao, JD.com and Pinduoduo are crucial sources of product information. They reduce perceived uncertainty, shape product awareness and drive sales (Iversen & Söderström, 2014). However, factors such as website appearance, design, user reviews and reviewers' emotional expressions significantly influence consumers' perceptions of platform reputation and their behavioural responses (Erden et al., 2012; Kaneyasu, 2022). In China, cultural factors also play a vital role. For instance, the concept of 'face' is deeply ingrained, meaning that positive reviews can enhance a seller's reputation, while negative ones can severely damage it. In addition, the importance of community and social proof further amplifies the impact of user-generated content on consumer decisions. These cultural nuances and platform-specific features must be considered to understand the full impact of online reviews on business reputation in China.

Online reviews, an evolution of word-of-mouth, transcend traditional social connections and significantly influence consumer behaviour. As post-purchase feedback, they are essential for understanding consumer needs (Zhao et al., 2022). With the rapid growth of social networks, an increasing number of consumers share their shopping experiences online, leading to a substantial impact on both consumer behaviour and business decisions (Pekkala & Van Zoonen, 2023).

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Online reviews provide valuable insights into user preferences, market trends and product development, making their effective application crucial in shopping contexts.

Previous research on online reviews has focused on several key aspects: the characteristics of reviews (number, polarity, score, timeliness, validity) (Li et al., 2023a; Wang et al., 2022), their impact on consumer behaviour (purchase decisions, product perceptions, brand attitudes, shopping satisfaction) and their effect on business activities (sales performance, brand image, customer loyalty, market position) (Pfeuffer & Phua, 2022). Studies also address the authenticity and credibility of reviews, including the identification of fake reviews and their impact. Existing literature on online reviews primarily examines the impact of review content on consumers (Korfiatis et al., 2012), with limited focus on how reviews affect platform sellers' reputations within virtual communities, considering reviewer characteristics and community factors. The influence of review behaviours on the perceived reputation of sellers in e-business platforms, particularly during service remediation interactions, remains underexplored. There is a notable gap in academic analysis regarding the effects of online reviews on seller reputation in cross-border e-business (CBEB) platforms.

The impact of online reviews in virtual communities on the perceived reputation of CBEB platforms is intricate and multidimensional. Online reviews serve as a direct channel for consumer feedback, influencing purchasing decisions through evaluations of product quality, platform service and logistics (Akturk et al., 2022). The rapid dissemination and wide reach of these reviews can swiftly alter a platform's reputation, either enhancing or diminishing it. Emotional content in reviews also significantly affects consumer trust and satisfaction, thereby influencing the platform's reputation (Camilleri & Filieri, 2023). Opinion leaders and active users in virtual communities have a notable impact on how reviews are perceived and accepted.

Based on the 'stimulus-organism-response' (SOR) framework (Chudhery et al., 2021), this article investigates how online reviews affect the perceived reputation of platform sellers, proposing a chain mediation model: 'online reviews → trust in platform market system → platform shopping efficiency → perceived reputation of platform sellers'. The study examines online reviews through four dimensions – reviewer credibility, community reputation, review quality and consensus – assessing their effects on seller reputation and the underlying mechanisms. This research enhances understanding of online reviews and provides practical insights for improving marketing management on CBEB platforms.

The specific questions studied are as follows: (1) Do online reviews in virtual communities significantly impact the perceived reputation of sellers on cross-border e-commerce platforms? (2) What mediating role do platform market institutional trust and platform shopping efficiency play in the process of online reviews affecting sellers' perceived reputation? (3) How does customer engagement (visit stickiness vs. purchase stickiness) regulate the relationship between online reviews and the perceived reputation of platform sellers? (4) How do the four dimensions of online reviews (reviewer credibility, community reputation, review quality, review consensus) affect the perceived reputation of platform sellers through different transmission mechanisms?

The contributions of this study are as follows. Firstly, combining SOR theory, using structural equation modelling (SEM) to empirically explore how online reviews in virtual communities affect the perceived reputation of CBEB platform sellers, and what are the mechanism paths in its transmission process? Secondly, to explore whether customer stickiness affects the influence process of online reviews on platform sellers' perceived reputation and to decipher the 'black box' of the influence path from the customer's perspective. Thirdly, we quantitatively measure online reviews in virtual communities, comprehensively evaluating the four aspects of reviewer credibility, community reputation, review quality and review consensus, to identify online reviews in a fairer and more impartial way, thus helping consumers make more informed decisions to improve their trust and reputation in the platform.

In e-business, virtual community online reviews provide CBEB platforms with essential market feedback and consumer insights. These reviews help platforms understand consumer needs and preferences, allowing for product and service refinement, thereby enhancing user satisfaction. Additionally, reviews serve as a reference for improving service quality, operational efficiency and fostering innovation within the industry. For consumers, reviews offer insights into others' experiences and evaluations, aiding informed decision-making and reducing shopping risks (Badmus et al., 2024). For merchants, positive reviews enhance brand credibility and attract customers, while engagement with feedback boosts loyalty and repurchase rates (Maru & Sai Vijay, 2024). Overall, online reviews significantly impact the reputation of CBEB platforms and contribute to the sector's development. However, rigorous regulation is necessary to ensure review authenticity and mitigate the effects of fraudulent and malicious content.

The rest of the article is organised as follows. Section 'Literature review' introduces the conceptual structure and theoretical foundations. Section 'Research hypothesis and theoretical model' outlines the research model and hypotheses of the research. Section 'Methodology' describes the data collection procedure, variable measurement and research methodology. Section 'Results' focuses on analysing and testing the reliability of the collected data. Section 'Hypothesis testing' tests whether the previous hypotheses are valid or not. Finally, section 'Conclusion' gives conclusions, recommendations and specific implementation measures.

Literature review

Stimulus-organism-response theory

The term SOR was expanded by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) within the framework of environmental psychology. They posited that external stimuli (S) impact an individual's cognition, emotions and internal states (O), which subsequently affect their attitudes and behaviours (R). The SOR theory highlights the significance of both external stimuli and the individual's internal perceived state in understanding behaviour. External stimuli influence the internal psychological state, which then drives various behavioural responses (Kim et al., 2021).

Stimulus-organism-response theory has been extensively applied in online user behaviour research, particularly in traditional shopping and e-business contexts. Key studies include Luqman et al. (2017), who investigated the impact of aesthetic features on consumers' internal states and subsequent purchasing behaviours. Additionally, SOR theory has been applied to social networking sites, with Qiu et al. (2023) finding that exhaustion and technological pressure can decrease Facebook use. Research also identifies negative information factors, such as vulgar content and rumour flooding, that contribute to social media burnout and reduced user engagement (Wolter et al., 2023).

Virtual community

A virtual community is a group formed on the Internet where members share knowledge and information through interactive communication, creating interdependent and relatively stable social networks (Capdevila & Mérindol, 2024). The widespread use of the Internet has accelerated and enhanced information transfer, facilitating the growth of virtual communities. These communities transcend traditional time and space constraints, enabling members to interact and communicate through online platforms (Zhu & Yang, 2023).

Grzelka (2020) defined a virtual community as an Internet-mediated platform initiated by e-business platforms, consumers or third parties, where groups of consumers engage in continuous social interactions. These interactions, including information exchange and knowledge sharing, establish stable social relationships among members. Practically, platform managers recognise that virtual communities facilitate the maintenance of relationships between e-business platforms and consumers and that knowledge sharing within these communities can address management issues, thus improving platform usability (Zhang et al., 2024).

Online reviews

With the advancement of the Internet, online shopping has surged in popularity among Chinese consumers. However, the virtual nature of the Internet introduces risks and uncertainties in the shopping process. Online reviews help mitigate information asymmetry and reduce purchasing risks, garnering significant attention from the academic community (Ikhsan et al., 2024).

Online reviews consist of both subjective evaluations and objective information about purchased goods from e-business or third-party review sites, significantly influencing consumer purchase decisions. Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, online reviews benefit from Internet technology, allowing for intuitive display and enabling consumers to assess credibility based on review quality (Xu, 2021). However, online reviews face issues such as information overload and integrity concerns, making it challenging to evaluate their usefulness. To address this, e-business platforms are increasingly focusing on improving review content. For instance, Dianping.com recruits 'experiencers' to post reviews, and many communities award medals to highlight valuable contributions from reviewers (Burtch et al., 2021).

Platform market institution trust

The platform market institution trust refers to the extent to which buyers trust the regulatory body and regulatory norms in the platform transaction process (Beck et al., 2024). In online transactions, the creation and maintenance of institutional trust relies mainly on various documents and credentials, especially third-party authentication and third-party payment escrow. McKnight et al. (1998) divided institutional trust into two dimensions, one is situational normality, that is, the transaction is based on normal transaction links and processes, and the interaction process meets the expectations, which leads to trust; the other is structural assurances, that is, the success of the transaction is guaranteed through contractual agreements, rules and procedures, warranties, etc.

Platform shopping effectiveness

Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura et al. (1999), is the belief in one's ability to achieve goals and complete tasks. Research indicates that self-efficacy can stem from observational learning, verbal persuasion and past successes (Graham, 2022). In platform transactions, characterised by high frequency and uncertainty, self-efficacy is reflected in buyers' confidence in successfully shopping through e-business platforms. This is termed platform shopping efficacy, which describes buyers' belief in their ability to complete online transactions, such as acquiring information, purchasing correctly, finding suitable sellers and resolving issues (Martínez-López et al., 2020). Higher platform shopping efficacy suggests that buyers are more confident in finding quality sellers and achieving successful transactions (Livan et al., 2022).

Customer stickiness

In marketing, Zott et al. (2000) introduced the concept of 'stickiness', specifically 'Internet stickiness' in the e-business

context. This concept has been applied in studies as 'website stickiness', focusing on a website's ability to retain customers, and as 'user stickiness' or 'consumer stickiness', highlighting customer retention on platforms. Unlike 'customer loyalty', which has distinct characteristics, most research on stickiness employs models such as the information system success model (ISSM), technology acceptance model (TAM), commitment-trust theory (CTT) and expectation-confirmation theory (ECT). These studies suggest that stickiness results from factors such as perceived quality and perceived usefulness, reflecting individual rational decision-making processes (Deodhar & Gupta, 2023).

This article draws on Kankam et al. (2023) to deconstruct the conceptual connotation and formation mechanism of 'customer stickiness', and divides customer stickiness into two dimensions, visit stickiness and purchase stickiness. Visit stickiness refers to the behaviour of customers who keep browsing for a long period of time, repeat browsing over a period or browsing in depth on an e-business platform (Lee et al., 2021). Purchase stickiness refers to the behaviour of customers who maintain a high purchase frequency, purchase type or purchase quantity on an e-business platform over a period (Goyal & Dutta, 2021).

Perceived reputation of platform sellers

Reputation is the overall trust and perceived evaluation of consumers in a company, product or service based on past experience and word-of-mouth communication (Kuppelwieser et al., 2022). Reputation is the digital asset of an online platform, which brings quantifiable business value and sustainable growth drivers to the platform by building trust, boosting conversions, optimising search rankings and enhancing competitiveness (Fatorachian & Ramesh, 2025). The perceived reputation of platform sellers explored in this article refers to the rational perceptions such as understanding, judgement or evaluation that buyers hold about all sellers of platform-based e-business as a marketplace (Rohn et al., 2021). During platform transactions, buyers will not only choose high-reputation sellers but also high-reputation platform-based e-business companies (Li et al., 2019). However, previous studies have primarily concentrated on the signalling effect of seller reputation but neglected the halo effect of platform-based e-business reputations (Gala & Mueller, 2024).

Online reviews, a key form of online word-of-mouth, significantly influence consumer purchase decisions (Lei et al., 2022). Consumers routinely consult these reviews before purchasing, benefiting from their ability to overcome time and space constraints and enhance communication between merchants and consumers (Hou & Ma, 2022). However, the Internet's indirect contact, low cost and anonymity lead to information overload and uneven quality, including misleading content from online trolls. This makes consumers to demand higher usefulness from reviews, requiring them to sift through numerous reviews to find useful information, increasing their information processing costs (Rosário & Raimundo, 2021).

Consequently, academic research is shifting focus from the impact of online reviews on purchase decisions to improving review content and perceived usefulness (Harrigan et al., 2021). Current research primarily addresses the quantitative and textual characteristics of reviews, with less emphasis on content (Ghorbani et al., 2022). This article explores the relationship between online reviews and the perceived reputation of platform sellers, examining how customer stickiness moderates this relationship and the chain mediation roles of platform market system trust and platform shopping efficacy. This study offers new insights into word-of-mouth research and practical implications for guiding effective consumer evaluations in e-business.

As a major force in global e-commerce, the expansive and rapidly evolving Chinese market plays a crucial role in the global economy (Lundvall & Rikap, 2022). Survey data from Chinese CBEB platforms are vital because of the market's size and its rapid technological and business model innovations. These platforms are often at the forefront of adopting new e-commerce technologies, such as artificial intelligence and advanced analytics for consumer behaviour prediction and personalised marketing, setting benchmarks that influence global e-commerce trends (Micu et al., 2021).

Incorporating data from China's diverse and dynamic market refines theoretical models on consumer behaviour, market entry and digital strategy (Gomes et al., 2022). This enhances the inclusivity and applicability of these models across various economic environments and deepens understanding of unique factors driving consumer engagement in digital marketplaces. Insights into Chinese consumer behaviour offer a perspective on global market trends and preferences, providing valuable lessons for international businesses targeting this lucrative market (Brunzel, 2024). Studying Chinese consumers on cross-border platforms reveals broader trends, such as the rapid adoption of mobile payments and social commerce, which influence global consumer expectations and business strategies. These insights can predict emerging e-commerce practices and technologies with potential global relevance.

China's cross-border e-commerce market is developing rapidly and has a large number of users. According to relevant data, China's cross-border e-commerce import and export scale will reach 2.72 trillion yuan in 2023, and the scale of users is also expanding. Such a large user group, covering different ages, genders, regions, consumption habits and other characteristics, provides a rich and diverse sample for the study of international business theory, which can more comprehensively reflect various phenomena and laws in international business activities. So, leveraging Chinese CBEB user data is crucial for advancing international business theory (Yan et al., 2023). It allows scholars and practitioners to challenge and expand

traditional theories, adapting them to accommodate the complexities of the digital age and cross-cultural consumer interactions (Papadopoulos & Cleveland, 2023). These data not only inform business strategies tailored for the Chinese market but also enhance global strategic planning, providing a competitive edge in the fast-paced world of international e-commerce.

The contributions and the gaps with previous research are elaborated upon in the following aspects. Firstly, previous research mainly focused on domestic e-commerce platforms or single cultural contexts, examining consumer trust and security using models such as TAM (Hanakata & Bignami, 2023; Wen et al., 2024) and proposing strategies to build consumer trust (Wang et al., 2020). In contrast, this study addresses the complexities of CBEB platforms serving a global audience. Online consumer behaviours, including review habits and evaluation criteria, vary significantly across cultures, impacting perceptions of platform reputation. Our survey incorporated diverse cultural perspectives, languages and consumer habits to better understand how these factors affect online reviews and the reputation of international e-commerce platforms, providing a more accurate global consumer feedback depiction.

Secondly, prior studies primarily investigated simpler online reputation systems, such as eBay's rating system, and the role of online conversations in word-of-mouth transmission to build consumer trust (Oraedu et al., 2021). These studies analysed forums and discussion groups, focusing on how review content quality and structure affected purchasing behaviour (Palalic et al., 2021). They did not extensively explore the impact of social media reviews on platform reputation. In contrast, this study examined how technological advancements, including social media and intelligent systems, have reshaped e-commerce by accelerating consumer feedback spread and enhancing review analysis accuracy. This approach addresses a gap in understanding how these technological changes influence consumer perceptions and platform reputation.

Lastly, earlier studies largely focused on domestic traditional retailers and e-commerce platforms, emphasising product characteristics within a single market and customer loyalty in traditional e-commerce (Al-Adwan et al., 2020; Cao et al., 2020). They did not explore the role that customer loyalty plays in reviews and platform reputation. This study enhances the discourse by examining how customer stickiness moderates the relationship between online reviews and platform reputation. This perspective is crucial for developing strategies tailored to the diverse needs and behaviours of users in CBEB platforms.

In summary, by bridging these gaps, the article not only extends the existing body of knowledge on the influence of online reviews in e-commerce but also provides actionable insights that can help CBEB platforms enhance their strategic approaches to managing consumer perceptions and strengthening their market position globally. The inclusion of cultural diversity, technological progression and the unique characteristics of CBEB platforms contributes to a more comprehensive framework for understanding the complex dynamics of global e-commerce.

Research hypothesis and theoretical model

A virtual community forms when people with shared interests or goals gather online to communicate. In China, with advancements in Internet technology, virtual communities have become central to discussing platform functions and sharing post-use experiences, serving as a major source of information and word-of-mouth for consumers. These online reviews help mitigate perceived risks associated with e-business platforms. This article, building on Sun et al. (2019), categorises online reviews into four dimensions: reviewer credibility, review community reputation, review quality and review consensus.

Previous research indicates that source reliability significantly impacts online reviews. In virtual communities, where reviewers are often anonymous, consumers must assess the reliability of reviews themselves to determine their validity. According to Román et al. (2023), higher perceived reliability of the reviewer enhances trust and perceived usefulness of online reviews, thereby affecting consumer trust in the platform's seller.

Review community reputation refers to the ability of a community website to provide information and the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the information provided. Gu et al. (2020) used better-known websites to represent trustworthy sources and found that word-of-mouth from better-known websites had a greater effect than word-of-mouth from lesser-known websites. Cao (2023) verified the effect of online reputation on consumers' choice of trustworthy platforms in his article that influences customers' purchasing decisions through trust.

Scholars measured online review quality based on content aspects such as truthfulness, reliability, relevance and completeness (Li et al., 2023b). Research consistently shows that high-quality reviews positively influence consumer purchase decisions. Beikverdi et al. (2024) found that longer reviews, which provide more product details, enhance review validity and affect purchase choices. In addition, picture reviews, because of their visual impact, are more influential than text reviews in driving purchase intentions (Riswanto et al., 2024). High-quality reviews, reflecting genuine consumer experiences, effectively reduce transaction uncertainty and aid in informed purchasing decisions (Hina et al., 2025).

Review consensus, which involves the agreement among reviewers regarding an e-business platform's rating or

support, can be quantified through metrics such as the number of reviews, overall ratings and review support (Ba et al., 2022). Traditional studies often emphasised the volume of reviews, but contemporary analysis also considers review ratings. Review consensus is achieved when there is both a high number of reviews and consistent overall ratings. Gu et al. (2020) demonstrated through empirical research that the quality of review content, the credibility of the reviewer and the quantity and quality of reviews positively affect consumer perceptions and trust in e-business platforms. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Online reviews in virtual community influence consumers' perceived reputation of sellers on CBEB platforms.

If buyers believe that the e-business platform has a good perceived reputation, they will believe that the e-business platform will design and implement the platform market system in a fair and just manner, thus prompting the platform sellers to give up opportunistic behaviours and adhere to good business practices (Miao et al., 2022). Platform transactions are characterised by spatial and temporal separation, virtual contract execution and the anonymity and random matching of transaction parties. These features diminish interpersonal trust while amplifying the importance of institutional trust, thereby enhancing the role of platform-based institutional trust mechanisms in shaping buyers' perceptions of seller reputation and behavioural attributes through online review systems. Taking this into account, this article proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Platform market institution trust mediates the process of online reviews influencing the perceived reputation of platform sellers.

In platform transactions, buyers and sellers are direct stakeholders. When buyers' commitment or repeat purchase behaviour is influenced by platform shopping efficacy, the focus is on the platform seller. Buyers who perceive higher shopping efficacy are more confident in sellers' ability to meet their needs and are likely to provide positive evaluations (Qian et al., 2023). They also perceive lower risk, trust sellers more and handle the shopping process's complexity and uncertainty better (Rasty et al., 2021). Consequently, if buyers view a seller positively, they are more likely to have favourable attitudes towards the seller. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: Platform shopping efficacy plays a mediating role in the impact of online reviews on the perceived reputation of platform sellers.

Platform shopping efficacy perceptions can be positively influenced by website operational capabilities and social support. Online reviews, reflecting website authenticity, may enhance platform shopping efficacy, thereby impacting the perceived reputation of platform sellers. In addition, platform market institution trust, as a form of social support, could positively affect shopping efficacy perceptions (Yahia et al., 2018). Combining the above analyses, this article suggests that platform market institution trust and platform shopping efficacy may play a chain mediating role in the process of online reviews' influence on sellers' perceived reputation. However, platform sellers are practitioners of the platform market institution, and the overall perceived reputation of sellers can be regarded as a characterisation of the efficacy of the platform market institution, and there is no causal logical relationship between the two (Hussain et al., 2021). The chain mediating role of platform shopping efficacy and platform market institution trust in the transfer of online reviews to platform sellers' perceived reputation cannot be supported by theory. Because of this, this article proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: Platform market institution trust and platform shopping efficacy play a chain mediating role in the process of online reviews' influence on platform sellers' perceived reputation.

Customers found that customer stickiness in the background of CBEB platform has the characteristics of both 'shopping' and 'buying', that is, it contains two dimensions, namely, 'access stickiness' and 'purchase stickiness' (Li et al., 2021). In many cases, customers come to an e-business platform not to purchase but simply to browse, so that customers spend more time on the platform, which is also of commercial significance, and thus both customer access stickiness and purchase stickiness will bring economic value to the platform (Karaman, 2021). Among them, 'purchase stickiness' can directly increase the sales and profits of the platform, while 'customer behaviour big data' formed based on 'access stickiness' also contains great indirect value (Kour & Chhabria, 2022). Therefore, the relationship between e-business platforms and customers is no longer just about repeated purchases and mass purchases but also about the continuous and long-lasting relationship between platforms and customers during visits and browsing. Therefore, in the face of multiple platform choices, extending their stay time, increasing the frequency of visits and extending the depth of visits are the manifestation of customers' adhesion to a particular platform.

In the background of e-business platforms, online reviews promote customer interaction with the platform, and the higher the frequency of customer visits to the e-business platform, the more customers will subconsciously enhance their sense of identity and loyalty to the e-business platform (Ting & Ahn, 2023). In addition, positive customer feedback and word-of-mouth will further enhance the seller's perceived reputation (Belhadi et al., 2023). And the higher frequency of consumers purchasing the platform's goods indicates that customers are more satisfied with the platform's goods and services. Positive online reviews may strengthen customers' purchasing intention, which in turn increases the e-business platform's awareness and reputation. Based on this, this research proposes the hypothesis that:

H5: The higher the customer access stickiness, the stronger the positive influence of online reviews on the perceived reputation of CBEB platform sellers. The lower the customer access stickiness, the weaker the positive influence of online reviews on the perceived reputation of CBEB platform sellers.

H6: The higher the customer purchase stickiness, the stronger the positive influence of online reviews on the perceived

reputation of CBEB platform sellers. The lower the customer purchase stickiness, the weaker the positive influence of online reviews on the perceived reputation of CBEB platform sellers.

Accordingly, this article constructs a theoretical model of the influence mechanism of online reviews on the perceived reputation of platform sellers, as shown in Figure 1.

Methodology

Questionnaire design

In this article, consumers who browse online reviews of virtual communities and make online purchases on CBEB platforms are taken as survey respondents, and samples are selected using random sampling method. On the basis of the questionnaires of previous research, the corresponding contextual adjustments were made by combining the characteristics of virtual communities and China's CBEB platforms (e.g., regarding platform features, users can be asked whether they have used the search functions of Chinese shopping apps such as Taobao or JD.com, and to evaluate their convenience; regarding community interaction, users can be asked whether they share shopping experiences on Chinese social apps such as Little Red Book or Douban, and to assess the impact on their purchasing decisions). The electronic questionnaires were distributed to virtual community platforms (e.g. Zhihu, Little Red Book, Weibo, Today's headlines, Amazon 1688, Hugo.com, Fubu foreign trade forum, Global foreign trade forum, Chuanglang forum, Wear seller community, DHgate.com and Ennews.com, etc.) to find the data. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: survey background introduction, consumer profile survey and consumer behaviour survey, and the survey items were assessed by employing a five-point Likert scale for measurement.

Measurement of variables

There are 41 items in this study, including 8 personal information items as well as 33 consumer behaviour survey items. The scale is contextually adapted to the characteristics of Chinese CBEB platforms, and the specific variable measures and literature sources are provided in Table 1.

Pre-survey and questionnaire revision

Pre-survey is a necessary step before the formal research; through the pre-survey, the problem can be identified in the questionnaire design, and corresponding changes and adjustments can be made to address these problems to ensure the influence of the formal research. In the pre-survey, a total of 120 valid questionnaires were returned.

Based on the pre-study data, this study conducted a reliability test by calculating Cronbach's α coefficient. The results showed that the Cronbach's α coefficients of each variable and the total scale were larger than 0.8000, denoting that the scale had a high level of reliability. The validity analysis used the principal component analysis framework in the exploratory factor analysis method, and the factors were extracted by the rotation with the largest variance, and the selection standard of the factors was the eigenvalue greater than 1. The outcome showed that the structure of the eight factors was stable, there was no cross-factorial situation, and the loadings of each factor were all greater than 0.5000, reliant on the scale of who? Wen, Ma, & Lyu, (2024), which pointed out that the validity level of the scale was good. In summary, the questionnaire used in the pre-survey can be used in the formal studies.

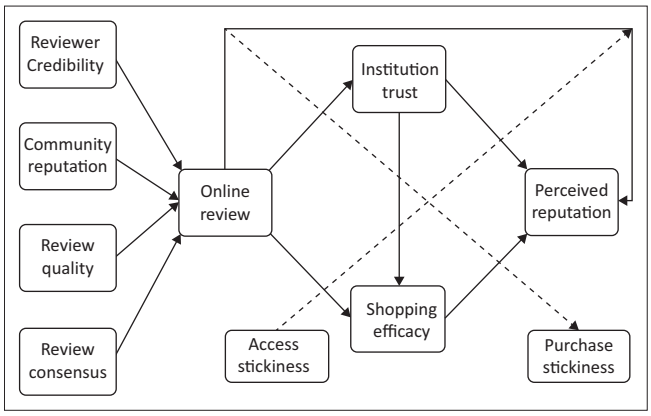


FIGURE 1: Theoretical model diagram.

Results

Descriptive statistical analyses

In this article, a total of 576 questionnaires were returned by means of electronic questionnaires distributed over the Internet, and the returned questionnaires are cleaned and rejected according to the following two basic principles (The questionnaire question type is in Chinese) (Wen et al., 2024). Firstly, whether the IP addresses of the questionnaires are the same to screen for duplicate responses. Secondly, whether the answers to similar questions are the same to screen for false responses. In the end, 529 qualified questionnaires are retained, with a validity rate of 91.84%.

The sample demographics indicate that 41.67% are male and 58.33% are female. Most participants are aged 22–34 years (63.72%). The majority are university undergraduates (50.35%), with school students (48.61%) and office workers (27.43%) being the primary occupations. Exposure to CBEB platforms ranged mainly from 1 year to 3 years (43.23%). The most frequently used virtual communities are Little Red Book (35.07%), Weibo (32.29%), Fubu foreign trade forum (21.88%), Amazon 1688 (19.27%) and Hugo.com (18.06%), with other platforms being used by less than 5% of respondents.

Common method bias test and covariance test

To control for homogeneous variance among data subjects from the same population, this study employed both procedural and statistical controls. Procedurally, questionnaire randomisation and psychological isolation methods were used. Statistically, factor analysis with added latent factors was conducted to test for homoscedasticity bias. Table 2's Panel A shows that model indicators remained stable after including unmeasured latent factors, indicating that serious homoscedastic bias was absent.

TABLE 1: Variables and literature sources.

Concept	Element	Serial number	Measurement item	Literature references
Online review	Reviewer credibility	RC1	The commenter has a high level of experience in the community (e.g. registered early).	Godes and Mayzlin (2004)
		RC2	The commenter is a cross-border connoisseur within that community (e.g. senior member, moderator, etc.).	
		RC3	Reviewer has extensive experience related to CBEB (e.g. cross-border selector designation).	
		RC4	Reviewers have a wealth of knowledge related to cross-border shopping (e.g. many published reviews).	
	Reviewer community reputation	CR1	I believe that the CBEB community itself is trustworthy.	Shamdasani et al. (2001) and Ma et al. (2008)
		CR2	The community is an authoritative leader in the CBEB industry space.	
		CR3	The communities I visit offer online reviews that are truly consumer-sourced.	
		CR4	The community I visit offers online reviews that are not operated by marketers.	
	Review quality	RQ1	The content of this review is true and objective	Chatterjee (2001) and Chen (2007)
		RQ2	The content of this review is closely related to this CBEB platform.	
		RQ3	This review has more details about this CBEB platform (e.g. platform regulation, logistics services, after-sales services for users, etc.)	
		RQ4	This review gave me a tonne of useful information.	
	Review consensus	RS1	This CBEB platform is a hit in the review community.	Román et al. (2023)
		RS2	There are a lot of people posting online reviews for this CBEB platform.	
		RS3	Many respondents thought this CBEB platform was great.	
		RS4	Many respondents expressed support for this CBEB platform.	
Platform market institution trust		IT1	CBEB platforms have institutionalised security and privacy protection structures.	Gefen and Pavlou (2004)
		IT2	Can protect customers' browsing and purchasing behaviour on CBEB platforms.	
		IT3	CBEB platforms make moderate use of customers' personal information.	
Platform shopping effectiveness		SE1	I am confident in my ability to solve problems using virtual community online reviews.	Kim (2005)
		SE2	I think I am good at generating original ideas.	
		SE3	I am skilled at developing my own ideas through the ideas of others.	
Customer stickiness	Access stickiness	AS1	I always stay in that CBEB platform for a long time.	Wen, Ma and Lyu (2024)
		AS2	I visit this CBEB platform very frequently.	
		AS3	I have a very good understanding of the interface design and various functions of this CBEB platform.	
		AS4	I will always maintain the habit of visiting on this CBEB platform.	
	Purchase stickiness	PS1	I buy products from this CBEB platform very frequently.	Tadelis (2016)
		PS2	There are many types of products I buy in this CBEB platform.	
		PS3	I have purchased a large number of products from this CBEB platform.	
		PS4	I will always keep my shopping habits on this CBEB platform.	
Perceived reputation of platform sellers		PR1	The e-business platform is known for providing excellent pre-sales and after-sales services.	Chen (2007) and Ma, Zeng and Abedin (2025)
		PR2	The buyer believes that the CBEB platform provides true and detailed product pictures, descriptions, etc.	
		PR3	The buyer believes that the CBEB platform has a strong platform operation strength.	

Note: Please see the full reference list of this article Ma, S., Zeng, H., Liu, H., & Yan, H. (2025). Impact of online reviews in virtual communities on cross-border e-commerce platform reputation. *South African Journal of Business Management, 56*(1), a4984. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajbm.v56i1.4984 for more information.

CBEB, cross-border e-business; RC, reviewer credibility; CR, community reputation; RQ, review quality; RS, review consensus; IT, institution trust; SE, shopping effectiveness; AS, access stickiness; PS, purchase stickiness; PR, perceived reputation.

For the problem of multicollinearity in the regression equation, it is mainly judged by the variance inflation factor (VIF) and the tolerance. From the table, it can be seen that the tolerance and VIF values of these four factors are close to 1, and the VIF value is less than 10, so it can be considered that the multicollinearity between these variables is not serious. The specific covariance test is shown in Table 2's Panel B.

Reliability analysis

In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess the scale's reliability and internal consistency. The reliability coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, with values closer to 1 indicating better reliability. A value below 0.7000 suggests poor reliability (Liu et al., 2025). The scale, consisting of six dimensions and 33 items, achieved a total Cronbach's alpha of 0.8910, indicating high reliability. Each subscale also had reliability coefficients above 0.7000, confirming robust reliability (Wen et al., 2024). Overall, the scales demonstrated strong reliability and high internal consistency for all measured variables.

TABLE 2a: Factor model and covariance test.

Model	χ^2	*df*	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	IFI	RMSEA
Panel A: Factor model tests							
Seven-factor model	768.849	272	2.827	0.952	0.947	0.952	0.058
Add unmeasured LFM	549.915	275	2.000	0.973	0.971	0.973	0.043
Discrepancy	218.934	-3	0.827	-0.021	-0.024	-0.021	0.015

CFI, comparative fit index; TLI, Tucker-Lewis index, IFI, incremental fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; χ^2/df, minimum discrepancy divided by degrees of freedom; RC, Reviewer credibility; CR, community reputation; RQ, review quality; RS, review consensus; PR, perceived reputation; VIF, variance inflation factor; LFM, latent factor model.

TABLE 2b: Factor model and covariance test.

Model	Non-standardised coefficient		Standardised coefficient	*t*	Significance	Collinearity statistics	
	β	SE	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
Panel B: Tests of covariance							
Constant	0.245	0.092	-	2.669	0.008	-	-
RC	0.167	0.044	0.167	3.804	0.000	0.272	3.681
CR	0.128	0.053	0.127	2.430	0.015	0.192	5.204
RQ	0.295	0.057	0.282	5.137	0.000	0.173	5.781
RS	0.343	0.054	0.326	6.357	0.000	0.198	5.040

SE, standard error; RC, Reviewer credibility; CR, community reputation; RQ, review quality; RS, review consensus; PR, perceived reputation; VIF, variance inflation factor.

Validity analysis

SPSS 28.0 was used to conduct the KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity to assess the data's suitability for factor analysis. The overall KMO value was 0.851, and Bartlett's test showed a chi-square significance level of 0.000, which is below the 0.050 threshold, rejecting the null hypothesis. Each subscale met the KMO criterion with values exceeding 0.700 and Bartlett's test significance levels under 0.050 (Wen et al., 2024). These results indicate that the data are suitable for factor analysis and qualifies for further validation.

AMOS 28.0 was used to validate the questionnaire for convergent and discriminant validity. The standardised factor loadings for all six factors exceeded 0.500, and the composite reliability (CR) values were all above 0.800, with personal inclination and perceived usefulness surpassing 0.9000, indicating strong CR (Wen et al., 2024). The average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.532 to 0.643, exceeding the threshold of 0.500. These results confirm that the scales exhibit excellent convergent validity, as detailed in Table 3's Panel A.

Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing each variable's correlation coefficient with the square root of its AVE value. If the square root of the AVE for each variable exceeds the correlation coefficients with other variables, the scale demonstrates good discriminant validity. Analysis revealed that the square root of the AVE for each variable was indeed greater than its correlation coefficients with other variables, indicating strong discriminant validity and effective differentiation between dimensions. Details are presented in Table 3's Panel B.

TABLE 3a: Convergent and discriminant validity test.

Variant	Subject	Factor loading	α	CR	AVE
Panel A: Effect of convergent validity test					
RC	RC1~RC4	0.783, 0.753, 0.821, 0.847	0.877	0.878	0.643
CR	CR1~CR4	0.782, 0.729, 0.815, 0.786	0.858	0.860	0.607
RQ	RQ1~RQ4	0.770, 0.783, 0.799, 0.811	0.869	0.870	0.625
RS	RS1~RS4	0.790, 0.816, 0.754, 0.793	0.868	0.868	0.622
IT	IT1~IT3	0.790, 0.745, 0.646	0.763	0.772	0.532
SE	SE1~SE3	0.762, 0.744, 0.788	0.808	0.809	0.585
AS	AS1~AS4	0.794, 0.762, 0.774, 0.822	0.867	0.868	0.622
PS	PS1~PS4	0.709, 0.824, 0.793, 0.805	0.861	0.864	0.615
PR	PR1~PR3	0.799, 0.821, 0.766	0.838	0.838	0.633

AVE, average variance extracted; CR, composite reliability; RC, reviewer credibility; CR, community reputation; RQ, review quality; RS, review consensus; IT, institution trust; SE, shopping effectiveness; AS, access stickiness; PS, purchase stickiness; PR, perceived reputation.

TABLE 3b: Convergent and discriminant validity test.

Variant	IT	PR	PS	AS	CC	RQ	CR	RC	SE
Panel B: Effect of discriminant validity test									
IT	0.797	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PR	0.791	0.813	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PS	0.736	0.743	0.782	-	-	-	-	-	-
AS	0.774	0.770	0.753	0.807	-	-	-	-	-
CC	0.789	0.753	0.698	0.740	0.798	-	-	-	-
RQ	0.773	0.741	0.681	0.712	0.760	0.774	-	-	-
CR	0.791	0.747	0.697	0.728	0.766	0.773	0.802	-	-
RC	0.734	0.708	0.643	0.684	0.705	0.704	0.748	0.781	-
SE	0.759	0.730	0.691	0.737	0.741	0.718	0.732	0.683	0.783

AVE, average variance extracted; CR, composite reliability; RC, reviewer credibility; CR, community reputation; RQ, review quality; RS, review consensus; IT, institution trust; SE, shopping effectiveness; AS, access stickiness; PS, purchase stickiness; PR, perceived reputation.

Hypothesis testing

Structural equation modelling test

Following the reliability and validity tests, this article uses an SEM approach for modelling and hypothesis testing. Figure 2 shows the structural equation model.

Before conducting path analysis, the goodness-of-fit of the model needs to be tested, and this article is based on the discriminant criteria for the goodness-of-fit of structural equation models compiled by Ying et al (2025) and Zhou et al (2025).

In absolute fit metrics, RMSEA denotes the square root of the sum of squares of the asymptotic residuals and is usually used to measure the degree of model misfit. The results of the SEM analysis showed that the RMSEA in this study was 0.0330 less than 0.0800, and RMR, which denotes the fitted residuals, was 0.0250, which is less than 0.0500, indicating that the model was well fitted. CMIN/*df* denotes the degree of fit of the model's covariance matrix to the observed data, and when the value is between 1 and 3, it indicates that the fit is very good. The CMIN/*df* value of this study is 1.5860, which is a good fit. In the relative fit indices, NFI is 0.9500, RFI is 0.9430, TLI is 0.9780, CFI is 0.9810 and IFI is 0.9810, and it is usually considered that NFI, RFI, TLI, CFI and IFI greater than 0.9000 indicate goodness-of-fit, and values greater than 0.7000 indicate acceptability. In addition, when the model was subjected to the validation factor in the previous section, it can be seen that the combined reliability of the latent variables is all greater than 0.7000, and the mean variance extracted are all greater than 0.5000, which indicates that the model has an intrinsic goodness-of-fit. It can be seen that all the indicators meet the criteria for the goodness-of-fit of the model, indicating that the model is well adapted, and hypothesis testing can be carried out accordingly.

The article uses the maximum likelihood method to estimate path parameters, with results summarised in Table 4's Panel A. Five out of six hypothesised paths are confirmed, except for H3. The findings demonstrate that online reviews, platform market institution trust and shopping efficiency significantly impact platform sellers' perceived reputation. Specifically, online reviews influence both platform market institution trust and shopping efficiency, which in turn affect the sellers' reputation. However, H3, which posits that online reviews impact shopping efficiency, was not supported. This may be because of the competitive landscape of China's CBEB platforms, where high-quality products and reliable logistics services reduce consumers' attention to shopping efficiency. At the same time, consumers pay more attention to individual sellers and place greater emphasis on

personalised experiences and overall service quality. In addition, the dynamics of the competitive landscape and the adaptability of consumer behaviour also make the impact of shopping efficiency on seller reputation not significant. This phenomenon may be temporary; as the market environment changes and consumer demands further develop, shopping efficiency may once again become an important factor influencing seller reputation in the future.

Mediation effect test

Further results suggest that the effect of online reviews on the perceived reputation of platform sellers is mediated through three mediators: an independent mediator through the platform market institution trust, an independent mediator through perceptions of platform shopping efficacy and a chain mediator through the platform market institution trust and perceptions of platform shopping efficacy. In this study, platform market institution trust and platform shopping efficacy mediate the effect of virtual community online reviews on the perceived reputation of platform sellers, respectively.

As shown in Table 4's Panel B, the mediating effect was further tested using the bias-corrected nonparametric percentile Bootstrap method. The results show that the mediating effect of platform market institution trust and platform shopping efficacy is significant, with a mediating effect value of 0.3590. Specifically, the mediating effect emerges via three chains of mediation. Firstly, the indirect

TABLE 4a: Path weights and statistical and mediating effect test.

Hypothetical path	Structural modelling path	Standardised coefficient	SE	CR	Hypothetical conclusions
Panel A: Path weights and statistical testing results					
H1	OR → IT	0.781***	0.047	16.408	Support
H2	IT → PR	0.253***	0.017	14.540	Support
H3	OR → SE	0.041	0.026	1.577	Reject
H4	SE → PR	0.313***	0.023	13.376	Support
H5	IT → SE	0.335***	0.042	7.976	Support
H6	OR → PR	0.404***	0.041	9.711	Support

CR, composite reliability; SE, standard error; OR, online review; IT, institution trust; PR, perceived reputation; SE, shopping effectiveness.
***, significance at the 1% level.

TABLE 4b: Path weights and statistical and mediating effect test.

Trails	Intermediary effect	Percentage of total effect proportions	95% confidence interval	
			Boot CL lower limit	Boot CL upper limit
Panel B: Mediating effect test				
Ind1: OR → IT → PR	0.1939	21.32	0.1076	0.2799
Ind2: OR → SE → PR	0.1321	14.53	0.0545	0.2096
Ind3: OR → IT → SE → PR	0.0330	3.63	0.0101	0.0637
Ind1+Ind2+ Ind3	0.3590	39.48	0.2285	0.4819
Ind1-Ind2	0.0618	-	-0.0579	0.1842
Ind1-Ind3	0.1609	-	0.0709	0.2486
Ind2-Ind3	0.0991	-	0.0385	0.1698

CR, composite reliability; SE, standard error; OR, online review; IT, institution trust; PR, perceived reputation; SE, shopping effectiveness; CL, confidence level.

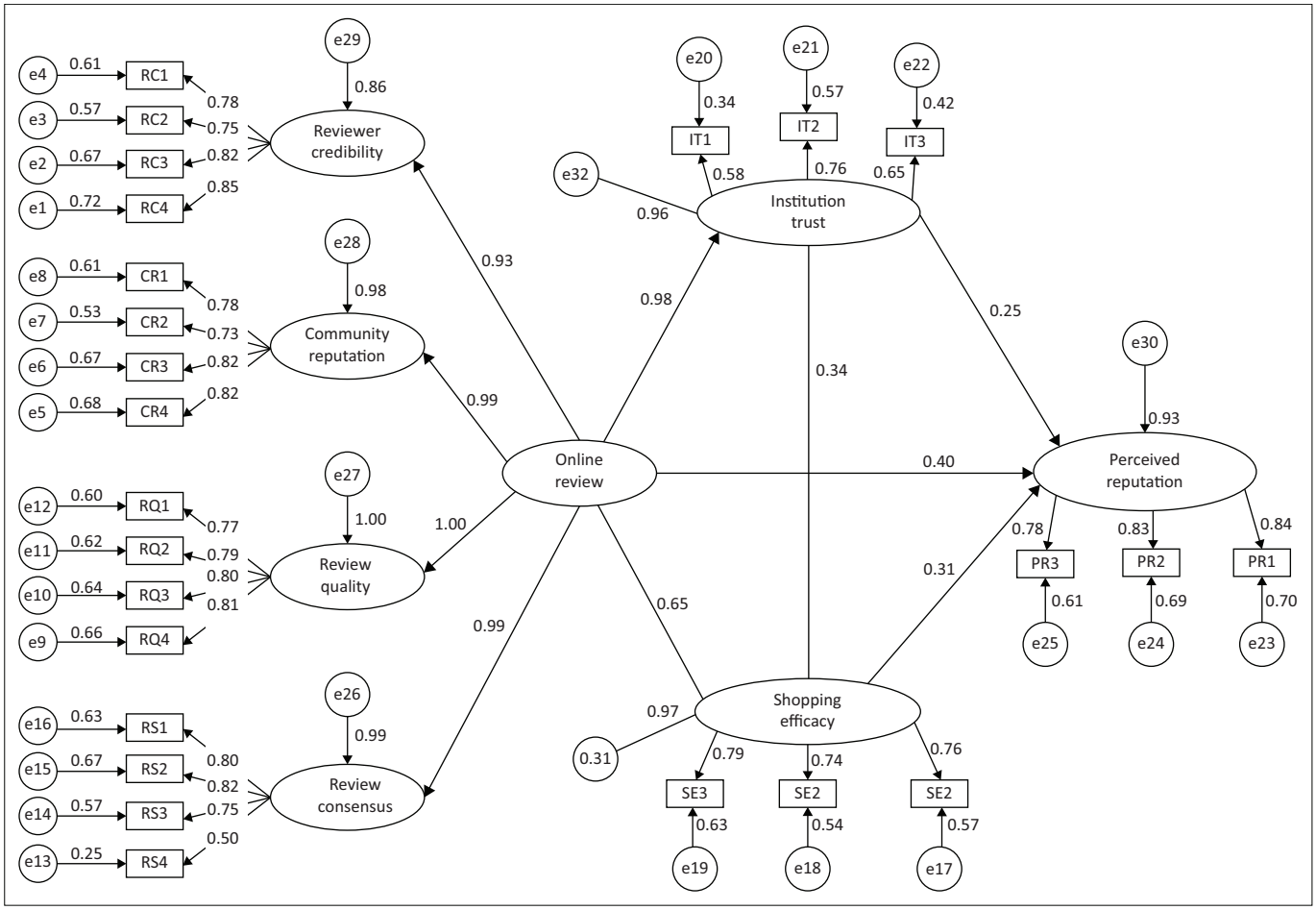


FIGURE 2: Structural equation model.

effect lnd1 (0.1939) consisting of online reviews → platform market institution trust → platform sellers' perceived reputations, with a Bootstrap 95% confidence interval that does not contain 0, indicates that the mediating effect of platform market institution trust has a significant mediating effect. Secondly, the indirect effect lnd3 (0.0330) consisting of online comments → platform market institution trust → platform shopping efficacy → platform sellers' perceived reputation, with Bootstrap 95% confidence intervals not containing 0, suggests that the chain mediating role of platform market institution trust and platform shopping efficacy between online comments in the virtual community and platform sellers' perceived reputation is significant. Thirdly, the indirect effect lnd2 (0.1321) consisting of online reviews → platform shopping efficacy → platform sellers' perceived reputation, with Bootstrap 95% confidence intervals not containing 0, suggests that the mediating role of platform shopping efficacy is significant. The specific path of online reviews acting on platform sellers' perceived reputation is shown in Figure 3.

As shown in Table 5, mediation effect analyses were conducted using the SPSS macro program Process, prepared by Hayes, to analyse the mediating role of platform market institution trust and platform shopping efficacy in the relationship between online reviews in virtual communities and perceived reputation of platform sellers, controlling for gender and age.

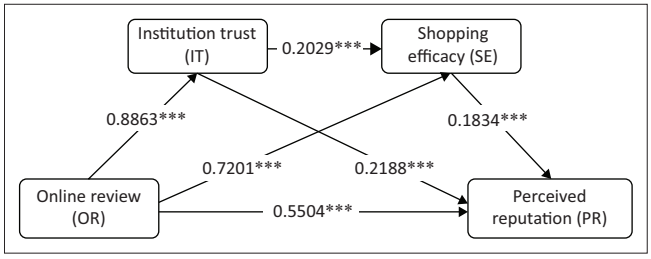
Regression analyses showed that online comments had a direct positive predictive effect on platform market institution trust ($\beta = 0.8863$, $p < 0.01$) and platform shopping efficacy ($\beta = 0.7201$, $p < 0.01$). Platform market institution trust had a direct positive predictive effect on sense of platform shopping efficacy ($\beta = 0.2029$, $p < 0.01$). When online reviews, platform market institution trust and platform shopping efficacy simultaneously predicted platform sellers' perceived reputation, online reviews, platform market institution trust and platform shopping efficacy all had a significant positive predictive effect on platform sellers' perceived reputation ($\beta = 0.5504$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = 0.2188$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = 0.1834$, $p < 0.01$).

Further analysis

In this study, consumers were assigned a value of 1 for browsing online reviews and –1 for not browsing online reviews, and customer stickiness (divided into access stickiness and purchase stickiness) was centred. To test the moderating role of customer stickiness between online reviews and platform sellers' perceived reputation in virtual communities, stepwise regression analyses were conducted with online reviews, customer stickiness and the product of online reviews and customer stickiness as the independent variables, and platform sellers' perceived reputation as the dependent variable, respectively. The specific results of the analyses are shown in Table 6.

Testing for the moderating effect of access stickiness

The analyses showed that the interaction term between online reviews and access stickiness was significantly related to platform sellers' perceived reputation ($\beta = -0.479$, $p < 0.05$). To further understand how customer access stickiness moderates the relationship between online reviews and platform seller's perceived reputation, the relationship was examined separately for high and low access stickiness levels. Simple main effects analyses showed a significant main effect of online reviews ($\beta = 0.515$, $p < 0.001$), a significant main effect of access stickiness ($\beta = 0.467$, $p < 0.001$). For subjects with high levels of access stickiness (mean plus one standard deviation), subjects in the group of browsed online reviews endorsed the perceived reputation of the platform seller significantly more than subjects in the group of not browsed online reviews ($M_{not\ browse} = 1.112$, $M_{browse} = 2.106$, $p < 0.001$). As for subjects with low access stickiness levels (mean minus one standard deviation), the difference in perceived reputation of platform sellers between subjects in the browsing online reviews group and subjects in the not browsing online reviews group was not significant ($M_{not\ browse} = 2.012$, $M_{browse} = 2.110$, $p = 0.891 > 0.05$). In addition, subjects with high levels of access stickiness valued platform sellers'



***, significance at the 1% level.

FIGURE 3: Diagram of the role of chained intermediaries.

TABLE 5: Regression analysis.

Variables		Overall fit index			Significance of regression coefficients	
Outcome variable	Predictor variable	*R*	R^2	*F*	B	*T*
IT	Gender	0.8627	0.7442	518.9000	0.0298	0.7101
	Age	-	-	-	-0.0420	-1.8905
	OR	-	-	-	0.8863	36.4533***
SE	Gender	0.8650	0.7482	396.6310	0.0062	0.1469
	Age	-	-	-	-0.0062	-0.2797
	OR	-	-	-	0.7201	15.8657***
	IT	-	-	-	0.2029	4.6925***
PR	Gender	0.8605	0.7405	304.2207	0.0045	0.1011
	Age	-	-	-	-0.0358	-1.5200
	OR	-	-	-	0.5504	9.4648***
	IT	-	-	-	0.2188	4.6942***
	SE	-	-	-	0.1834	4.0122***

OR, online review; IT, institution trust; PR, perceived reputation; SE, shopping effectiveness.
***, significance at the 1% level.

TABLE 6: Customer stickiness regulatory test.

Customer stickiness (CS)	Trails	Standardised coefficient	SE	CR	*P*
AS	OR → PR	0.515	0.091	5.017	0.000
	AS → PR	0.467	0.104	4.355	0.000
	OR × AS → PR	-0.276	0.141	-0.256	0.016 < 0.05
PS	OR → PR	0.337	0.115	3.031	0.002 < 0.05
	PS → PR	0.633	0.102	5.857	0.000
	OR × PS → PR	-0.379	0.149	-0.924	0.05

CR, composite reliability; SE, standard error; OR, online review; PR, perceived reputation; AS, access stickiness; PS, purchase stickiness.

perceived reputation more than subjects with low levels of access stickiness, and hypothesis 5 was partially valid, and Figure 4 presents these test results visually.

Testing for the moderating effect of purchase stickiness

The analyses revealed that the interaction term between online reviews and purchase stickiness was significantly related to platform sellers' perceived reputation ($\beta = -0.379$, $p < 0.05$). To further understand how customer purchase stickiness moderates the relationship between online reviews and platform seller's perceived reputation, the relationship was examined separately for high and low purchase stickiness levels. Simple main effects analyses showed a significant main effect of online reviews ($\beta = 0.337$, $p < 0.001$), a significant main effect of visit stickiness ($\beta = 0.633$, $p < 0.001$), and, for subjects with high levels of purchase stickiness (mean plus one standard deviation), subjects in the browsed online reviews group endorsed the perceived reputation of the platform seller significantly more than subjects in the not browsed online reviews group ($M_{not\ browse} = 1.321$, $M_{browse} = 1.898$, $p < 0.001$). As for subjects with low purchase stickiness levels (mean minus one standard deviation), subjects in the browsed online reviews group had significantly lower perceived reputation endorsement of platform sellers than subjects in the not browsed online reviews group ($M_{not\ browse} = 2.271$, $M_{browse} = 2.118$, $p = 0.891 > 0.05$). In addition, subjects with high purchase levels valued platform sellers perceived reputation more than subjects with low purchase stickiness levels. Hypothesis 6 is verified, and Figure 5 visually presents the results of these tests.

Customer stickiness moderates the effect of online reviews on platform sellers' perceived reputation. Higher customer visit stickiness amplifies the positive impact of online reviews on sellers' reputation, while lower stickiness diminishes this effect. Thus, CBEB platforms should enhance customer visit stickiness to attract and retain attention, increase trust and improve sellers' perceived reputation. In addition, higher purchase stickiness strengthens the influence of online reviews on reputation, whereas lower stickiness weakens it. Platforms should therefore focus on effective advertisement strategies, multichannel brand communication and engaging marketing methods, such as live streaming, themed promotions and interactive games, to boost customer purchasing desires and enhance sellers' reputations. Furthermore, platforms should conduct visual analyses of consumer attributes and behaviours to provide personalised recommendations, improving user engagement and marketing effectiveness, thereby reinforcing the sellers' perceived reputation.

Conclusion

By exploring and examining the effects and mechanisms of online reviews in virtual communities on the perceived reputation of platform sellers, the following main conclusions were reached.

Firstly, online reviews in virtual communities significantly enhance the perceived reputation of platform sellers, with each unit increase in reviews boosting the perceived reputation by 0.404 units. Customers assess reviewer credibility, community reputation, review quality and review consensus during online interactions. More positive reviews lead to a higher perceived reputation of sellers and increased consumer trust and willingness to purchase.

Secondly, platform market institution trust and platform shopping efficacy play a chain mediating role in the influence of virtual community online reviews on the perceived reputation of CBEB platform sellers. In other words, online reviews positively influence consumers' trust in the platform market, which improves their sense of the platform shopping efficacy and ultimately enhances the perceived reputation of platform sellers. Through empirical tests, it is found that online reviews not only have a direct impact on the perceived reputation of platform sellers but also indirectly affect consumers' perceived reputation of platform sellers through the chain intermediary of the platform market institution trust and the sense of the platform shopping efficacy.

Thirdly, customer stickiness moderates the relationship between online reviews and platform sellers' perceived reputation. When customer access stickiness is high, online reviews positively affect platform sellers' perceived reputation. When customer access stickiness is low, online reviews do not significantly affect platform sellers' perceived reputation. When customer purchase stickiness is high, online reviews positively influence platform sellers' perceived reputation. When customer purchase stickiness is low, online reviews negatively affect the platform seller's perceived reputation.

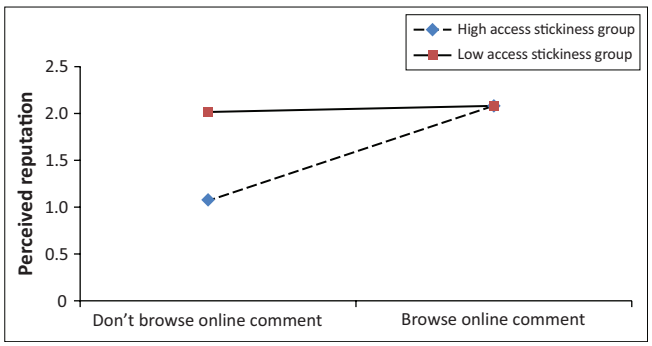


FIGURE 4: Customer access stickiness regulatory effect.

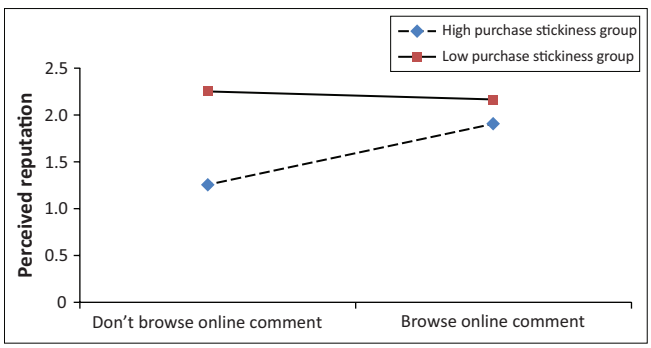


FIGURE 5: Customer purchase stickiness regulatory effect.

Recommendations

For CBEB platforms, the following specific measures can be taken based on the outcome of this article to effectively enhance the reputation of platform sellers.

Firstly, CBEB platforms should implement measures to incentivise users to write reviews, such as offering virtual badges, points or monetary rewards, while preventing manipulation of the review system to maintain credibility. Secondly, to improve accessibility and avoid information overload, platforms could cap review word counts and encourage image-based reviews, alongside developing guidelines for detailed and relevant feedback. Thirdly, incentivising sellers to positively respond to reviews through an after-sales service attitude points mechanism can enhance decision-making for potential users. Fourthly, platforms should focus on increasing visit and purchase stickiness by optimising website experiences, providing valuable content, and personalising recommendations. Finally, high-reputation platforms should refine reviewer information systems to attract consumers, while lower-reputation platforms should focus on improving product quality and service to build trust rather than relying on review systems alone.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

S.M. was involved in writing, method; H.Z. performed formal analysis, investigation; H.L. was responsible for data curation, resources; H.Y. performed revision and funding. All authors have made equal contributions and should be regarded as co-first authors.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, H.Z., upon reasonable request.

Disclaimer

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