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The Impact of Platform WOM Information on Consumers' Purchase Intention in Community Group Buying: The Roles of Perceived Risk and Social Presence

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Abstract— *Community group buying integrates online pre-sales, community interaction, and offline self-pickup services. Because consumers cannot fully assess product quality before making a purchase, platform word-of-mouth (WOM) information has become an important source of information for purchasing decisions. Drawing on the Technology Acceptance Model and research on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), this study examines the relationships between three dimensions of platform WOM—information credibility, WOM from repeat customers, and positive reviews containing negative information—and consumers' purchase intentions in community group buying. Perceived usefulness, perceived risk, and social presence are incorporated as mediating variables. Questionnaire surveys and statistical analyses were conducted, with the descriptive statistics and multiple-response tables in the original manuscript based on 226 respondents. The results indicate that information credibility, WOM from repeat customers, and mixed reviews are significantly associated with purchase intention, although the strength of these associations varies. Social presence received consistent statistical support as a mediator in two pathways, whereas the indirect effect of perceived usefulness was not statistically significant.*

Keywords— ***Community group buying; Online Word-of-mouth (WOM); Purchase intention; Perceived risk; Social presence; Perceived usefulness***

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Research Background and Research Questions

The development of mobile internet technologies and the digital transformation of the retail sector have accelerated the integration of online transactions, social communication, and community-based services. Community group buying relies on community residents or nearby business operators as organizational intermediaries, integrating online ordering, centralized order aggregation, consolidated delivery, and offline self-pickup into a relatively complete transaction process. As early as 2016, some fresh food retailers in Changsha had begun experimenting with community group buying. Around 2018, platforms such as Shixianghui and Linlinyi attracted considerable attention from investors. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and periodic restrictions on offline shopping further increased public awareness and expanded the usage scenarios of this business model. These developments reflect the specific market context in which this research was initially conceived, rather than an assessment of the current industry scale or competitive landscape.

Compared with traditional in-store retail, consumers participating in community group buying generally need to

evaluate products before physically inspecting them. This is particularly relevant to fresh food products, for which specifications, quantities, freshness, and actual delivery conditions cannot be fully assessed based solely on product images. Meanwhile, some platforms have previously exhibited problems such as limited access to rating information, insufficient visibility of product reviews, and inadequate product descriptions. Incomplete information presentation may widen the information asymmetry between buyers and sellers, thereby increasing consumers' perceived uncertainty regarding product quality, value for money, and service fulfillment. Consequently, the authenticity and reliability of review information, the purchasing experiences of repeat customers, and consumers' interpretations of negative information embedded in positive reviews may all serve as important cues influencing purchase decisions.

Platform reviews are not characterized solely by their positive or negative valence. On the one hand, detailed consumer reviews can help potential buyers identify the actual characteristics and performance of products. On the other hand, repeat-customer labels may indicate sustained purchasing experience, while positive reviews containing negative information may simultaneously convey credibility and provide warnings about potential risks. The same review information may elicit different psychological responses among consumers. Some may perceive it as useful information for decision-making; others may become more alert to potential purchasing risks, while still others may develop a sense of social connection by observing interactions among fellow consumers. Therefore, examining only the direct relationship between online WOM and purchase intention is insufficient to explain the differentiated psychological mechanisms through which various types of review information influence consumer decisions.

2 Research Objectives and Research Significance

In response to the aforementioned issues, this study establishes three primary research objectives. First, it distinguishes among online WOM information credibility, WOM from repeat customers, and positive WOM containing negative information, and examines the relationships between these different review cues and consumers' purchase intentions. Second, it incorporates perceived usefulness, perceived risk, and social presence as mediating variables to investigate the cognitive and interactive mechanisms through which different types of WOM information may influence purchase intention. Third, based on the empirical evidence supported by the questionnaire survey and statistical analyses, this study proposes recommendations for platform review management and marketing practices.

From a theoretical perspective, this study integrates the content characteristics of online WOM with the individual cognitive mechanisms emphasized by the Technology Acceptance Model, thereby broadening the analytical perspective of existing research on community group buying, which has primarily focused on factors such as price, convenience, and consumer satisfaction. From a practical perspective, the findings may provide useful insights for platforms seeking to improve the visibility of consumer reviews, establish traceable review management mechanisms, and enhance the quality of offline self-pickup services.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

1. The Concept and Information Characteristics of Online WOM

Traditional WOM refers to the interpersonal exchange of information among consumers based on their experiences with products, brands, or services. When consumer reviews are recorded and disseminated through shopping applications, social media platforms, and other internet-based channels, they constitute eWOM. Unlike corporate advertising, the persuasive power of eWOM is not inherently greater; rather, it depends on the specificity of the information, the credibility of its source, and the extent to which recipients perceive the content as relevant to their purchasing decisions. Wang et al. (2012) examined WOM mechanisms from the perspective of dynamic interactions through online replies. Zheng (2017) reviewed the relationship between eWOM and consumer behavior, emphasizing the need to distinguish among dimensions such as review volume, information quality, review valence, and presentation format.

Regarding review volume, Yang’s (2015) study of online sales of experience products indicated that the positive effect of eWOM volume may be more pronounced during the initial stage but gradually diminishes over time, suggesting that the influence of online reviews has a temporal dimension. Gong et al. (2013) conducted an empirical analysis based on approximately 32 million online book reviews and identified a significant relationship between eWOM volume, review valence, and product sales.

In terms of review valence, online reviews generally contain positive, negative, or neutral information. Cui et al. (2012) examined the effects of online consumer reviews on new product sales. Ardizzone and Mortara (2014)

explored consumers' motivations for participating in group-buying deals, while Zhang et al. (2016) investigated online group-buying from the perspectives of relationship value, relationship quality, and consumer loyalty. Their findings suggest that positive WOM is associated with the maintenance of customer relationships.

Information credibility represents another important factor linking review content to consumers' purchasing decisions. Huang and Lao (2013) suggested that review quality and source credibility are associated with consumers' perceived value and purchase intention. When platforms contain incentivized positive reviews or reviews whose authenticity is difficult to verify, consumers may experience both information overload and uncertainty regarding information authenticity. Therefore, research on online review systems should focus not only on the positive or negative valence of reviews but also on whether the information provided is sufficiently reliable and comprehensive to help consumers form well-founded purchasing judgments.

2. Transaction Characteristics and Existing Research on Community Group Buying

Xue (2011) examined community-based online group-buying from the perspectives of community organizers and product supply chains. Huang (2019) further incorporated mobile platforms, community-based pre-sales, platform-organized delivery, and offline self-pickup into the operational definition of community group buying. Drawing on these studies, this paper defines community group buying as a transaction model in which consumers place orders through shopping applications, mini-programs, or community-based channels, after which platforms consolidate orders and arrange centralized delivery, while community group leaders or designated self-pickup points coordinate order fulfillment. The products involved include fresh produce, snacks, and daily necessities, rather than being restricted to any particular product category or platform.

Compared with conventional online shopping, community group buying is characterized by the combined effects of collective purchasing, localized self-pickup services, and relatively close-knit community interactions. Kauffman and Wang (2002) explained consumers' transaction motivations from the perspectives of group-buying participation and pricing mechanisms. Hsu (2014) found that website satisfaction, merchant satisfaction, and perceived website quality are associated with repurchase intention. Che (2015) reported that transaction unpredictability, personalization, and trust have varying effects on consumers' intentions to revisit group-buying websites. Deng (2015) analyzed the motivations for participating in online group-buying across six dimensions: enjoyment, convenience, security, service, price, and social interaction. Collectively, these studies indicate that consumers participating in group-buying do not base their purchasing decisions solely on low prices; service reliability and social interaction also play important explanatory roles.

Nevertheless, existing research has primarily focused on economic incentives, website satisfaction, and continuance intentions in conventional group-buying contexts. In contrast, review information in community group buying has distinct community-based characteristics. Reviews may reflect consumers' actual purchasing experiences, repeat customers' reviews may be specifically identified by platform labels, and the offline self-pickup process makes service experiences more dependent on local community organizers. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish among the credibility of WOM information, experiential cues provided by repeat customers, and positive reviews containing negative information, and to further investigate how consumers derive perceptions of usefulness, risk, and social presence from these different types of information.

3. Technology Acceptance Model and Mediating Mechanisms

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), proposed by Davis (1989), explains individuals' acceptance of information technology primarily through perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. This study draws on the fundamental logic of TAM, particularly its emphasis on individual cognitive evaluations, and extends its application to the context of community group buying. From an information-processing perspective, highly credible reviews may reduce consumers' information-screening costs, improve their understanding of product characteristics and transaction conditions, and thereby enhance perceived usefulness. Reviews from repeat customers may serve as reference cues for evaluating product consistency and reliability. Meanwhile, positive reviews containing negative information may provide more comprehensive details but may also raise concerns about potential product or service deficiencies.

Perceived risk refers to consumers' perceptions of uncertainty regarding product quality, pricing, service fulfillment, and personal privacy. Social presence, in contrast, reflects the sense of interaction, interpersonal closeness, and social connection that consumers experience when viewing and interpreting other consumers' reviews. These three psychological constructs are conceptually distinct and may influence purchase intention through different mechanisms and in different directions.

Accordingly, this study develops a conceptual framework comprising three types of WOM information, three psychological mediating variables, and consumers' purchase intention, and empirically examines the nine corresponding indirect-effect pathways.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

1. Research Model

The research model designates online review information credibility, repeat customer reviews, and mixed-valence positive reviews as explanatory variables; perceived usefulness, perceived risk, and social presence as candidate mediating variables; and consumer purchase intention as the outcome variable. Online review information credibility comprises two measurement dimensions: review quality and source trustworthiness.

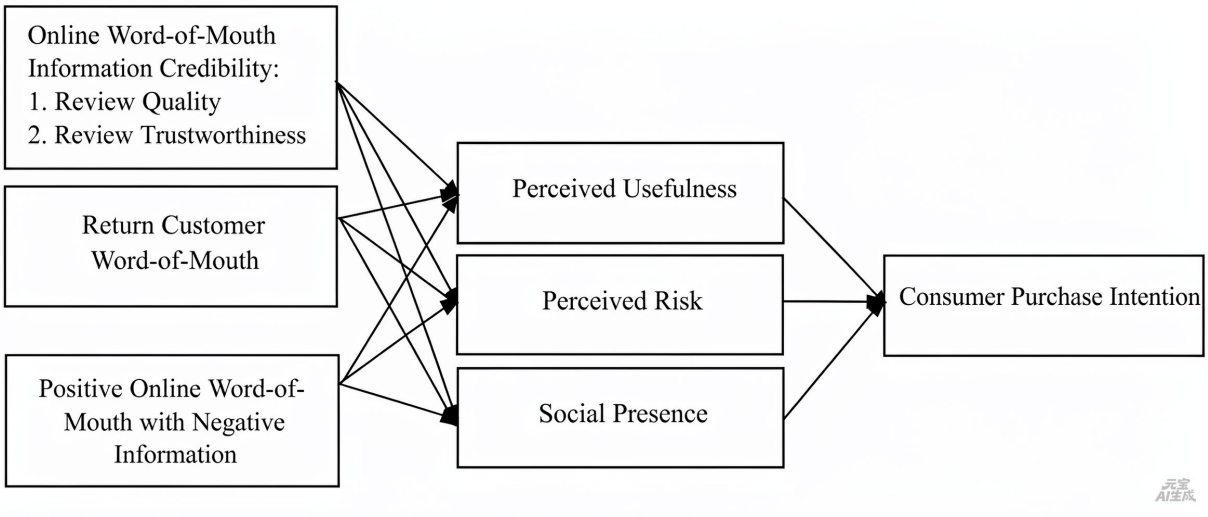


Fig.1 Research model of this study

2. Operationalization and Measurement of Variables

This study adopted existing measurement scales and adapted their wording to the context of community group buying. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure respondents' levels of agreement with each statement. Online review information credibility comprised eight items. The review quality dimension was adapted from Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2004), Hu (2012), and Zheng (2008), assessing the authenticity, objectivity, reliability, and usefulness of review content. The source credibility dimension was adapted from Jain and Posavac (2001), Cheung (2008), and Ehsan et al. (2019), measuring the persuasiveness, perceived impression, accuracy, and overall credibility of review information. Distinguishing between review quality and source credibility helps avoid conflating evaluations of review content with trust in the information source.

WOM from repeat customers was adapted from Park (2007) and Liu and Xu (2016). Four items were used to examine whether reviews from repeat customers could reduce consumers' unfamiliarity with products, alleviate anxiety associated with first-time purchases, and influence purchasing judgments through the number of repeat-customer reviews and the specificity of their comments. Positive reviews containing negative information were adapted from Li (2014) and Shi et al. (2016). Four items were designed to assess consumers' trust in such reviews, their perceptions of product shortcomings and service deficiencies, and their potential intention to abandon a purchase.

Perceived usefulness was adapted from Park and Lee (2009), with three items measuring whether reviews enhance consumers' understanding of products, provide comprehensive and important information, and offer valuable input for purchasing decisions. Perceived risk was adapted from Ye (2014) and Zhao et al. (2015). Four items were used to assess consumers' concerns about products or services failing to meet expectations, discrepancies between price and perceived value, conditions at self-pickup locations, and potential personal information leakage. Social presence was adapted from Teng (2013), Yu and Dou (2014), and Lu (2016). Four items were used to measure consumers' perceived closeness to merchants, the reference value of other

consumers' reviews, emotional responses, and purchasing tendencies stimulated by online interactions. Purchase intention was adapted from Bansal and Voyer (2000), with five items examining whether reviews provide new decision-making information, influence purchasing judgments, enhance decision-making clarity, change purchasing attitudes, and ultimately affect purchase decisions.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections: respondents' demographic characteristics, their community group-buying usage patterns, and 32 measurement items covering the seven research constructs. A total of 232 questionnaire responses were collected, of which 226 were considered valid for subsequent analysis. The online questionnaire was designed and administered through Questionnaire Star, and the survey link was distributed via WeChat, QQ, and community group leader-related groups. The collected data were subsequently processed and analyzed using SPSS version 21.

IV. EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The statistical data of this study show that there are 68 males, accounting for 30.09%, and 158 females, accounting for 69.91%. Regarding the frequency of community group buying usage, 22 people (9.73%) use it every day, 113 people (50.00%) use it 1–2 times a week, 49 people (21.68%) use it 3–5 times a week, and 42 people (18.58%) use it 1–3 times every two weeks. Before making a purchase, 99 people (43.81%) "Always check" platform reviews, 120 people (53.10%) "Check occasionally" and 7 people (3.10%) "Do not check"; in other words, a total of 219 people check reviews at least occasionally, accounting for 96.90%. In terms of review posting behavior, 29 people (12.83%) never post, 116 people (51.33%) post occasionally, 57 people (25.22%) post frequently, and 24 people (10.62%) post after every purchase. A total of 197 people post reviews at least occasionally, accounting for 87.17%. These results indicate that reading reviews is significantly more common than consistently posting reviews, but both constitute important links in the platform content cycle.

The α for WOM quality is 0.702; for WOM source credibility is 0.754; for repeat customer WOM is 0.671; for positive WOM containing negative information is 0.671; for perceived risk is 0.649; for social presence is 0.656; for perceived usefulness is 0.512; and for purchase intention is 0.730. Except for perceived usefulness, the reliability of the other variables all fall between 0.6 and 0.8, which can be considered to have internal consistency in exploratory research. For validity, the KMO in this study is 0.920, Bartlett's test of sphericity has an approximate χ^2 of 1183.664 with 21 degrees of freedom and $p = 0.000$, indicating that the correlation matrix used for this test is suitable for further analysis of common factors.

1. Overall Regression Relationship and the Role of Psychological Perception Variables

This study established five sets of regression equations. Let X_1 denote the credibility of online WOM information, X_2 denote repeat customer WOM, and X_3 denote positive online WOM containing negative information; M_1, M_2, and M_3 denote perceived risk, social presence, and perceived usefulness, respectively; Y denotes consumers' purchase intention. The regression coefficients are as follows:

$$(1)\ Y = 0.646 + 0.431X_1 + 0.234X_2 + 0.191X_3$$

$$(2)\ M_1 = 1.051 + 0.260X_1 + 0.239X_2 + 0.260X_3$$

$$(3)\ M_2 = 0.773 + 0.552X_1 + 0.062X_2 + 0.197X_3$$

$$(4)\ M_3 = 0.971 + 0.625X_1 + 0.167X_2 - 0.013X_3$$

$$(5)\ Y = 0.219 + 0.192X_1 + 0.175X_2 + 0.097X_3 + 0.128M_1 + 0.311M_2 + 0.053M_3$$

In the purchase intention model without mediating variables, the regression coefficients for the three types of WOM information were 0.431, 0.234, and 0.191, all reaching significance at $p < 0.01$. This result indicates that, while controlling for the other two types of WOM characteristics, all three types of WOM information were significantly and positively associated with purchase intention. After including the three mediating variables, the direct effects of the three types of WOM information decreased to 0.192 ($p < 0.01$), 0.175 ($p < 0.01$), and 0.097 ($p < 0.05$), respectively, but remained significant, suggesting that part of the effect may be transmitted through the mediating variables.

Table 4-1 Summary of Regression Relationships between WOM Information, Psychological Perception, and Purchase Intention

Explanatory variable	Total effect c	Direct effect c′	Perceived risk a	Social presence a	Perceived usefulness a
Online WOM information credibility	0.431**	0.192**	0.260**	0.552**	0.625**
WOM from returning customers	0.234**	0.175**	0.239**	0.062	0.167*
Positive WOM that contains negative information	0.191**	0.097*	0.260**	0.197**	−0.013

Notes：* p<0.05，** p<0.01。

Among them, the credibility of online WOM information has a significant positive relationship with all three mediating variables; the relationship between repeat customer WOM and perceived risk and perceived usefulness is significant, but its relationship with social presence does not reach a significant level; positive online WOM containing negative information has a significant relationship with perceived risk and social presence, while its relationship with perceived usefulness is not significant. Meanwhile, in the final model, perceived risk (b=0.128, p<0.01) and social presence (b=0.311, p<0.01) are significantly positively associated with purchase intention, whereas the relationship of perceived usefulness (b=0.053) does not reach a significant level.

Table 4-2 Test of Mediating Effect of WOM Information on Three Types of Platforms on Purchase Intention

Hypothesis / Mediating Path	Indirect effect ab	Boot SE	z value	p value	95% BootCI	Bootstrap range determination
H1 Credibility → Usefulness → Intention	0.033	0.043	0.782	0.434	[−0.040, 0.127]	Not significant
H2 Repeat Customers → Usefulness → Intention	0.009	0.013	0.689	0.491	[−0.015, 0.039]	Not significant
H3 Mixed WOM → Usefulness → Intention	−0.001	0.009	−0.081	0.935	[−0.021, 0.016]	Not significant
H4 Credibility → Risk → Intention	0.033	0.025	1.359	0.174	[0.005, 0.100]	The interval does not include 0*
H5 Repeat Customers →Risk → Intention	0.031	0.021	1.446	0.148	[0.004, 0.084]	The interval does not include 0*
H6 Mixed WOM →Risk → Intention	0.033	0.027	1.230	0.219	[0.003, 0.107]	The interval does not include 0*
H7 Credibility → Presence → Intention	0.172	0.049	3.537	<0.001	[0.092, 0.281]	Significant
H8 Repeat Customers →Presence → Intention	0.019	0.025	0.772	0.440	[−0.029, 0.070]	Not significant
H9 Mixed WOM→ Presence → Intention	0.061	0.028	2.221	0.026	[0.017, 0.126]	Significant

2. Moderated Mediation Test and Research Hypothesis Testing

(1) Perceived Usefulness: Indirect Effects Not Statistically Supported (H1–H3)

The indirect effects of online WOM information credibility, repeat customer WOM, and positive online WOM containing negative information on purchase intention via perceived usefulness were 0.033, 0.009, and −0.001, with corresponding p-values of 0.434, 0.491, and 0.935. The 95% Bootstrap confidence intervals for the three paths were [−0.040, 0.127], [−0.015, 0.039], and [−0.021, 0.016], all containing zero. Therefore, H1, H2, and H3 were not statistically supported. Although the

regression coefficients of credibility and repeat customer WOM on perceived usefulness were significant, the conditional regression coefficient between perceived usefulness and purchase intention did not reach a significant level (b = 0.053). Based on this, consumers' recognition of the usefulness of review information cannot be directly equated with an increase in purchase intention.

Theoretically, community group-buying consumers' judgments of WOM information may involve multiple factors such as convenience, price, risk, and social interaction; simply obtaining useful information may not be sufficient to form a stable purchase tendency. However, this explanation is a speculative discussion of the research findings, not a supplementary mechanism directly verified by existing statistical data; it cannot be asserted that perceived usefulness has no effect in all community group-buying contexts.

(2) Perception Risk: Discrepancy Between Interval and z-Test Conclusions (H4—H6)

The indirect effects of the three types of WOM information through perception risk are 0.033, 0.031, and 0.033, respectively, with corresponding 95% Bootstrap confidence intervals of [0.005, 0.100], [0.004, 0.084], and [0.003, 0.107], none of which include zero. If the Bootstrap intervals reported in the original table were taken as the sole criterion, all three paths would show a positive indirect effect, and the three types of WOM information would still have significant direct associations even when the mediator is included simultaneously, which is consistent with "partial mediation."

However, the p-values of the z-tests reported in the original table are 0.174, 0.148, and 0.219, respectively, all greater than 0.05, which is inconsistent with the conclusions obtained from the interval estimation. The sampling distribution of the indirect effect may deviate from normality, so the Bootstrap interval and the z-test based on normal approximation may differ; however, the supplementary materials do not specify the number of resamples, the method for constructing confidence intervals, or software output details, making it insufficient to determine the specific source of the discrepancy. Based on the principle of rigor, this study describes H4—H6 as "supported by Bootstrap intervals, but requiring verification," rather than directly claiming that these three hypotheses have obtained consistent and robust test evidence.

Special attention must also be paid to the substantive meaning of the variables: in the final model, the path coefficient between perception risk and purchase intention is positive (b=0.128, p<0.01). If higher scale scores represent stronger risk perception, this result differs from the usual expectation that risk inhibits purchase intention; if some items are reverse-coded or actually measure "sensitivity to risk information," the interpretation would change accordingly. Therefore, it is necessary to first check the item wording, reverse scoring, and the direction of construct scores; one cannot simply deduce the conclusion that "WOM reduces risk and thus promotes purchase" based solely on a positive indirect effect.

(3) Social Presence: Both paths showed significant positive indirect effects (H7–H9).

The indirect effect of online review information credibility on purchase intention through social presence was 0.172 (Boot SE = 0.049, z = 3.537, p < 0.001), with a 95% Bootstrap confidence interval of [0.092, 0.281], which did not include zero; moreover, the direct effect of credibility on purchase intention remained significant (c′ = 0.192, p < 0.01). Accordingly, H7 was supported, and social presence acted as a partial mediator.

The indirect effect of repeat customer WOM on purchase intention through social presence was 0.019 (p = 0.440), with a 95% Bootstrap confidence interval of [−0.029, 0.070], which included zero. Therefore, H8 was not supported. Although repeat customer WOM and purchase intention had a significant positive relationship, the existing research could not prove that it was primarily transmitted through social presence. The identity of repeat customers may carry referential value regarding consumption experience; however, such an inference does not equate to respondents actually experiencing a stronger sense of online social co-presence.

The indirect effect of positive online WOM containing negative information on purchase intention through social presence was 0.061 (Boot SE = 0.028, z = 2.221, p = 0.026), with a 95% Bootstrap confidence interval of [0.017, 0.126], which did not include zero; its direct effect also remained significant (c′ = 0.097, p < 0.05). Therefore, H9 was supported, and social presence likewise played a partial mediating role. This finding suggests that there is a certain connection between reviews containing both positive and negative information and consumers' perception of social interaction, but it does not mean that all negative information can be generalized as beneficial to purchase.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, WOM information across the three types of platforms is significantly and positively associated with community group-buying purchase intention; however, the mediating paths exhibit marked heterogeneity. Social presence shows consistent statistical support in the two

paths of "perceived credibility of online WOM information—purchase intention" and "positive WOM containing negative information—purchase intention," yet it does not reach significance in the "return customer WOM—purchase intention" path. The mediating effect of perceived usefulness is unsupported. Although perceived risk is supported by evidence at the Bootstrap interval level, discrepancies exist in methodological judgments. This structure suggests that the mere presence of review information and its perception as useful do not necessarily generate the same psychological mechanism.

For platform operators, the findings better support the prudent recommendation of "improving verifiable review information and an effective interactive environment," rather than directly claiming that increasing the number of comments will boost sales. Specifically, platforms can increase the transparency of review sources and purchase records, enhance the visibility of products, fulfillment, and after-sales feedback, and improve information exchange conditions among consumers. For reviews that point out product or service shortcomings, attention should be paid to their informational completeness and the handling of responses, rather than simply suppressing negative descriptions. These suggestions are based on the observation that WOM information is associated with social presence, and their actual operational effectiveness still needs to be verified through subsequent experiments or tracking data.

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