What Drives Trust Transfer? The Moderating Roles of Seller-Specific and General Institutional Mechanisms

Chen, Xiayu; Huang, Qian; Davison, Robert M.; Hua, Zhongsheng

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Title Page

Paper Title

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Author Contact Information

Xiayu Chen
School of Management
University of Science and Technology of China
Jinzhai Road 96, Hefei, Anhui, China
e-mail: cxy1023@mail.ustc.edu.cn

Qian Huang*
School of Management
University of Science and Technology of China
Jinzhai Road 96, Hefei, Anhui, China
e-mail: huangq@ustc.edu.cn

Robert M. Davison
Department of Information Systems
College of Business
City University of Hong Kong
83 Tat Chee Avenue, Hong Kong
e-mail: isrobert@cityu.edu.hk

Biographies

Xiayu Chen (cxy1023@mail.ustc.edu.cn) is a Ph.D. student in the Information Systems Department at the University of Science and Technology of China–City University of Hong Kong Joint Advanced Research Center. Her research focuses on the electronic commerce and social media.

Qian Huang (huangq@ustc.edu.cn) (corresponding author) is an Associate Professor in the School of Management at the University of Science and Technology of China (USTC). She obtained her Ph.D. from USTC and City University of Hong Kong. Her research focuses on knowledge management and electronic commerce. She has published papers in the Information Systems Journal, Asia Pacific Journal of Management, Information Technology and People, Information and Management, and Journal of Global Information Management.

Robert M. Davison (isrobert@cityu.edu.hk) is a Professor of Information Systems at the City University of Hong Kong. His current research focuses on virtual Knowledge Management and Collaboration in Chinese SMEs. He has published over 60 articles in a variety of journals such as MIS Quarterly, the Information Systems Journal, Journal of Management Information Systems, IT&People, Journal of IT, Journal of the AIS, IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management, Decision Support Systems, Communications of the AIS, and Communications of the ACM. Robert is the Editor-in-Chief of the Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries, co-Editor-in-Chief of Information Systems Journal, and co-Editor-in-Chief of Information Technology & People. Home Page: http://www.is.cityu.edu.hk/staff/isrobert

What Drives Trust Transfer? The Moderating Roles of General Institutional Mechanisms and Seller-Specific Mechanisms

Abstract: Trust transfer theory has been widely applied in the e-commerce environment. However, prior research has overlooked the boundary conditions under which trust can be transferred. By responding to the call for empirical explorations of the general institutional mechanisms against more seller-specific mechanisms in an e-commerce environment, this study identifies two key moderators, perceived effectiveness of e-commerce institutional mechanisms (PEEIM) and perceived website quality of the seller (PWQS), that impact the relationships between trust-in-platform, trust-in-seller and purchase intention. Using a sample of 294 online buyers from TaoBao (a major Chinese C2C portal), we find that trust-in-platform positively affects trust-in-seller; meanwhile, trust-in-seller positively influences purchase intention. In addition, PEEIM negatively moderates the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller, whereas it positively moderates the relationship between trust-in-seller and purchase intention. PWQS positively moderates the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller yet negatively moderates the relationship between trust-in-seller and purchase intention. Our findings complement trust transfer theory by demonstrating how PEEIM and PWQS have different moderating effects on the trust transfer process. For C2C platform providers and sellers, the findings suggest that they should strategically build buyers' trust according to different levels of PEEIM and PWQS in order to promote buyers' purchasing behavior.

Keywords: E-commerce, trust transfer, signaling theory, institutional mechanisms, website quality.

Introduction

Faced with temporal and spatial separation between online buyers and sellers, the need for trust is more salient within the Consumer to Consumer (C2C) online shopping context [11, 59]. Since two parties are involved in facilitating buyers to engage in transactions, namely, a platform and sellers, trust is considered as consisting of two types – platform trust and seller trust [11, 31]. It is thus essential to understand how these two categories of trust affect buyer purchasing behavior [31]. Prior research indicates that buyers' trust in a C2C platform can be transferred to their trust in the sellers on this platform, in turn facilitating the development of transaction intention [60]. The findings are consistently reported by some subsequent replications [31], but not by others. For example, Delgado-Márquez et al. [16] propose that the trust transfer process is moderated by the trustor's expectations. Van der Heijden et al. [73] also note that trust no longer triggers people's online purchase intention when trust reaches a certain evaluation level. Recently, scholars have called for further exploration of the various boundary conditions under which trust operates [22, 25]. Following these calls, a contingency perspective that explores the moderating effects of boundary conditions on the trust-in-platform – trust-in-seller – purchase intention (TP-TS-PI) relationship is taken in the current research.

Existing research has largely assumed that institutional context is an important moderating factor in the context of online purchasing [22, 25]. The institutional context is related to the transaction environment that is safeguarded by initiating formal regulative structures [78]. For example, Gefen and Pavlou [25] propose that the institutional context moderates the impact of trust on an individual's behavioral intention. Mayer et al. [48] indicate that the importance of prior transaction performance (manifested as buyer's trust-in-platform) on the reevaluation of

trust (manifested as buyer's trust-in-seller) is still dependent on the context. Fang et al. [20] further demonstrate that the perceived effectiveness of e-commerce institutional mechanisms (PEEIM) moderates the relationships between satisfaction, trust and repurchase intention. However, our understanding of how the TP-TS-PI relationship is affected by the e-commerce institutional context is still limited.

PEEIM only captures the general perception of the e-commerce institutional mechanisms (i.e., seller-independent and platform-independent), which has led researchers to call for further empirical exploration of PEEIM compared to more seller-specific mechanisms [20]. The seller's specific mechanisms include website design and customer service (i.e., website quality), which can mitigate social uncertainty and reduce the psychological distance between online buyers and sellers [44]. Thus, incorporating those sellers' website mechanisms that reduce uncertainty can lead to a long-term favorable relationship between the buyer and the seller [5]. This implies that buyers' trust transfer process is not independent from the seller-specific mechanisms. Considering the general institutional mechanisms alone as a moderator is insufficient and thus we should also take the local, specific seller's mechanisms into account. As such, a more complete understanding of the moderating roles of both the e-commerce institutional mechanisms and seller's website mechanisms is essential, since appropriate conditions can be provided by these two mechanisms that mitigate the negative influence of risk and uncertainty in the environment for online transaction activity. Nevertheless, previous research has ignored the effects of both the general institutional mechanisms and seller-specific mechanisms in the C2C online environment.

To address these gaps in the literature, we draw upon signaling theory [18, 68] to explore how institutional context and seller's website mechanisms serve as signals that moderate the TP-

TS-PI relationship. Signaling theory indicates that buyers tend to depend on some informational cues to assess product (or company) quality, especially when facing situations involving difficult decisions about quality and in an environment of information asymmetry [6, 38]. The signals exert an impact on the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of individuals [6]. Indeed, recent research identifies how institutional context explicitly signals a risk mitigation function to online buyers [20]. The seller's website mechanisms can also operate as signals that mitigate the negative impact of low seller visibility and high product uncertainty [44].

PEEIM is a manifestation of the institutional context [20]. PEEIM refers to an online buyer's general perception that safeguarding mechanisms in the e-commerce environment can protect him/her by mitigating potential risks [20]. According to Fang et al. [20], PEEIM, which operates at the general level (i.e., independent of any specific online seller or platform), captures the ability of institutional mechanisms to mitigate contextual risks. PEEIM can be considered as buyers' perceptions of signals that their online transaction activities are protected by institutional mechanisms against any potential risks. Perceived website quality of the seller (PWQS) is a manifestation of the website mechanisms of the seller [20, 40]. PWQS refers to an online buyer's evaluation of a seller's website in terms of whether his/her needs are met by the website features and whether it reflects the overall quality of the seller's website [2]. PWQS, which is defined at the local/specific level (i.e., where the mechanisms are investigated in the context of a specific online seller), reflects an online buyer's assessment of all signals, including information, system and service quality, demonstrated by the seller in designing its website [17, 32].

This study makes several key contributions to the literature. First, this study contributes to trust transfer theory by exploring its boundary conditions. Second, by establishing PEEIM and PWQS as moderators, we undertake comprehensive considerations of how both the general

institutional mechanisms and seller-specific mechanisms can serve as signals. To the best of our knowledge, this study is among the first to address Fang et al.'s [20] call to empirically examine PEEIM against more seller-specific mechanisms (i.e., sellers' website quality) in the C2C online shopping context. Third, with respect to the existing literature describing trust transfer from the C2C platform to the seller on the platform and purchase intention, we find that PEEIM and PWQS exert different moderating effects on the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller and the relationship between trust-in-seller and purchase intention.

This paper is organized as follows. First, we present the theoretical foundations. The research model and hypotheses are developed in the following section. We then discuss methodology and data collection, followed by data analysis and results. We present the discussion, contributions and future research directions in the next section. Finally, we provide concluding remarks.

Theoretical Foundations

Trust Transfer Theory

Trust is a subjective belief that the trusting party believes that the trusted party will behave by exhibiting integrity, ability and benevolence [48, 60]. Trust plays an important role between the trusting party and the trusted party, due to its ability to facilitate risk taking behavior when opportunism and uncertainty emerge [37, 53]. Indeed, it has been asserted that a trade between two parties will not be initiated without sufficient trust [34, 37]. In particular, convincing a buyer to engage in a transaction with an unknown online seller is a formidable challenge, because a sufficient level of initial trust needs to be induced by the seller [34]. Therefore, to enhance online buyers' judgments on the trustworthiness of the seller and engender adequate initial trust towards

the seller, the unknown online seller should offer opportunities for trust production to buyers [50, 54].

The trust transfer process can solve the trust-building problem in the e-commerce context [39, 74]. The trust transfer process is a cognitive process in which one's trust in a familiar target can be transferred to another target by virtue of certain associations [36, 70]. Pavlou et al. [61] indicate that the main functions of the electronic marketplace are collecting, processing and spreading information through Internet-based technologies in order to increase trust between online buyers and sellers. A reliable and safe trading environment provides fair and open rules that support the transaction process on an online shopping platform, which can restrict problematic sellers [60]. Prospective buyers could then form the belief that the transaction environment is well managed and that sellers there are trustworthy.

The trust transfer process involves three actors, namely, the trustor, the trustee and a third party [70]. The trustor is a person who assesses whether to trust others; the trustee is the one who is judged by the trustor based on the trustworthiness; a third party serves as the broker [69, 74]. The underlying logic among these three actors is that "when the trustor trusts in the third person and there is a close relationship between the trustee and the third person, the trustor's trust in the third person will be transferred to the trustee" [74, p. 1396]. Following the same logic, previous research argues that a buyer's trust can be transferred from a C2C platform to the seller, which in turn enhance a buyer's purchase intention [60].

However, the existing literature on the trust transfer process assumes a direct relationship through the TP-TS-PI sequence, ignoring the boundary conditions. Gefen et al. [22] indicate that it is necessary to explore how trust operates differently under different kinds of boundary

conditions. Delgado-Márquez et al. [16] further demonstrate that trust transfer is a dynamic process, suggesting that a trustor's expectations negatively and weakly moderate trust transfer from a trustor to a trustee. Hence, investigating the trust transfer process by incorporating boundary conditions is necessary.

Signaling Theory

Signaling theory explains how people assess product (or company) quality under various circumstances, particularly when the quality is impossible or difficult for people to directly observe [6, 68]. Signaling theory is widely applied in information economics with the premise that information asymmetry makes different influences on the relationship among the parties [38]. Information asymmetry in buyer-seller relationships is characterized by the difficulty that buyers experience in precisely evaluating products and sellers prior to purchase [56], which aggravates uncertainty in the transaction environment. When facing unobservable quality and in such asymmetric information situations, buyers tend to depend on informational cues to evaluate the product (or company) quality [38]. The less buyers know about the product and the more difficult it is for them to evaluate quality, the more likely buyers will depend on these cues to infer the quality of the product (or company) [6].

Informational cues can be categorized as intrinsic or extrinsic cues [34]. Intrinsic cues cannot be easily changed and are features of the product itself (e.g., ingredients), whereas extrinsic cues can be altered and are reflected through product-related attributes (e.g., various assurances from independent third-parties) [34, 75]. However, given the very nature of online shopping, it is unlikely that online buyers can touch or smell products, other than viewing a product's image [63]. This means that few intrinsic cues are available to buyers and so buyers

will tend to rely more on extrinsic cues [63]. Richardson et al. [63] also note that a buyer's shopping confidence can be enhanced by extrinsic cues because extrinsic cues can be assessed without any particular knowledge of the product or expertise. Thus, buyers tend to depend more on extrinsic cues to evaluate the trustworthiness of the online seller. More recent empirical research has also suggested that PEEIM and PWQS act as extrinsic signals of risk or uncertainty mitigation in the e-commerce environment [20, 75].

Research Model and Hypothesis Development

Based on the above discussion, a research model is developed to investigate the moderating roles of PEEIM and PWQS on the TP-TS-PI relationship. Based on trust transfer theory, we first examine how trust-in-platform can enhance trust-in-seller, and consequently affect purchase intention. Drawing upon signaling theory, we then examine how PEEIM and PWQS moderate the relationships between TP-TS-PI. The research model is shown in Figure 1 and the corresponding hypotheses are explained below.

----------Insert Figure 1 about here----------

Trust in Platform, Trust in Seller and Purchase Intention

According to Pavlou and Gefen [60], trust-in-platform is defined as an online buyer believing that a C2C platform will institute regulations and enforce appropriate rules and penalties with integrity, competently and reliably in order to restrict seller opportunistic behavior on the platform. Like trust in any target, Pavlou and Gefen [60] further indicate that an online buyer's trust in a C2C platform can also arise from familiarity with the platform (e.g., the buyers' expectations can be always fulfilled), the reputation of other similar platforms and the benevolent

behavior of the platform (e.g., the platform often replies to the buyer's email with a caring response).

Trust transfer theory suggests that people's trust can be transferred from known targets to unknown targets because of their associations with one another [70]. In the context of online transactions, trust transfer can also occur between one organization and another by virtue of their linked web pages [39]. Following the trust transfer logic [19, 62, 70], we propose that buyers who trust the C2C platform should also trust the sellers on the platform because of their perceived associations between the platform and sellers. Indeed, when a C2C online shopping platform is set up, the platform provider will always institute platform-level restrictions to prevent opportunistic transaction behavior [45, 60]. For example, any sellers' opportunistic behavior may result in serious consequences, such as sellerships taken away, monetary penalties and legal actions that could be taken by the platform on behalf of the online buyers. By participating in a trusted C2C platform, the seller demonstrates to its buyers its own trustworthiness [60, 66]. In this respect, it is suggested that buyers' trust in a C2C platform can also be transferred to any seller on this platform. Specifically, when buyers develop strong trust towards a C2C platform, they will view this platform as a place where it is safe and secure to do business or to engage in transactions. Thus, a favorable perception and attitude towards a C2C online platform will be automatically transferred to any seller on this platform; the seller will therefore be viewed as a trustworthy transaction partner. Furthermore, previous research has also demonstrated that buyers' trust-in-platform can be transferred to their trust-in-seller [31, 60]. For example, Hong et al. [31] found that trustworthiness factors have a significant effect on a buyer's trust-in-platform, and trust-in-platform can readily be transferred to trust-in-sellers, which in turn affect purchase intentions and attitudinal loyalty in a B2C e-marketplace. Pavlou and Gefen [60]

indicate that buyers who trust the transaction platform should also trust the community of sellers and so perceive a lesser degree of risk in such an online marketplace. Given these arguments, we hypothesize that:

H1: A buyer's trust in a platform will have a positive effect on his or her trust in a seller.

Trust transfer theory further indicates that buyers' trust in the platform can be transferred to their trust in the seller, which in turn enhances purchase intention [31, 60]. Online buyers are confronted with social uncertainty: they do not know what other parties will do [60]. Trust is a key mechanism reducing social uncertainty, which promotes buyers to begin a rational assessment of a situation [24]. In other words, trust allows buyers to rule out, subjectively, any undesirable behaviors from the party they trust, and thus their perceptions of risk can be reduced to a more manageable level [26, 48]. Trust can govern exchange relationships characterized by vulnerability, uncertainty and dependence [20]. Shankar et al. [65] argue that by exhibiting honesty, consistency, reliability and trustworthiness, online sellers can build and maintain buyers' relationship commitment and repeat purchases. As such, buyers' trusting beliefs towards a specific seller are associated with purchase intention with the seller [60]. It is well established that buyers' trust-in-seller is positively related to their purchase intention [24, 60]. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H2: A buyer's trust in a seller will have a positive effect on his or her purchase intention in the same seller.

Perceived Effectiveness of E-Commerce Institutional Mechanisms (PEEIM)

PEEIM is defined as an online buyer's subjective perception that online safeguarding mechanisms exist in the e-commerce environment to protect him/her against potential risks [20].

This definition of PEEIM views the influence of these institutional mechanisms largely in buyers' perceptional terms [20]. Common online safeguarding mechanisms include privacy protection, escrow services and online credit card guarantees [52, 60]. For example, escrow services (e.g., PayPal, Alipay) can protect buyers in order fulfillment by authorizing payment only after the buyers approve the goods [33, 60]. Online credit card guarantees provide a means to compensate buyers against sellers' potentially fraudulent behavior [60]. C2C e-commerce involves a variety of buyers, each of whom may have their own perceptions about the effectiveness of e-commerce institutional mechanisms [60]. According to Fang et al. [20], these mechanisms are generic, not party-specific or transaction-specific. The effectiveness of these mechanisms delivers a signal to buyers that their online transactions are protected by safeguards.

As discussed earlier, buyers who trust the platform can trust the seller by virtue of buyers' perceived association between the platform and the seller [60, 70]. Buyers' perceptions of this association rely on the certainty of the institutional context. When PEEIM is high, this association should be positively strengthened, given that such high PEEIM can function as a risk-mitigation signal [20]. Specifically, a high level of PEEIM can protect the transaction environment to reduce uncertainty [20]. This means that buyers' fears can be overcome under such a certain environment [50]: they are more likely to believe that the seller's trustworthiness is associated with the trustworthiness of the platform. As such, buyers will conveniently borrow the trustworthiness, which is reflected by the platform, and develop trust-in-seller. Furthermore, when PEEIM is high, buyers' confidence can be enhanced during the transaction process because effective mechanisms are in place to protect them against potential risks. With a stronger confidence level, buyers would be more likely to have positive perceptions that any unknown seller on this platform is related to the platform and so will not behave opportunistically. This

implies that buyers do not need to judge all sellers on this platform, but instead need to depend on their trust in this platform.

In contrast, when the level of PEEIM is low, buyers perceive a signal with regard to the uncertainty of the e-commerce environment and their automatic trust in the platform can be interrupted by situations of uncertainty. Thus they will question whether the trustworthiness of the platform can be used to determine the trustworthiness of the current transaction situation. Low PEEIM induces buyers to look for and collect new transaction information to infer the seller's trustworthiness, rather than depending on their trust of the platform. In other words, the trustworthiness of the seller needs to be reevaluated in such an uncertain context [51]. As a consequence, the impact of buyers' trust-in-platform on trust-in-seller is weak.

H3: PEEIM positively moderates the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller.

We further argue that the influence of trust-in-seller on buyers' purchase intention should vary under different levels of PEEIM. The typical function of trust is to mitigate uncertainty [57], which is related to an individual's inability to predict something accurately [55]. If a buyer's perception of risk is lower than the level of perceived trust, then trust exerts a more significant impact on buyers' risk-taking behavior (e.g., purchase intention) [20, 48]. Fang et al. [20] indicate that in situations of low uncertainty, trust-in-seller is not a determined factor of behavioral intention. Indeed, when buyers' have perceptions of low risk (i.e., high PEEIM), trust-in-seller plays a weak role in facilitating purchase intention [20, 64]. When people perceive the environment to be slightly uncertain, clear and useful signals enable people to assess others' behavior, and thus trust-in-seller plays a lesser role in such situations [13, 20]. As contextual

uncertainties can be reduced by high levels of PEEIM through explicit regulatory assurances, a less risky transaction environment may be created and the importance of trust-in-seller in promoting purchase intention will decrease [20, 64].

In contrast, when people perceive the environment to be characterized by high uncertainty (i.e., low PEEIM), they will rely more heavily on trust-in-seller to infer purchase intention because no useful signals will exist to enable them to judge others' behavior [13, 20]. In other words, if PEEIM is low, additional assurance is needed to increase buyers' confidence in purchasing from the online seller [20]. To obtain the additional assurance, buyers tend to rely more on trust-in-seller [48].

H4: PEEIM negatively moderates the relationship between trust-in-seller and purchase intention.

Perceived Website Quality of the Seller (PWQS)

PWQS refers to an online buyer's assessment of the features of a seller's website meeting his/her needs and reflecting the website' overall excellence [2]. Website quality includes cues like information, system and service quality [17]. Buyers' perceptions and expectations of website quality are evaluated primarily on these three dimensions [17, 40]. Specifically, information quality is defined as buyers' perceptions of information available on a seller's website [49]. System quality is related to a seller's website as perceived by buyers in terms of their overall performance, which can be reflected via the degrees of user friendliness [32]. Service quality refers to the extent to which buyers evaluate the service delivered by the seller through its website [32, 42]. The success of an online transaction between buyers and sellers is dependent on

the sellers' website quality. In this view, a seller's website quality represents seller-specific signals designed to promote buyers' online shopping behavior.

We expect that the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller can be positively strengthened by high PWQS. When the level of PWQS is high, buyers' initial impressions are solidified by first experiencing the seller's presence [52]. Following signaling theory, Benlian and Hess [6] note that IT-supported cues of a website (e.g., website quality) can influence users' perceptions through providing functionalities or visual signals. With a higher level of PWQS, buyers would be more likely to have a positive perception of the association between the platform and the seller because their initial perception of the platform is further confirmed by high PWQS. In addition, high PWQS can also mitigate online buyers' anxiety by providing reliable information and services [35]. Less anxious buyers will be more willing to feel certain about the consistency between the platform and seller in terms of reliability. Thus, in situations of high PWQS, the trustworthiness of the platform can be applied by buyers to infer the seller's trustworthiness on this platform. In this view, PWQS serves as a reliable signal to strengthen the relationship between buyers' trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller.

On the contrary, when PWQS is low, the influence of buyers' trust-in-platform on trust-in-seller is reduced because low PWQS causes doubts in buyers' minds about the applicability of a platform's trustworthiness to a new seller. If PWQS is low, buyers may fear that the seller engage in opportunistic behaviors [40]. Buyers may need to search for additional information to judge the trustworthiness of the seller, rather than inferring from the trustworthiness of the platform. This implies a weaker impact of buyers' trust-in-platform on trust-in-seller.

H5: PWQS positively moderates the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller.

We expect that the influence of buyers' trust-in-seller on their purchase intention is diluted by high PWQS. When PWQS is high, the likelihood of a mismatch can be reduced and information search can be facilitated [44]. Buyers, consequently, experience a useful signal through website quality, which is demonstrated by the seller. Wells et al. [75] argue that website quality influences buyers' online shopping experiences. The need for trust will decrease with experience [23], indicating that buyers may depend less heavily on their trust-in-seller to form a purchase intention when buyers experience a seller's high website quality. Furthermore, signaling theory also suggests that high website quality can alleviate uncertainty [6, 75]. Mayer et al. [48] and Fang et al. [20] indicate that trust is needed for people only in an uncertain situation. As high PWQS can reduce uncertainty, the need for buyers' trust-in-seller in facilitating their purchase intention is reduced.

On the contrary, if PWQS is low, buyers might give a negative appraisal of their experience of the seller's website. In this situation, buyers must rely more heavily on trust-in-seller to increase their purchasing confidence.

H6: PWQS negatively moderates the relationship between trust-in-seller and purchase intention.

Furthermore, it is known that perceived website quality positively affects trust [35, 50, 77] and trust-in-platform has a direct effect on purchase intention (e.g., [31]). Therefore, although these known relationships are not hypothesized, in order to ensure the theoretical completeness they are still included in our research model (see Figure 1).

Research Methodology

Measurement Development

All the measurement items used in this study were adapted from prior validated scales. In order to ensure that those scales fit the current research context, some minor changes were made. We used a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", to measure all items. The items in the questionnaire are shown in Table 1.

----------Insert Table 1 about here----------

Specifically, trust-in-platform was measured using a three-item scale adapted from Qu et al. [59]. Trust-in-seller was assessed with seven items adapted from Fang et al. [20]. Purchase intention was measured with three items adapted from Pavlou and Gefen [60]. In addition, PEEIM was assessed with a three-item scale adapted from Fang et al. [20]. Moreover, according to the existing literature [32], PWQS is a second-order construct encompassing the dimensions of information quality, system quality and service quality. To measure the three dimensions, twelve items were adapted from Zhou [77], with four items each for information quality, system quality and service quality.

Given that this research was conducted in China, following Van de Vijver [72], we translated the English questionnaire into Chinese. A professional translator who was unfamiliar with our study was hired to translate the questionnaire from Chinese back to English. When we compared the translated questionnaire with the original English version, no semantic discrepancies were found. In order to assess the content validity, four IS PhD students who had online shopping experience on TaoBao were also invited to review and critique the measurement items.

Additionally, some demographical variables that might affect trust-in-seller and purchase intention were included in our model as control variables.

Research Design

We chose TaoBao as our research context because TaoBao is the dominant C2C online shopping platform in China and Chinese buyers are familiar with it [76]. While TaoBao and eBay offer similar functionality, there exist some notable differences [58]. For instance, TaoBao provides a variety of product listings in the homepage of the platform. When buyers transact with sellers at TaoBao, buyers need to visit the platform first and then choose the specific sellers based on the product listings provided by the platform. However, in the case of eBay, the entire transaction is finished in the eBay platform: there is no need to visit the seller's website. Furthermore, TaoBao allows sellers to design their own website, so different sellers are distinct in terms of their website quality, with different interface navigation and product formats. In addition, Chinese online buyers like to query the qualities and details of the merchandise and negotiate prices with sellers before making a deal [4]. By using WangWang, an instant messenger (IM) tool embedded in TaoBao' platform [58], sellers can provide prompt and professional responses to the buyers' inquiries.

We employed an online survey for data collection. During a three-month period (March to May, 2014), the survey was promoted by distributing a banner with a hyperlink of our online survey to a number of popular social network sites and virtual communities in China. Individuals who had prior experience of shopping on TaoBao and had bought products or services for personal use were invited to complete the questionnaire. In addition, in order to increase the participants' response rate, RMB 30 (approximately US$ 4.85) was provided as an incentive for fifty randomly selected respondents. In the questionnaire, the first page explained the purpose of

our research and ensured confidentiality. The respondents were asked to recall their most recent online shopping experience at TaoBao. In all, 318 questionnaires were returned. Among them, 24 were incomplete or invalid after initial examinations, resulting in a total of 294 valid questionnaires for data analysis. The demographic information of those respondents is shown in Table 2.

----------Insert Table 2 about here----------

We further followed Armstrong and Overton's [3] suggestions by comparing the early and late responses to test non-response bias. Two tailed t-statistics across all the constructs were used to compare responses between the first 25% and last 25% of respondents. No significant differences among all constructs' means were identified, indicating that non-response bias was not a concern for this study.

Common Method Bias

Furthermore, since all the data collected was perceptual and from a single source at the same time, we also tested for common method bias. First, we followed Harman's single-factor method to test common method bias [9]. The results showed that three constructs have eigenvalues higher than 1.0, explaining 61.73% of the total variance. Meanwhile, the first construct accounted for 24.31% of the variance. Hence, the results were unlikely to be contaminated by common method bias.

Second, we included in the Partial Least Squares (PLS) model a common method factor associated with all the principal constructs' indicators by following the suggestions of Liang et al. [41]. We then calculated each indicator's variances explained by the substantive constructs and the method factor. As Table 3 shows, the average substantively explained variance of the

indicators was 0.686, and the average method-based variance of the indicators was 0.006. The ratio between the average substantively explained variance of the indicators and the average method-based variance of the indicators was very large. In addition, there were no significant method factor loadings, suggesting that common method bias was not a significant issue with the data.

----------Insert Table 3 about here----------

Data Analysis and Results

Measurement Model

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was applied to examine the validity and reliability of the constructs. The results revealed that the fit between the dataset and the measurement model was satisfactory (X^2=886.45 on 329 d.f., RMSEA=0.076, CFI=0.968, IFI=0.968, NFI=0.95, NNFI=0.963). The loadings of all items were above 0.7 [8] (see Appendix A). As shown in Table 4, The AVEs of all constructs were higher than 0.6, all above the recommended value of 0.5 [21]. In addition, following Fornell and Larcker [21], we used composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha to test construct reliability. The values of Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.719 to 0.896, which were above the benchmark value of 0.7 [21]. Composite reliability sores ranged from 0.842 to 0.920, which were also above the recommended value of 0.7 [21]. Thus, the results demonstrated a good convergent validity of our measurement model.

----------Insert Table 4 about here----------

Furthermore, we assessed discriminant validity by comparing the square root of the AVE of each construct and the correlations among constructs [12]. As shown in Table 5, the largest correlation between constructs was 0.665, less than the recommended level of 0.71 [46]. Also,

the square roots of the AVEs for all constructs on the diagonal were larger than the inter-construct correlations, suggesting good discriminant validity.

----------Insert Table 5 about here----------

Considering that several inter-construct correlations were higher than the recommended value of 0.6 in our study, we further examined the potential multicollinearity issue. We employed the Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) to detect collinearity using the guideline suggested by Mason and Perreault [47]: multicollinearity exists when Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) are greater than 10. The results indicated that the highest VIF was 2.419. Thus, multicollinearity was not a significant issue in the present research.

In this study, we treated PWQS as a second-order reflective construct. To examine whether the second-order construct was reflected by all first-order dimensions, a second-order CFA by using the extracted first-order dimension was employed. The results showed that the higher-order measurement model had adequate fit (X^2=182.64 on 51 d.f., RMSEA=0.094, CFI=0.971, IFI=0.971, NFI=0.961, NNFI=0.963). Although the RMSEA value of PWQS was slightly higher than the cut-off score of 0.08, it is still acceptable according to the criterion suggested by Liu et al. [43] (i.e., RMSEA$\leq$ 0.1). The results indicated that the loadings of each dimension on PWQS were positive and significant ($p<0.001$). Their correlations were also significant at the level of $p<0.001$, suggesting these first-order dimensions converged on the common underlying construct of PWQS. Finally, we used SPSS to test the reflective factors. The average values of the first-order dimensions were used to construct the values of PWQS to examine the structural model [43].

Structural Model

Hierarchical regression analysis, specifically, OLS regression, was used to test our structural model. Hierarchical regression was chosen as the preferred analysis for several reasons. First, using structural equation models to test moderations is problematic [15]. In comparison with other approaches (e.g., SEM), hierarchical regression analysis is more appropriate for models with multiple moderating effects and multiple moderators [71]. Second, Goodhue et al. [27] indicate that when conducting interaction analysis, regression analysis with the product of the sum of indicators is more appropriate than partial least squares with the product of indicators (the strength of relationships is overestimated and their significance is underestimated in partial least squares). Third, it is one of the most popular approaches for examining hypotheses about interaction effects [71].

As shown in Table 6, to minimize the possibility of multicollinearity, we mean-centered the independent variables and moderator variables [1]. We tested three models separately. We included the control variables in step 1, followed by including the independent variables and moderators in step 2. We added the interaction effects in step 3. Furthermore, in all regression models, a heteroskedasticity robust variance estimator was used to assess the robustness of the significance tests of estimates [29].

----------Insert Table 6 about here----------

Table 6 shows that the model accounted for 51.04% of the variance in trust-in-seller and 40.48% of the variance in purchase intention. The results showed that the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller was positive and significant ($\beta=0.315$, $p<0.001$). The

relationship between trust-in-seller and purchase intention was also positive and significant (β=0.148, $p<0.05$). Hence, both H1 and H2 were supported.

Meanwhile, we found the negative moderating effect of PEEIM on the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller (β=-0.106, $p<0.05$). As such, H3 was not supported. The moderating effect of PEEIM on the relationship between trust-in-seller and purchase intention was positive (β=0.129, $p<0.05$), rejecting H4. The results indicated that the positive moderating effect of PWQS on the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller was significant (β=0.121, $p<0.05$), which supported H5. Furthermore, the negative moderating effect of PWQS on the relationship between trust-in-seller and purchase intention was significant (β=-0.110, $p<0.05$), supporting H6. We summarize the findings of the hypothesis testing in Table 7.

----------Insert Table 7 about here----------

To advance our interpretations, we plotted the moderating effects of PEEIM and PWQS on the relationships between trust-in-platform, trust-in-seller and purchase intention, respectively. A score one standard deviation below or above the mean was used to indicate a low or high level of PEEIM or PWQS [1]. The moderating effect of PEEIM on the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller was plotted in Figure 2, showing that the gap (the effect of trust-in-platform on trust-in-seller) is larger in low PEEIM than in high PEEIM. The moderating effect of PEEIM on the relationship between trust-in-seller and purchase intention was delineated in Figure 3, showing that the gap (the effect of trust-in-seller on purchase intention) is larger in high PEEIM than in low PEEIM. Similarly, we delineated the moderating effect of PWQS on the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller in Figure 4, indicating that the gap (the effect of trust-in-platform on trust-in-seller) is larger in high PWQS than in low PWQS. In

addition, we delineated the moderating effect of PWQS on the relationship between trust-in-seller and purchase intention in Figure 5, showing that the gap (the effect of trust-in-seller on purchase intention) is larger in low PWQS than in high PWQS.

----------Insert Figure 2 about here----------

----------Insert Figure 3 about here----------

----------Insert Figure 4 about here----------

----------Insert Figure 5 about here----------

To confirm the significance of the moderating effects of PEEIM and PWQS, we also examined the results of the interaction effects of R^2 changes [10]. The results revealed that trust-in-platform significantly increased the R^2 of trust-in-seller by 48.44% ($F=36.165$, $p<0.001$), indicating a large effect size ($f^2=0.965$)[1]. PEEIM and PWQS with trust-in-platform significantly increased the R^2 of trust-in-seller by 1.25% ($F=34.311$, $p<0.001$), which indicated that the effect size was small ($f^2=0.026$). In addition, trust-in-seller significantly increased the R^2 of purchase intention by 37.59% ($F=32.805$, $p<0.001$), indicating a large effect size ($f^2=0.614$). When including the interaction effects of PEEIM and PWQS, the R^2 of purchase intention was significantly increased by 1.68% ($F=34.428$, $p<0.001$), indicating that the effect size was small ($f^2=0.028$). Therefore, the F-test results indicated the significantly increased R^2 of the interaction effects, suggesting that the moderating effects were significant [10].

[1] Effect size f^2 = [R^2 of interaction effect model – R^2 of main effect model] / [1 – R^2 of main effect model]. Following Cohen (1988), f^2 of 0.02~0.14, 0.15~0.34, and above 0.35 are termed small, medium and large effect sizes, respectively.

Discussion and Implications

Discussion

This study examines how PEEIM and PWQS exert different moderating effects on the relationships between trust-in-platform, trust-in-seller and online purchase intention. Specifically, our study finds that trust-in-platform has a positive effect on trust-in-seller and trust-in-seller positively affects purchase intention. In addition, our study confirms that PWQS positively moderates the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller, such that the influence of trust-in-platform on trust-in-seller is stronger when PWQS is higher. This moderating effect implies that the platform's trust becomes an important source of the seller's trust only under the high, but not the low PWQS condition. However, surprisingly, the current research finds that PEEIM negatively moderates the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller. A possible explanation is that once buyers visit a specific online seller's website, they can apply their direct experience with the website, including their direct impressions of the seller's website quality, to make judgement about the transaction environment of the seller [7]. The effects of institutional mechanisms' assurance will be attenuated by this direct experience with the website [7, 54]. Indeed, if buyers can acquire the direct experience with the seller's website, then the roles of perceived institutional mechanisms assurance actually will become less profound [7]. This implies that the effect of trust-in-platform on trust-in-seller is stronger when PWQS is higher, while weaker when PEEIM is higher.

Furthermore, the results also confirm that PWQS negatively moderates the relationship between trust-in-seller and purchase intention, such that the positive impact of trust-in-seller on purchase intention becomes weaker when PWQS is higher. This moderating effect suggests that

if buyers perceive that the level of website quality is high, it is not particularly significant to cement trust-in-seller. The interaction plot (see Figure 5) also suggests that trust-in-seller does not have a significant effect on purchase intention when PWQS is high.

Contrary to our expectations, the present research finds that PEEIM positively moderates the relationship between trust-in-seller and purchase intention. One possible explanation is that the effective institutional mechanisms can provide explicit regulatory assurances to buyers, and thus cause buyers to believe that the transaction environment is less risky [67]. Buyers will not worry about the problems that occur during or after the transaction process under this condition. In other words, when enforceable, convenient, available and cost effective recourses are provided by these effective institutional mechanisms [60], buyers who trust the seller are more willing to form a purchase intention with this seller.

Limitations and Future Research

Though our proposed model is generally supported by the data, several limitations need to be mentioned as they open up interesting research opportunities. First, although some sample characteristics variables are controlled in this study, we should also take some other variables into consideration, such as product characteristics and satisfaction. Future research could be conducted by examining these control variables.

Second, given that our sample is exclusively composed of active online buyers, self-selection bias may have impacted our results. Individuals who had already ceased to purchase from TaoBao might have different perceptions about the roles of the effectiveness of the institutional mechanisms and the seller's website quality. Thus, the results only explained the behavior of active online buyers. Although self-selection bias might have affected the data

collection process, prior research indicates that a web-based survey has the potential to attract participation from a diverse range of respondents, and is easy to access and answer [14]. Gosling et al. [28] argue that the data quality provided by a self-selected sample is the same as that offered by traditional methods. In addition, Hayslett and Wildemuth [30] suggest that no significant differences exist between a random sample and self-selected respondents with respect to the demographic background of the respondents. Therefore, the influence of self-selection is not considered to be significant in this study.

Third, the respondents who completed the questionnaires were asked to recall their most recent transaction experience with TaoBao, which may induce memory recall bias. Hence, future research could consider replicating the study with other methods, such as experiments.

Finally, our data were collected from buyers on TaoBao, the most important C2C online shopping platform in China. Even though it is worth investigating how online buyers perceive contextual conditions on TaoBao, given its status as the most well-known C2C online shopping platform in China, the generalizability of our findings to C2C online shopping platforms in other contexts requires additional research. In particular, the behavior of online buyers is likely to vary across cultures. A cross-cultural comparison between TaoBao and other C2C online marketplaces in other countries should be undertaken in future research. Such cross-cultural studies may provide a more holistic explanation of online buyers' behavior.

Theoretical Implications

This study offers several important implications for theory. First, our study provides a more fine-grained insight into trust transfer theory in terms of its boundary conditions. Although trust transfer theory has been used to interpret a variety of trust building mechanisms in the context of

e-commerce [31, 60], its boundary conditions with respect to how trust can be transferred in the C2C online shopping context had yet to be tested before the current study, notwithstanding recent work reporting the dynamic nature of the trust transfer process [16]. Mayer et al. [48] also argue that in order to achieve a better understanding of trust in a trustee, it is necessary to consider the contextual conditions under which trust operates. Hong and Cho [31] call for future e-marketplaces research to explore factors that facilitate the trust transfer process. To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to address this call in the C2C e-commerce literature by empirically verifying and theorizing the crucial moderating roles in influencing the trust transfer process, which would help develop strategies to promote trust transfer production mechanisms.

Second and more specifically, by identifying PEEIM and PWQS as moderators, we take the roles of both the general institutional mechanisms and seller-specific mechanisms into consideration. In doing so, we draw upon signaling theory and then theorize the important effects of PEEIM and PWQS. Previous studies have considered either institutional mechanisms or website quality as moderators [20, 44]; however, researchers seldom recognize that these two perspectives can be combined, not to mention their impacts on the trust transfer process. Indeed, Fang et al. [20] indicated that they only theoretically differentiate the role of PEEIM from seller-specific mechanisms, laying bare the possibility that the existence of seller-specific mechanisms may outweigh the effect of PEEIM. Fang et al. [20] thus called for empirical examinations of PEEIM against more seller specific mechanisms, such as sellers' website quality in future research. Our study is the first to investigate this assertion and our findings also advance the scholarly understanding of the crucial role of PEEIM and PWQS in facilitating buyers' trust transfer and subsequent purchase intention. Unfortunately, related studies have only focused on one perspective, either the general institutional mechanisms or seller-specific mechanisms, when

investigating online buyers' behavior. In essence, our study takes a significant step toward theoretical advancement in the existing literature by demonstrating that both the general level and specific/local level of mechanisms should be combined to produce additional impacts on trust transfer process.

Furthermore, this study shows the interesting paradoxical effects of PEEIM and PWQS on the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller and the relationship between trust-in-seller and online purchase intention. On the one hand, PEEIM negatively moderates the impact of trust-in-platform on trust-in-seller, while strengthening the importance of trust-in-seller in purchase intention. On the other hand, PWQS positively moderates the influence of trust-in-platform on trust-in-seller, whereas negatively moderates the relationship between trust-in-seller and purchase intention. Given that the cost of monitoring online transactions can be reduced by trust, thus online sellers treat trust as a source of competitive advantage [60]. Our findings suggest that this is true when PWQS is low. This implies that enhancing trust may no longer help sellers gain competitive advantage among competitors when PWQS is high, because its role becomes less important at this stage. In addition, previous research argues that buyers' trust-in-platform can be easily transferred to trust-in-seller [31]. Our findings indicate this argument is correct when PEEIM is ineffective.

Practical Implications

In terms of practicality, this study may provide some valuable guidelines. C2C platform providers and sellers should have different foci on online buyers at different stages. First and foremost, an online survey could be conducted by the C2C platform to assess buyers' PEEIM. Then the providers of the platform should strategically build buyers' trust according to different

levels of PEEIM. Specifically, for those buyers who perceive that the e-commerce institutional mechanism is relatively ineffective, providers need to put much more effort to build buyers' trust-in-platform. For example, the platform providers can help teach buyers how to select a trustworthy seller in accordance with buyers' interest. In addition, the providers should pay more attention to the provision of customer service: they should provide a professional level of service to buyers at each of the pre-sales, online-sales and post-sales phases. Alternatively, when buyers perceive the e-commerce institutional mechanism to be relatively effective, no additional costs need to be invested to maintain buyers' trust.

Second, the seller should also strategically build buyers' trust based on different levels of PWQS. Specifically, when buyers perceive the seller's website quality to be relatively low, sufficient attention should be paid to build buyers' trust in it. For example, online buyers hope to get more guarantees and promises from the seller due to high uncertainties during online shopping process. Thus, the seller should fulfill his/her commitments in terms of returns and replacement. An online seller may save costs with respect to trust maintenance for those buyers who perceive the website quality to be relatively high. Accordingly, knowing buyers' PWQS is very significant for the seller. The seller can directly assess buyers' evaluation of the website quality and then study if their PWQS is related to other attributes such as purchasing history.

Conclusion

This study is the first to explore the boundary conditions surrounding the trust transfer process in the C2C online shopping context by simultaneously considering the moderating roles of PEEIM and PWQS. We found that PEEIM has a negative effect on the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller yet has a positive effect on the relationship between trust-in-seller

and online purchase intention. Furthermore, PWQS positively moderates the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller yet negatively moderates the relationship between trust-in-seller and online purchase intention. These findings not only address the call to examine the general perception of institutional mechanisms against more local, specific mechanisms but also advance our understanding of how to strategically promote buyers' trust transfer so as to increase their purchasing behavior. To conclude, these interesting findings provide guidance for future research to further examine the roles of e-commerce institutional mechanisms and website quality in the e-commerce context.

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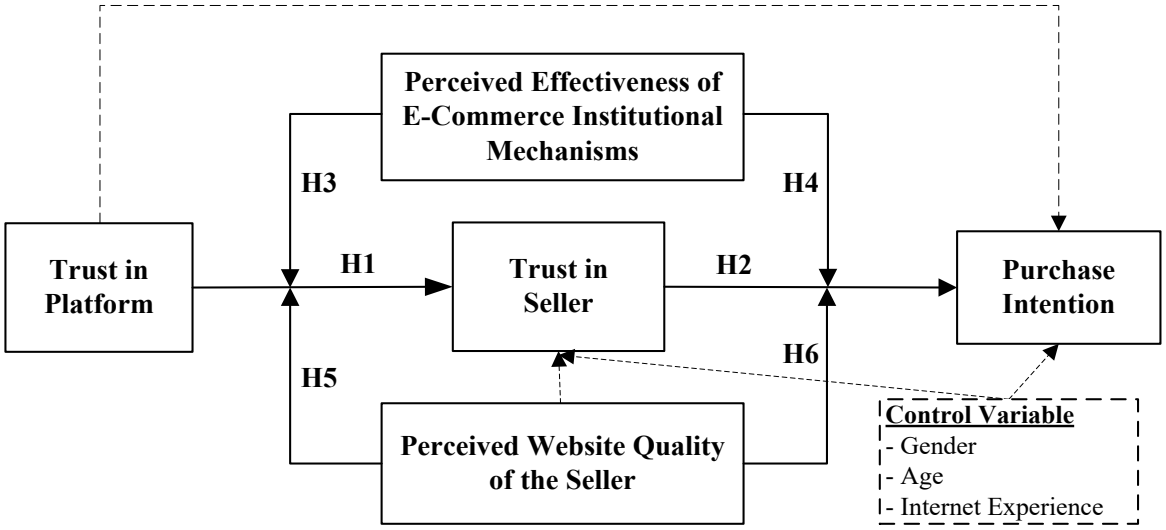

Figure 1. Research Model

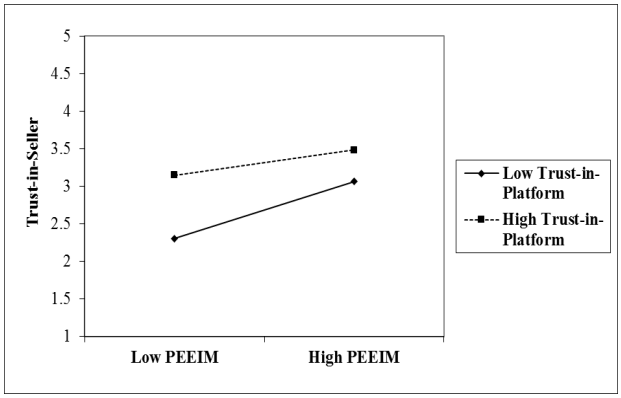

Figure 2. The Moderating Effect of PEEIM on the Relationship between Trust-in-Platform and Trust-in-Seller

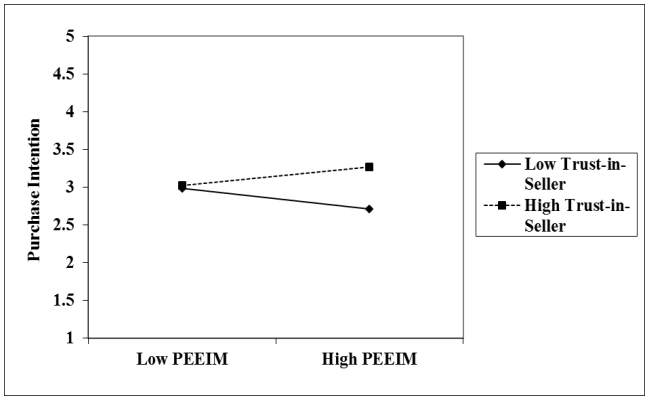

Figure 3. The Moderating Effect of PEEIM on the Relationship between Trust-in-Seller and Purchase Intention

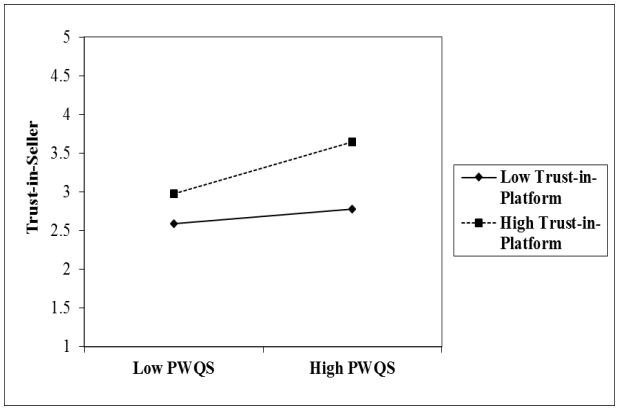

Figure 4. The Moderating Effect of PWQS on the Relationship between Trust-in-Platform and Trust-in-Seller

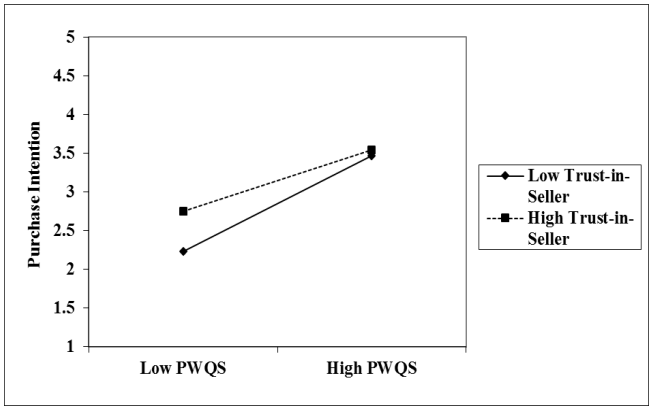

Figure 5. The Moderating Effect of PWQS on the Relationship between Trust-in-Seller and Purchase Intention

Table 1. Measurement Items.

Constructs and Measurement	Loading
Trust in Platform	
1. As an auction host/intermediary, TaoBao can be trusted at all times.	0.834
2. As an auction host/intermediary, TaoBao has a high level of integrity.	0.838
3. TaoBao is a competent and knowledgeable auction host/intermediary.	0.725
4. As an auction host/intermediary, TaoBao can be counted on to do what is right*.	
Trust in Seller	
1. I believe that this seller is consistent in quality and service.	0.753
2. I believe that this seller is keen on fulfilling my needs and wants.	0.807
3. I believe that this seller is honest.	0.722
4. I believe that this seller wants to be known as one that keeps promises and commitments.	0.812
5. I believe that this seller has my best interests in mind.	0.837
6. I believe that this seller has high integrity.	0.786
7. I believe that this seller is dependable.	0.798
Purchase Intention	
1. Given the chance, I predict that I would consider buying products from this seller on TaoBao in the future.	0.903
2. Given the opportunity, I intend to place an order from this seller on TaoBao.	0.912
3. It is likely that I will actually buy products from this seller on TaoBao in the near future.	0.815
Perceived Effectiveness of E-Commerce Institutional Mechanisms	
1. When buying online, I am confident that there are mechanisms in place to protect me against any potential risks (e.g. leaking of personal information, credit card fraud, goods not received, etc.) of online shopping if something goes wrong with my online purchase.	0.821
2. I am sure that I cannot be taken advantage of (e.g. leaking of personal information, credit card fraud, goods not received, etc.) as a result of conducting purchases online.	0.865
3. I believe that there are other parties (e.g. your credit card company) who have an obligation to protect me against any potential risks (leaking of personal information, credit card fraud, goods not received, etc.) of online shopping if something goes wrong with my online purchase.	0.863
4. I have confidence in third parties (e.g. SafeTrader, TRUSTe) to protect me against any potential risks (e.g. leaking of personal information, credit card fraud, goods not received, etc.) of online shopping if something goes wrong with my	

online purchase*.	
Perceived Website Quality of the Seller	
- Information Quality	
1. The website of this seller provides me with information relevant to my needs.	0.810
2. The website of this seller provides me with sufficient information.	0.837
3. The website of this seller provides me with accurate information.	0.850
4. The website of this seller provides me with up-to-date information.	0.778
- System Quality	
1. The website of this seller quickly loads all the text and graphics.	0.833
2. The website of this seller is easy to use.	0.878
3. The website of this seller is easy to navigate.	0.877
4. The website of this seller is visually attractive.	0.739
- Service Quality	
1. The website of this seller provides on-time services.	0.869
2. The website of this seller provides prompt responses.	0.826
3. The website of this seller provides professional services.	0.774
4. The website of this seller provides personalized services.	0.738

Note: *Items were removed from further analyses due to low loading.

Table 2. Demographics of Respondents (the Number of Respondents=294).

	Percentage
Gender	
Male	53.7%
Female	46.3%
Age	
16-20	4.8%
21-30	85.0%
31-40	9.9%
41 and above	0.3%
Education	
High school or below	2.4%
Two year college	3.1%
Bachelor	45.9%
Master or above	48.6%
Monthly individual income in RMB (US$1=RMB6.18)	
Under 1,000	49.7%
1,001-3,000	18.7%
3,001-5,000	12.2%
5,001-10,000	13.9%
10,001or above	5.4%
Online shopping frequency (times in a month)	
1-3	62.9%
4-6	26.9%
7 or above	10.2%
Internet experience (in years)	
1-3	48.3%
4-6	40.5%
7 or above	11.2%

Table 3. Common Method Bias Analysis.

Construct	Indicator	Substantive Factor Loading (R_1)	R_1^2	Method Factor Loading (R_2)	R_2^2
TP	TP1	0.800***	0.640	0.043	0.002
	TP2	0.882***	0.778	-0.055	0.003
	TP3	0.714***	0.510	0.014	0.000
TS	TS1	0.708***	0.501	-0.015	0.000
	TS2	0.888***	0.789	-0.126	0.016
	TS3	0.679***	0.461	0.010	0.000
	TS4	0.807***	0.651	-0.049	0.002
	TS5	0.926***	0.857	-0.163	0.027
	TS6	0.817***	0.667	-0.079	0.006
	TS7	0.887***	0.787	-0.121	0.015
PI	PI1	0.842***	0.709	0.087	0.008
	PI2	0.953***	0.908	-0.058	0.003
	PI3	0.837***	0.701	-0.031	0.001
PEEIM	PEEIM1	0.761***	0.579	0.089	0.008
	PEEIM2	0.874***	0.764	-0.013	0.000
	PEEIM3	0.911***	0.830	-0.072	0.005
IQ	IQ1	0.751***	0.564	0.069	0.005
	IQ2	0.936***	0.876	-0.115	0.013
	IQ3	0.787***	0.619	0.073	0.005
	IQ4	0.802***	0.643	-0.028	0.001
SQ	SQ1	0.863***	0.745	-0.037	0.001
	SQ2	0.826***	0.682	0.065	0.004
	SQ3	0.869***	0.755	0.010	0.000
	SQ4	0.776***	0.602	-0.047	0.002
SerQ	SerQ1	0.864***	0.746	0.007	0.000
	SerQ2	0.812***	0.659	0.018	0.000
	SerQ3	0.717***	0.514	0.074	0.005
	SerQ4	0.820***	0.672	-0.105	0.011
Average		**0.825**	**0.686**	**-0.020**	**0.005**

Note: *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 4. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

Construct	Indicators	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Trust in Platform (TP)	3	0.719	0.842	0.641
Trust in Seller (TS)	7	0.896	0.920	0.622
Purchase Intention (PI)	3	0.850	0.909	0.770
Perceived Effectiveness of E-Commerce Institutional Mechanisms (PEEIM)	3	0.807	0.886	0.722
Second-order Perceived Website Quality of the Seller (PWQS)		0.859	0.914	0.780
Information Quality (IQ)	4	0.836	0.891	0.671
System Quality (SQ)	4	0.849	0.901	0.695
Service Quality (SerQ)	4	0.813	0.879	0.645

Table 5. Means, Standard Deviation and Correlations.

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. TP	3.435	0.678	**0.801**							
2. TS	3.324	0.721	0.614	**0.789**						
3. PI	3.803	0.743	0.622	0.437	**0.878**					
4. PEEIM	3.213	0.818	0.501	0.561	0.343	**0.850**				
5. PWQS	3.537	0.616	0.665	0.580	0.601	0.524	**0.883**			
6. Gender	NA	NA	-0.056	-0.023	-0.085	-0.063	0.002	NA		
7. Age	NA	NA	-0.123	-0.051	0.014	-0.136	-0.059	-0.049	NA	
8. Internet Experience	NA	NA	-0.002	0.088	0.044	-0.017	-0.042	0.271	0.045	NA

Note: Square root of AVE is the shaded numbers in the diagonal row.

Table 6. Hierarchical Regression Results.

Variables	DV—Trust in Seller			DV—Purchase Intention		
	Model 1a	**Model 2a**	**Model 3a**	**Model 1b**	**Model 2b**	**Model 3b**
Control Variables						
Gender	-0.056	0.035	0.027	0.005	0.040	0.030
Age	-0.054	-0.013	-0.007	-0.102	-0.102*	-0.106*
Internet Experience	0.104	0.103**	0.096*	0.070	0.081	0.091
Main Effects						
Trust in Platform		0.324***	**0.315*****			
Trust in Seller					0.119	**0.148***
PEEIM		0.278***	0.274***		-0.007	-0.009
PWQS		0.206***	0.214***		0.516***	0.508***
Moderating Effects						
Trust in Platform X PEEIM			**-0.106***			
Trust in Platform X PWQS			**0.121***			
Trust in Seller X PEEIM						**0.129***
Trust in Seller X PWQS						**-0.110***
R^2	1.35%	49.79%	**51.04%**	1.21%	38.80%	**40.48%**
ΔR^2		48.44%	1.25%		37.59%	1.68%
F(p-value)	1.508	**36.165*****	**34.311*****	1.124	**32.805*****	**34.428*****
Effect Size (f^2)		0.965	0.026		0.614	0.028

Note: The number of respondents=294
Heteroskedasticity robust variance estimator used.
Reported values are standardized regression coefficients.
*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 7. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Findings

H1: A buyer's trust in a platform will have a positive effect on his or her trust in a seller.	Supported
H2: A buyer's trust in a seller will have a positive effect on his or her purchase intention in the same seller.	Supported
H3: PEEIM positively moderates the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller.	Unsupported
H4: PEEIM negatively moderates the relationship between trust-in-seller and purchase intention.	Unsupported
H5: PWQS positively moderates the relationship between trust-in-platform and trust-in-seller.	Supported
H6: PWQS negatively moderates the relationship between trust-in-seller and purchase intention.	Supported