

Visual Cues and Repeat Purchase: A Cue Utilization Perspective

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800124>

Received: 13 August 2026; Accepted: 18 August 2026; Published: 27 August 2026

ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper develops a multidimensional framework explaining how storefront visual cues shape online repurchase intention in Chinese e-commerce. Existing studies have often examined individual website features separately and focused mainly on initial purchase decisions, offering limited insight into how the overall visual environment supports repeat patronage. Drawing on Cue Utilization Theory, the framework posits that consumers use storefront cues to infer a platform's quality, credibility, usefulness, and shopping value when product attributes cannot be directly inspected. Six visual cues are incorporated. Social presence, novelty, interactivity, enjoyment, and vividness are proposed to strengthen online repurchase intention by reducing uncertainty, improving product evaluation, increasing perceived control, and creating a more engaging shopping experience. Intrusiveness is expected to weaken repurchase intention because disruptive, attention-grabbing design elements reduce consumer autonomy and undermine platform credibility. By integrating experiential, interactive, informational, and disruptive cues into a single framework, the paper extends the fragmented treatment of online visual presentation and shifts attention from initial conversion to sustained consumer-platform relationships. The framework provides hypotheses for future empirical testing and offers practical guidance for e-commerce platforms seeking to design storefronts that promote informed decisions, trust, and repeat purchasing.

Keywords: Chinese e-commerce, Cue Utilization Theory, online repurchase intention, storefront visual cues, visual presentation

INTRODUCTION

Digital storefronts have become the primary setting where online consumers inspect products, compare alternatives, and decide whether a platform is worth revisiting. In this setting, visual presentation serves informational and evaluative functions. Product imagery, contextual scenes, interactive tools, visual richness, and promotional features serve as signals consumers use before they can physically inspect an offering. Prior research shows that website and product presentation cues influence perceived quality, attention, risk, and purchase decisions (Longstreet et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2016). However, studies frequently examine these cues separately, which offers only a partial account of the storefront as an integrated decision environment.

This limitation is particularly important for online repurchase intention. Repurchase represents a consumer's willingness to continue purchasing from the same platform or merchant after prior experience. It therefore differs from an initial purchase triggered by novelty, promotion, or immediate need. Continued patronage depends on whether the platform repeatedly supports confident product evaluation, perceived value, satisfaction, and trust while limiting regret (Liao et al., 2017; B. Chekima & K. Chekima, 2019; Chekima, 2019). In China's highly competitive e-commerce market, storefront designs must attract attention while helping consumers understand products and retain control over their decisions. Features that provide useful, credible, and engaging signals can support repurchase, whereas intrusive features may weaken the relationship by creating irritation and reducing perceived autonomy.

This paper addresses the gap by developing a multidimensional model of storefront visual presentation and online repurchase intention. Drawing on Cue Utilization Theory, it proposes six direct relationships. Social presence, novelty, interactivity, enjoyment, and vividness are treated as favourable cues that can improve consumers' evaluations of the platform and shopping experience. Intrusiveness is treated as an unfavourable cue that can reduce credibility, control, and willingness to return. The paper contributes by integrating these cues within one framework, extending cue-based reasoning from initial purchase judgements to repeat patronage, and identifying design priorities for e-commerce platforms. The framework is conceptual and presents theoretically grounded hypotheses for subsequent empirical testing.

Cue Utilization Theory and Online Repurchase Intention

Cue Utilization Theory explains how consumers form judgments when they cannot directly inspect all relevant attributes. Consumers use observable indicators, or cues, to infer less observable qualities such as product reliability, seller credibility, and platform competence (Olson & Jacoby, 1972; Steenkamp, 1990). The influence of a cue depends on its predictive value, which concerns its perceived association with the target attribute, and its confidence value, which concerns the consumer's confidence in interpreting the cue correctly (Longstreet, 2010). Cues that appear relevant, credible, and interpretable should therefore receive greater weight in consumer evaluation.

E-commerce increases reliance on such signals because consumers cannot touch, test, or inspect products as they can in physical stores. Seller reputation and product presentation can independently shape product-quality inferences, although consumers may assign them different weights across products and decision contexts (Wang et al., 2016). The present framework extends this reasoning by treating the digital storefront as a configuration of simultaneous cues. Social presence and enjoyment represent experiential signals; novelty, interactivity, and vividness communicate platform capability and informational value; and intrusiveness signals interference and reduced control. Cue Utilization Theory serves as the explanatory lens for these direct relationships with online repurchase intention. It is not proposed as a separate measured construct or mediator.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

A Multidimensional Cue Configuration

A multidimensional treatment is necessary because consumers encounter visual storefront elements simultaneously rather than in isolation. The six cues capture complementary aspects of the online shopping environment. Social presence conveys human connection, novelty signals freshness, interactivity provides a sense of control, enjoyment supplies hedonic value, and vividness improves product representation. Intrusiveness differs in direction because it interrupts evaluation and restricts perceived autonomy. A vivid contextual display, for example, may improve product understanding and social presence, while a disruptive promotion may weaken an otherwise favourable experience. The framework therefore distinguishes visual richness from visual effectiveness and proposes that each cue directly influences online repurchase intention. This position is consistent with evidence that consumers assign different weights to presentation and reputational cues across decision contexts (Wang et al., 2016).

Social Presence

Social presence refers to the perceived human involvement communicated through visual and interactive features, including people in product scenes, social interaction, and contextual usage displays. It can make an online environment feel less impersonal, reduce transaction uncertainty, and support the formation of trust (Gefen & Straub, 2004; Pavlou, 2005). Social presence cues in product photographs can also generate favourable emotional responses and increase purchase intention (Poirier et al., 2024). From a cue-utilisation perspective, credible human presence signals that the product and platform are understandable, socially validated, and relevant to consumers' lives. These evaluations can reinforce confidence in the platform and encourage continued patronage.

H1: Social presence is positively related to online repurchase intention.

Novelty

Novelty refers to the perceived newness, originality, or unexpectedness of visual presentation. Innovative layouts, discovery features, and immersive product displays can signal that a platform remains current and capable of offering differentiated value. Novelty may operate through functional and emotional pathways, including facilitating exploration, fostering stronger engagement, and providing a more stimulating experience (McLean & Wilson, 2019; Xiao et al., 2019). Its relevance to repurchase, however, depends on more than short-lived surprise. When novel features improve product discovery or platform use, consumers can interpret them as evidence of continuing usefulness and innovation. Such favourable platform associations should increase willingness to purchase again.

H2: Novelty is positively related to online repurchase intention.

Interactivity

Interactivity concerns the consumer's ability to control the interface, respond to content, and receive timely feedback from the platform. Examples include adjustable product displays, searchable information, review filters, question-and-answer tools, and responsive customer communication. These features can increase perceived control, facilitate comparison, and help consumers resolve uncertainty. In the Chinese e-marketplace, interactivity has been linked to trust and repurchase intention (Bao et al., 2016). From a cue-utilisation perspective, responsive interaction signals platform competence and service capability. It also increases confidence in consumers' interpretation of product and seller information, providing a stronger basis for continued platform use.

H3: Interactivity is positively related to online repurchase intention.

Enjoyment

Enjoyment is the intrinsic pleasure and immersion experienced while using a platform. It may arise from visually appealing content, fluid interaction, and an engaging browsing journey. Although enjoyment is often associated with impulse purchasing (Febrilia et al., 2024), its relevance also extends to repeat patronage. Pleasant experiences can create favourable memories, strengthen satisfaction, and make consumers more willing to return. Within the proposed framework, enjoyment serves as a hedonic cue signaling experiential value. When the platform makes shopping both pleasant and worthwhile, consumers are more likely to evaluate the overall relationship positively and develop stronger intentions to repurchase online.

H4: Enjoyment is positively related to online repurchase intention.

Vividness

Vividness denotes the sensory richness and realism of product presentation, including high-resolution images, dynamic video, 360-degree views, and three-dimensional visualisation. Such features help consumers form clearer mental representations of a product and reduce uncertainty about its appearance and use. Three-dimensional and augmented-reality displays can enhance perceived website quality, interactivity, and vividness compared with conventional image displays (Kim et al., 2022; Zare Ebrahimabad et al., 2024). Vividness can therefore function as a product-transparency cue. When visual information appears clear, realistic, and complete, consumers have stronger grounds for confident product evaluation and subsequent purchasing decisions (Taheri et al., 2024).

H5: Vividness is positively related to online repurchase intention.

Intrusiveness

Intrusiveness is the perceived interference with autonomous decision-making caused by forced attention-capturing features, including disruptive pop-ups, premature permission requests, aggressive retargeting, and difficult-to-dismiss promotions. Unlike the five favourable cues, intrusiveness communicates pressure and

reduces the consumer's sense of control. It has been associated with unfavourable attitudes towards online advertising and negative app and brand responses (Raharjo & Widyastuti, 2019; Smink et al., 2020). Under Cue Utilization Theory, intrusiveness functions as a negative platform cue. It can lower perceived credibility (F. Z. Chekima & B. Chekima, 2019; Li et al., 2024), interrupt product evaluation, and make the shopping experience less worthwhile, thereby reducing consumers' willingness to purchase again.

H6: Intrusiveness is negatively related to online repurchase intention.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual framework. It specifies six direct relationships between storefront visual cues and online repurchase intention. Social presence, novelty, interactivity, enjoyment, and vividness are expected to exert positive effects, whereas intrusiveness is expected to exert a negative effect. Cue Utilization Theory provides the explanatory foundation for the model by clarifying how consumers interpret these observable storefront features as signals of platform quality, credibility, capability, and shopping value. The theory is used as an analytical lens rather than as a separate construct or intervening variable.

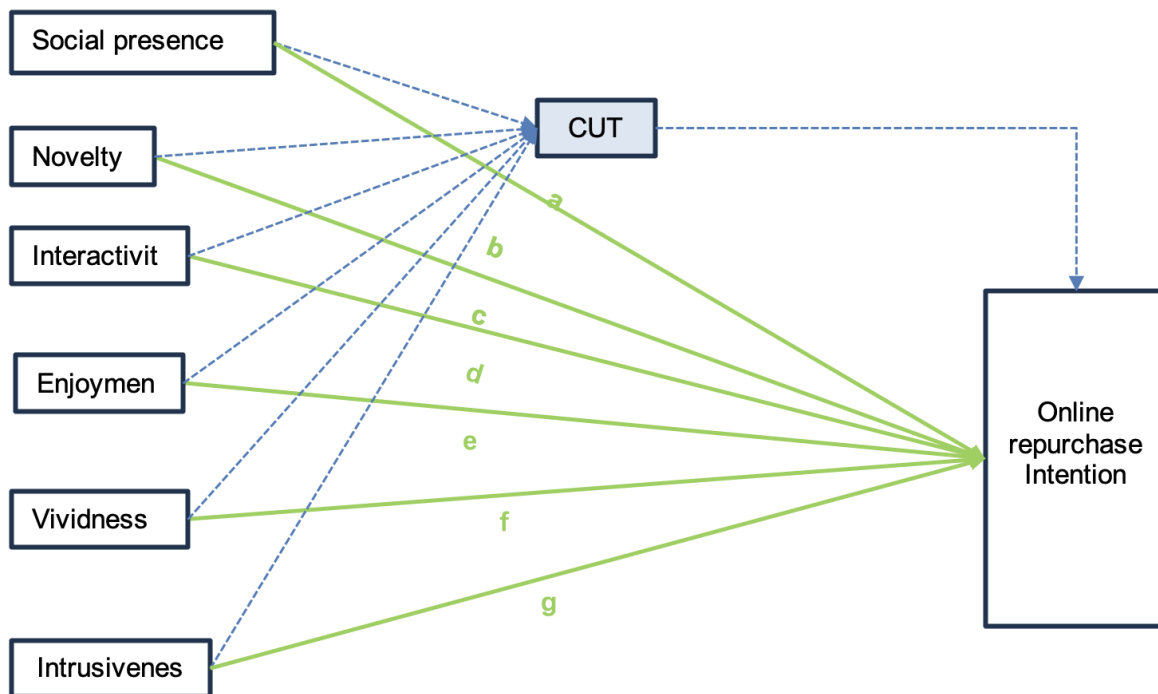


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework.

Theoretical And Practical Implications

The framework offers three theoretical contributions. First, it consolidates six storefront cues within a single model of online repurchase intention. Prior studies commonly examine individual features such as social presence, interactivity, or vividness. Integrating them provides a broader account of the digital storefront as an experiential, functional, informational, and potentially disruptive environment. This approach also distinguishes visual effectiveness from visual intensity. A storefront can be visually rich yet weaken consumer response if its design becomes intrusive.

Second, the framework extends Cue Utilization Theory from product-quality and initial purchase judgements to continued patronage. Repurchase requires consumers to reassess whether a familiar platform remains credible, useful, and worthwhile. The model explains how positive cues can reinforce these evaluations over repeated encounters, whereas intrusiveness can signal weak respect for consumer control. It therefore introduces cue

valence into the explanation of repurchase intention and demonstrates that observable interface features can shape a relational outcome beyond a single transaction.

For platform managers, the framework identifies clear design priorities. Social presence should be developed through credible contextual imagery and human-centered interaction. Novelty should improve discovery or usability rather than serve as decoration. Interactive tools should give consumers meaningful control over product comparison, reviews, and communication. Enjoyment should support a pleasant and efficient browsing experience, while vivid media should clarify product attributes and usage. When these cues deliver functional or experiential value, they can strengthen the consumer's reasons to return and purchase again.

Platforms should treat intrusiveness as a retention risk. Frequent pop-ups, forced permissions, aggressive retargeting, and difficult-to-dismiss promotions may attract attention but damage perceived control and credibility. Managers should test whether each visual feature supports product evaluation or interrupts it. Future research should compare all six cues across marketplace pages, social commerce, live-streaming platforms, and product categories. Longitudinal studies, experiments, and behavioural indicators such as repeat visits or actual reorders would provide stronger evidence than cross-sectional intentions alone (Chekima et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

Storefront visual presentation comprises multiple cues that can shape consumers' willingness to purchase again. Social presence, novelty, interactivity, enjoyment, and vividness are expected to strengthen online repurchase intention, whereas intrusiveness is expected to weaken it. Grounded in Cue Utilization Theory, the framework integrates these direct relationships and explains how consumers use visual storefront features to evaluate platform quality and shopping value. It provides a focused basis for empirical testing and for designing Chinese e-commerce storefronts that support trust, control, and continued patronage.

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