

Visual Presentation Cues and Online Repurchase Intention in Chinese E-Commerce

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper develops a framework explaining how visual presentation cues can sustain online repurchase intention in Chinese e-commerce. It focuses on durable loyalty in changing information environments. Although e-commerce research recognises the importance of social and informational features, studies often focus on single cues or initial purchase outcomes. This leaves limited understanding of why consumers intend to return to a platform after prior experience. Integrating the Elaboration Likelihood Model and Cognitive Load Theory, the paper conceptualises social presence, interactivity, information quality, and review usefulness as distinct cues that influence repurchase intention through affective engagement, diagnostic evaluation, perceived control, trust, and reduced uncertainty. The framework further positions information overload and perceived deceptiveness as boundary conditions. Information overload is expected to weaken the positive effect of information quality by exhausting cognitive resources and turning useful information into noise. Perceived deceptiveness is expected to weaken the positive effect of review usefulness by undermining central processing of review arguments and peripheral reliance on review signals. The paper develops six hypotheses and presents an integrated visual presentation model. It offers a dual-route explanation of repeated online patronage and guidance for platforms seeking to design informative, interactive, and credible shopping environments that support customer retention.

Keywords: Chinese e-commerce, Cognitive Load Theory, Elaboration Likelihood Model, online repurchase intention, visual presentation

INTRODUCTION

Digital interfaces have become the principal setting in which consumers inspect online offerings, compare alternatives, and decide whether a platform merits another visit. Visual presentation is therefore more than an aesthetic layer. Product scenes, interface feedback, seller information, and customer reviews provide cues through which consumers assess uncertainty, relevance, and platform trustworthiness before and after a purchase. Such cues matter especially in Chinese e-commerce, where sustained repeat patronage affects customer value and where consumers face rich, fast-changing shopping environments (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013; Liao et al., 2017).

Research has established useful links between individual interface features and purchase-related outcomes. Social presence can generate affect and perceived connection, interactivity can encourage perceived control, and augmented visual features can improve user experience (Bao et al., 2016; Poirier et al., 2024; Zare Ebrahimabad et al., 2024). Yet individual-cue studies do not adequately explain how several visual and informational cues support a decision to return. They also overlook the possibility that the same digital setting can assist or obstruct judgment. An information-rich page can clarify a choice, but it can also exhaust attention. A review system can lower uncertainty, but suspicion of manipulation can make even useful content less persuasive (Peng et al., 2016; H. Zhang et al., 2018).

This paper develops a conceptual framework that addresses this tension. It integrates the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) to explain how four visual presentation cues, social presence, interactivity, information quality, and review usefulness, relate to online repurchase intention. It further proposes that information overload weakens the effect of information quality, whereas perceived deceptiveness weakens the effect of review usefulness. The paper is deliberately conceptual. It advances six testable hypotheses rather than reporting empirical findings.

Elaboration Likelihood Model, Cognitive Load Theory, And Online Repurchase Intention

ELM explains persuasion through two processing routes. The central route involves deliberate evaluation of message quality, logic, and evidence. The peripheral route relies on simpler cues, such as attraction, source signals, or visible social endorsement. Attitudes formed through central processing tend to be more enduring, whereas peripheral processing can support fast but less stable judgment (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Kitchen et al., 2014). In e-commerce, consumers may move between these routes as they inspect product details, judge review content, or respond to interface cues. This makes ELM suitable for explaining how a visual environment supports a continuing relationship with a platform.

CLT complements ELM by specifying the capacity conditions for effective processing. Working memory is limited, and complex or poorly organised content creates extraneous cognitive load that can hinder useful evaluation (Sweller, 1988, 2020). In online shopping, cues can provide cognitive scaffolding by making product information easier to locate and interpret. The same cues can become counterproductive when their volume, movement, or complexity exceeds the consumer's capacity. Together, ELM and CLT describe an attractiveness-cognitive balance: visual cues may attract attention and aid assessment, but their value depends on consumers' ability to process them.

Online repurchase intention is a consumer's willingness to maintain a long-term relationship with the same platform or merchant after prior experience. It differs from an initial purchase response (Febrilia et al., 2024) in that it rests on accumulated satisfaction, trust, value judgments, and the avoidance of regret (Liao et al., 2017; Miao et al., 2021; B. Chekima & K. Chekima, 2019; Chekima, 2019). The proposed framework therefore concentrates on cues that help consumers form credible, low-effort, and repeatable judgments.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

A Dual-Route Cue Configuration

The framework treats visual presentation as a configuration of social, functional, and informational cues. The four cues are conceptually distinct, yet each can affect the confidence with which consumers decide whether to revisit a platform. Social presence and interactivity can supply experiential and relational signals. Information quality and review usefulness can supply diagnostic content for more deliberate evaluation. The two moderators specify when positive cue effects should be weakened rather than assuming that visual richness or information volume is always beneficial.

Social Presence

Social presence is the consumer's perception of human involvement within a digital shopping environment. It can arise from people in product imagery, usage scenes, responsive interaction, and contextual social cues. These cues can reduce the impersonal character of online transactions and support emotional and cognitive trust (Chen et al., 2023; Nadeem et al., 2020). Through ELM's peripheral route, social presence can generate affective engagement and arousal. Through the central route, implicit social cues can improve the perceived diagnosticity of a product's use context. Research on social presence cues in product images supports their capacity to shape consumers' responses (Poirier et al., 2024). In a repurchase setting, this combination should make the platform feel more understandable, trustworthy, and worth revisiting.

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

Interactivity

Interactivity refers to a platform's ability to enable consumer control, feedback, and two-way communication through features such as navigation, adjustable displays, question-and-answer, and responsive communication. It can increase perceived control and reduce uncertainty by allowing consumers to obtain information relevant to their own decisions. Interactivity may also stimulate deeper engagement with product information, supporting central-route processing. Evidence from the Chinese e-marketplace links interactivity, trust, and repurchase intention (Bao et al., 2016), while ELM research shows how external cues can support more deliberate consumer evaluation (Fang et al., 2023). Visual technologies can further strengthen this effect by making interaction useful and intelligible rather than merely novel (Zare Ebrahimabad et al., 2024).

H2: Interactivity is positively related to online repurchase intention.

Information Quality

Information quality concerns the clarity, relevance, completeness, and organisation of product-related content supplied by a platform. Clear specifications, transparent service conditions, credible seller information, and well-ordered presentation can enable consumers to scrutinise an offering through the central route. Such processing supports stronger attitudes because consumers can relate product attributes to their own needs and form expectations that are more likely to be confirmed after purchase. Website quality has been associated with both initial and continued purchase outcomes (Kuan et al., 2008). Clear presentation can also provide peripheral signals of competence and trustworthiness when consumers have little time or motivation for extensive evaluation (Purwianti et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2020). Consequently, information quality should make future purchases feel less uncertain and less effortful.

H3: Information quality is positively related to online repurchase intention.

Review Usefulness

Review usefulness is the perceived diagnostic value of peer-generated information for making an accurate purchase decision. It depends on relevance, detail, perceived authenticity (Li et al., 2024), and the evidence that reviewers have invested cognitive effort. Useful reviews can reduce uncertainty and encourage trust in the platform's information environment (Benlian et al., 2012; Shaheen et al., 2019). Under ELM, detailed and relevant reviews act as high-quality arguments that support central-route processing. When consumers cannot examine content fully, helpfulness markers, reviewer credentials, and visible review value can function as peripheral signals (F. Z. Chekima & B. Chekima, 2019). The distinction is important because systematically processed review content is more likely to support durable attitudes, whereas simple review signals may produce less stable judgments (Yin et al., 2014; Rosillo-Díaz et al., 2024).

H4: Review usefulness is positively related to online repurchase intention.

Information Overload

Information overload occurs when the amount, variety, or complexity of platform content exceeds a consumer's processing capacity. CLT predicts that a high load depletes working-memory resources and can prevent consumers from extracting the diagnostic value of otherwise high-quality information (Sweller, 1988). Studies of online shopping associate overload with confusion, impaired decision quality, and higher cognitive costs (Lucian & Farias, 2009; H. Zhang et al., 2018). Although information can sometimes reduce uncertainty, the literature also indicates that the effects of overload depend on perceived risk and consumer experience (Soto-Acosta et al., 2014). The framework therefore treats overload as a boundary condition on the information-quality relationship rather than as a uniform, direct force.

H5: The positive relationship between information quality and online repurchase intention is weaker when information overload is high.

Perceived Deceptiveness

Perceived deceptiveness is the consumer's suspicion that reviews, recommendations, or promotional cues contain misleading claims, manufactured opinions, or manipulative intent. It is distinct from overload. Overload burdens attention, whereas deceptiveness undermines trust in the information itself. Perceived deception can raise screening and evaluation costs because consumers must verify whether a cue is credible (Peng et al., 2016; H. Zhang et al., 2018). In central processing, it contaminates the perceived argument quality of reviews. In peripheral processing, it invalidates heuristic signals such as helpfulness ratings and reviewer badges (Petrescu et al., 2022). Dark patterns, false urgency, and fabricated review signals make this condition increasingly relevant to e-commerce design (Rauniyar et al., 2025; Zhuang et al., 2018).

H6: The positive relationship between review usefulness and online repurchase intention is weaker when perceived deceptiveness is high.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 presents the proposed framework. H1 to H4 specify positive direct relationships between the four visual presentation cues and online repurchase intention. H5 and H6 identify two targeted boundary conditions. Information overload is expected to weaken the information quality path by reducing the capacity for deep evaluation. Perceived deceptiveness is expected to weaken the review usefulness path because it damages the credibility of both content and heuristic signals. The model does not assume that the four cues are interchangeable or that their effects will always be present. It instead locates each cue within a specific processing logic and identifies the environmental condition most likely to limit its effectiveness.

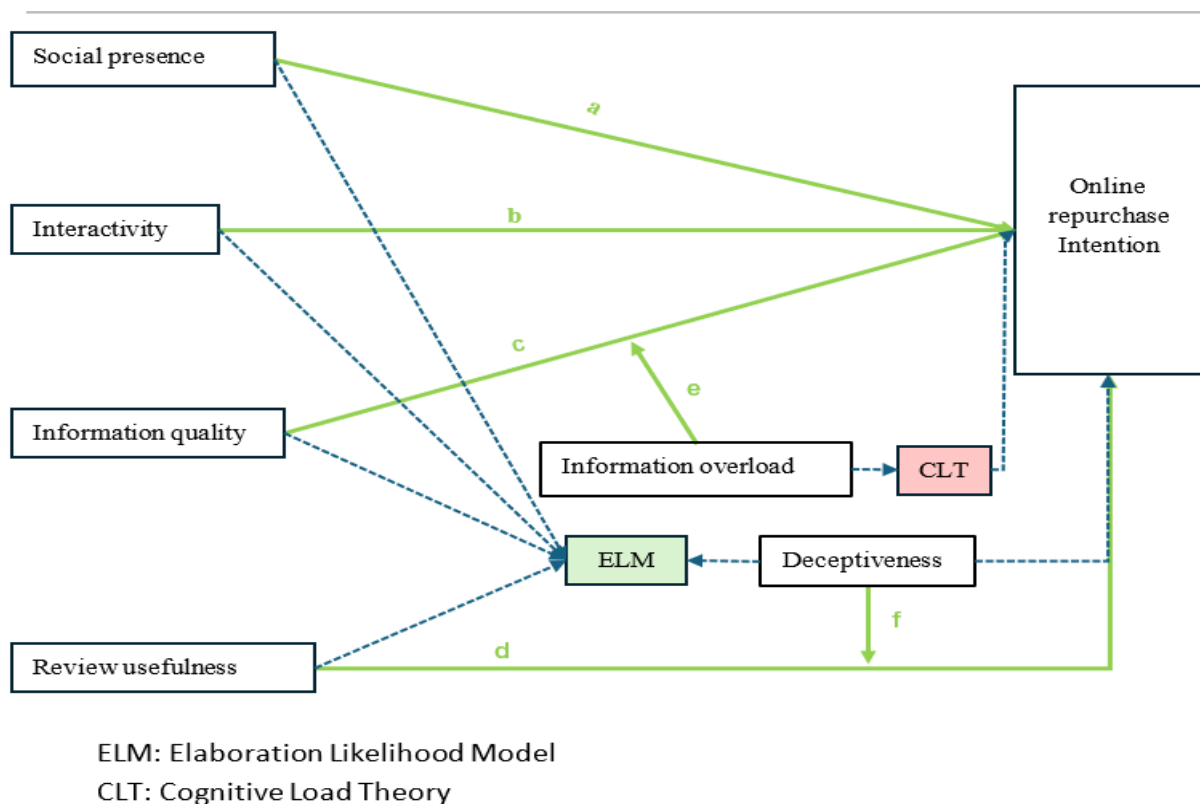


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework.

The framework remains conceptual and invites empirical testing across product categories, levels of consumer involvement, and types of e-commerce platform. It is particularly suitable for research designs that distinguish between immediate purchase responses and repeat patronage over time.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The framework makes three theoretical contributions. First, it shifts the focus from isolated interface characteristics to an integrated cue configuration that combines relational, functional, and diagnostic forms of visual presentation. Second, it uses ELM to explain why cues need not work through a single mechanism. Social presence and interactivity can support both affective engagement and informed evaluation, whereas information quality and review usefulness are more closely tied to the diagnostic content required for the formation of durable attitudes. Third, CLT adds a capacity-based explanation of why the value of information is conditional. The framework also distinguishes overload from deception, showing that platforms can fail either because consumers cannot process information or because they no longer trust it.

For platform managers, the central implication is that visual design should make evaluation easier, not simply more stimulating. Social presence should be created through credible contextual imagery and meaningful interaction. Interactive features should give consumers practical control over product inspection, search, and communication. Information should be prioritised and structured so that key attributes, service conditions, and supporting evidence are easy to locate. Review systems should elevate relevant, authentic, and well-substantiated content rather than relying on sheer volume. These design choices reduce cognitive effort while improving the trust required for repeat purchasing.

Future research can test the six hypotheses with longitudinal designs that link survey judgments to behavioural indicators such as repeat visits, repeated orders, or continued platform use (Chekima et al., 2023). Comparative studies can examine whether the proposed relationships differ for experience goods, search goods, and high-involvement purchases. Researchers can also investigate differences among consumers in susceptibility to information overload and the specific visual signals that trigger perceived deceptiveness.

CONCLUSION

Online repurchase intention depends on more than visual appeal. Social presence, interactivity, information quality, and review usefulness are proposed as cues that can strengthen a consumer's willingness to return to an e-commerce platform. Their effects, however, are conditional. Information overload can weaken the value of information quality, and perceived deceptiveness can weaken the value of useful reviews. By integrating ELM and CLT, the framework explains why durable repeat patronage requires an environment that is socially engaging, practically useful, informative, credible, and manageable to process.

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