

RESEARCH ON THE INFLUENCE MECHANISM OF ONLINE AND OFFLINE STORE IMAGE CONSISTENCY ON CONSUMERS' ONLINE PURCHASE INTENTION

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Received July 2021; accepted September 2021

ABSTRACT. *This paper explores the relationship between online and offline store image consistency and consumers' online purchase intention, as well as the mechanism of trust, perceived risk and retail brand familiarity. Firstly, based on the literature review, the definition and dimensions of online and offline store image consistency (goods, price and promotion, atmosphere, convenience, service, safety) are determined. Secondly, this paper constructs a model of the influence of online and offline store image consistency on consumers' online purchase intention with online store trust and online store perceived risk as mediating variables and retail brand familiarity as moderating variables. Finally, the empirical results verify that strengthening online and offline store image consistency can promote the formation of online store trust, effectively reduce the perceived risk of online store, and improve consumers' online purchase intention. The study provides a theoretical contribution to the mechanism by which online and offline store image consistency affects consumers' online purchase intention, and offers useful suggestions for the operational management and transformation and upgrading of multi-channel retailers.*

Keywords: Store image consistency, Online store trust, Online store perceived risk, Retail brand familiarity, Online purchase intention

1. Introduction. New retail channels are gradually appearing in consumers' view and influencing their purchasing behavior. In order to expand market share, retailers began to explore multi-channel development strategies and actively carried out online and offline marketing cooperation business [1]. The seamless connection among channels brings consistent shopping experience [2]. However, as a fixed multi-channel business model had not been formed [3], the goods price and promotion and other factors are inconsistent, affecting the store image and reducing consumers' purchase intention. Therefore, multi-channel retailers need to realize the coordinated operation among channels and create the online and offline store image [4].

Previous studies on online and offline store image consistency dimensions are based on the customer perspective [5,6,12] and do not fully consider the impact of marketing strategies [7-9]. So, we incorporate marketing synergy strategies into the research. The study explores the relationship between online and offline store image consistency and consumers' online purchase intention, and the role of trust, perceived risk and retail brand familiarity in this relationship, contributing to research related to online store purchase intention.

Our research aims to investigate how online and offline store image consistency influences consumers' online purchase intention. To achieve this goal, we develop a research model emphasizing store image consistency, store trust, store perceived risk and brand

familiarity. The study's novelty and theoretical contributions are three-fold. First, our research proposes the influence mechanism of online and offline store image consistency on customer purchasing from the perspective of multi-dimensional image consistency, trust and perceived risk. Second, our study considers both the features of online and offline store image consistency and customers' perceptions thereof. Third, our study considers the moderating effect of retail brand familiarity. Our study also provides some practical suggestions for multi-channel retailers to better leverage multiple shopping channels for effectively marketing their products.

2. Literature Review.

2.1. Online and offline store image consistency. Store image consists of emotional and subjective judgments, based on the evaluation of store's functional and psychological attributes [10]. Wang and Zhang defined store image fit as consumers' perception of the similarity between a multi-channel retailer's online and offline stores overall image and each attribute dimension [11]. Online and offline synergistic marketing strategy fit is the degree to which consumers perceive consistency in the marketing strategy [12]. Thus, we define online and offline store image consistency as the similarity of perceptions formed in consumers' minds by attributes collection of online and offline store image due to a retailer's multi-channel synergistic marketing strategy.

This paper draws on Badrinarayanan et al. [13], and Wang [14]'s consistency dimensions in store image to extract dimensions worth studying. Considering that price and promotion are to some extent congruent, the two are divided into the same dimension, with the innovative inclusion of atmosphere image and safety image. The final dimensions of online and offline store image consistency are divided into goods image consistency, price and promotion image consistency, atmosphere image consistency, convenience image consistency, service image consistency and safety image consistency.

2.2. Online store trust and perceived risk. Brand trust is the relationship between consumers' expectations and brand's responsibilities [15]. It is based on several characteristics such as brand reputation and predictability [16], and can be divided into two dimensions: reliability and goodwill. The study defines online store trust as consumers' confidence in online stores that are reflected by the store image consistency.

Consumers often perceive risks in online transactions [17]. Kim et al. considered perceived risk to be consumers' beliefs about the potential uncertain outcomes of online transactions [18]. We define online store perceived risk as consumers' uncertain negative beliefs in online stores due to the multi-dimensional store image consistency.

2.3. Retail brand familiarity. Alba and Hutchinson [19] defined brand familiarity as the degree of direct or indirect experience related to the brand accumulated by consumers. We define retail brand familiarity as the impression strength formed in consumers' mind when they have direct or indirect contact with retail brands.

3. Theoretical Model and Hypotheses Development.

3.1. Theoretical model. The above literature review has laid a theoretical foundation for the research. With the support of relevant literature, the final dimensions of online and offline store image consistency are divided into goods, price and promotion, atmosphere, convenience, service and safety image consistency. We construct a theoretical model of the influence mechanism of online and offline store image consistency on consumers' online purchase intention. The theoretical model is shown in Figure 1.

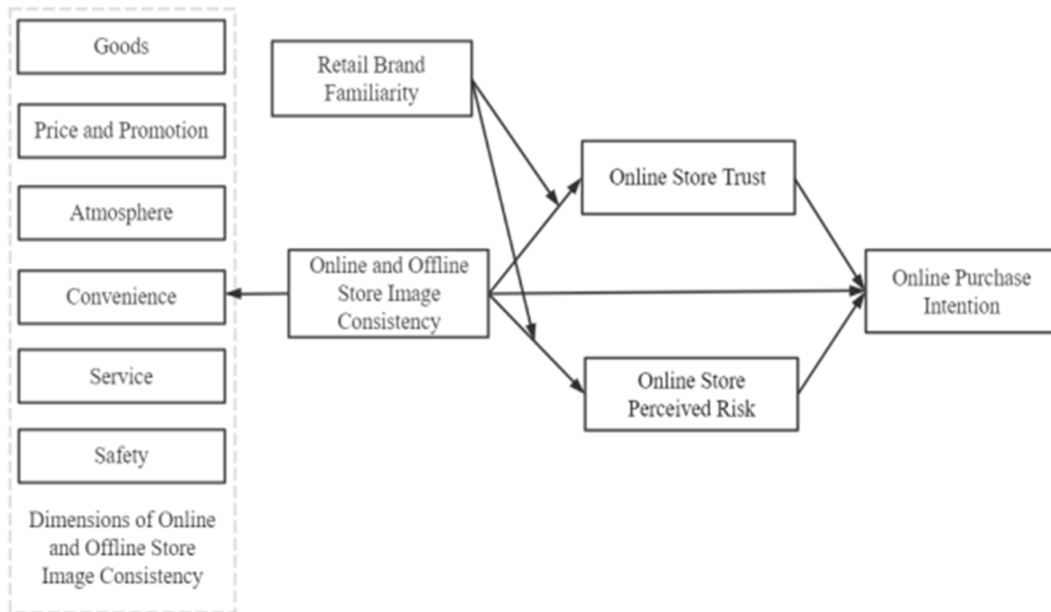


FIGURE 1. The research theoretical model

3.2. Hypotheses development.

3.2.1. *The impact of online and offline store image consistency on online trust, perceived risk and purchase intention.* Wang et al. proposed that when store image consistency is high, consumers show positive attitudes and beliefs [20]. Badrinarayanan et al. confirmed that perceived consistency between offline stores and online stores has a positive impact on online trust [13]. When multi-channel retailers extend their brands, consumers will compare the retailer’s online store image with their offline one [21]. If there is a high consistency between the two, then consumers will make positive comments, thus affecting online store trust. Therefore, we hypothesize that

H1: Online and offline store image consistency has a positive impact on online store trust.

Mitchell suggested that perceived risk is a necessary precondition for trust operation [22]. DelVecchio believed that a high fit will effectively reduce consumers’ risk perception and therefore increase trust in the extended brand [23]. When consumers first encounter a brand, they will first perceive the consistency of its online and offline store images and existing risks [24]. Therefore, we hypothesize that

H2: Online and offline store image consistency has a negative impact on online store perceived risk.

When consumers compare shopping in online and offline stores, the consistency of goods, price and other dimensions has a positive impact on the multi-channel retail brand image [25-27], promoting positive consumer attitudes towards online stores, which in turn influences consumers’ purchase intention in online stores. Therefore, we hypothesize that

H3: Online and offline store image consistency has a positive impact on online purchase intention.

3.2.2. *The effect of online store trust and online store perceived risk on online purchase intention.* Online store trust is positively related to purchase intention. Whereas online store perceived risk is the basis for measuring consumers’ online purchase intention [28]. The lower the perceived risk of consumers, the stronger their purchase intention [29]. Therefore, we hypothesize that

H4: Online store trust has a positive impact on online purchase intention.

H5: Online store perceived risk has a negative impact on online purchase intention.

3.2.3. *Mediating effect of online store trust and online store perceived risk.* Faced with the risks in the transaction, consumers are more inclined to choose the trusted retailers. Verhagen and Van's research showed that customers' perception of online and offline store images can directly or indirectly influence online purchase intentions through trust [30]. Ye and Hu verified that perceived risk mediates the influence model of perceived fit and extended product trust [31]. Therefore, we hypothesize that

H6: Online store trust mediates the effect of online and offline store image consistency on consumers' online purchase intention.

H7: Online store perceived risk mediates the effect of online and offline store image consistency on consumers' online purchase intention.

3.2.4. *Moderating effect of retail brand familiarity.* Benedicktus et al. believed that retail brand familiarity can significantly enhance customers' online store trust [32]. Yoon believed that website trust is affected by consumers' familiarity and prior satisfaction with e-commerce [33]. When consumers are familiar with a retail brand, the more consistent the online and offline store image is, the more likely they are to trust the brand. Low consistency increases risk awareness and uncertainty. Therefore, we hypothesize that

H8: Retail brand familiarity has a moderating effect between online and offline store image consistency and online store trust.

H9: Retail brand familiarity has a moderating effect between online and offline store image consistency and online store perceived risk.

4. Research Design.

4.1. **Questionnaire design.** Our study adopts the survey method. We use a 5-point Likert scale to measure each item (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = uncertain, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). Our questionnaire includes three parts. The first part is consumers' basic shopping conditions (online purchase frequency, online and offline purchase experience, and names of traditional retailers' online stores). The second part is the core component. There are 25 items for online and offline store image consistency (SIC), 4 items for online store trust (TR), 4 items for online store perceived risk (PR), 4 items for online purchase intention (PI) and 5 items for retail brand familiarity (BF), totaling 42 items. The third part is demographic information (gender, age, education level, occupation and monthly income).

4.2. **Data collection.** We conducted a pre-study on the designed online and offline store image consistency scale. The respondents have online shopping experience. We used a one-to-one questionnaire link to distribute. After the reliability and exploratory factor analysis, two items were deleted to form an online and offline store image consistency scale with 6 dimensions and 25 items. Online store trust, online store perceived risk, online purchase intention and retail brand familiarity scale followed previous studies, with minor changes for each item to fit our research context. Based on the pre-survey results, some problems were corrected, and the final questionnaire was designed.

We distributed the questionnaire on the Wenjuanxing website and personal networks. Only those who reported having online shopping experience are the target audience. The survey period was one month to ensure maximum geographical coverage and sample breadth. 360 questionnaires were returned, and after eliminating invalid sample, 307 questionnaires were valid, with a valid return rate of 85%.

Of all the respondents, 69.71% are women ($n = 214$) and 30.29% are men ($n = 93$). Most of the respondents are aged in 21-30 ($n = 172$, 56.03%), and most have a bachelor's degree ($n = 182$, 59.28%). This group is the main force of online shopping, and has an understanding of the online and offline stores of well-known retailers. 93% have shopped in retailers which have both offline and online stores, including Dashang, WalMart, IKEA,

Suning, Watsons, Uniqlo, Three Squirrels, MUJI, Huawei, and Hema. Therefore, the sample is widely representative, and can meet the needs of the study.

4.3. Data analysis.

4.3.1. *Reliability and validity analysis.* We use SPSS23.0 and LISREL8.70 to analyze the data. The online and offline store image consistency scale revised after preliminary investigation contains 6 dimensions of goods, price and promotion, atmosphere, convenience, service and safety image consistency, with 25 items. It is proved that the reliability and validity of the scale meet the standards, and the data have reached adaptation state. The consistency value of online and offline store images is the average value of the above six dimensions, represented by SIC. The results are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Analysis results of reliability and convergence validity of model variables

Constructs	Items	Mean	SD	CITC	Cronbach's α	Standardized loading	AVE
SIC	SIC1	3.90	0.783	0.778	0.913	0.53	0.515
	SIC2	3.63	0.721	0.649			
	SIC3	3.84	0.827	0.796			
	SIC4	4.23	0.674	0.785			
	SIC5	3.76	0.832	0.799			
	SIC6	3.98	0.988	0.787			
TR	TR1	3.96	0.706	0.801	0.910	0.78	0.643
	TR2	3.95	0.717	0.854			
	TR3	3.80	0.793	0.770			
	TR4	3.86	0.802	0.772			
PR	PR1	3.54	0.947	0.815	0.928	0.74	0.695
	PR2	3.48	0.894	0.867			
	PR3	3.58	1.033	0.844			
	PR4	3.42	0.783	0.814			
PI	PI1	3.89	0.807	0.768	0.919	0.86	0.735
	PI2	3.84	0.782	0.821			
	PI3	3.85	0.817	0.857			
	PI4	4.11	1.112	0.806			
BF	BF1	3.82	0.727	0.770	0.897	0.82	0.624
	BF2	4.02	0.830	0.786			
	BF3	3.73	0.729	0.724			
	BF4	3.88	0.998	0.755			
	BF5	3.96	0.960	0.705			

As shown in Table 1, the mean values are all above 3.4, indicating that respondents generally agree with the question options. The standard deviation fluctuates between 0.674 and 1.112, showing a relatively reasonable data distribution. We use Cronbach's α and CITC to test the model's reliability. The Cronbach's α values exceed the required value of 0.7 [34], and the CITC values exceed the required value of 0.5 [35], which satisfies the reliability requirement. We use the average variance extracted (AVE) and item standardized loading to test for convergent validity. The standardized loading values are all higher than or close to 0.5, and have significant correlation under the condition of less than 0.001. Not all quality criteria need to be fulfilled if the overall measurement model has a high quality standard [36]. The AVE values of all constructs exceed the accepted level of 0.5 [37]. The results thus show that convergent validity is also satisfied.

As can be seen from Table 2, the AVE square roots values (values on the diagonal) ranged from 0.718 to 0.857, exceed the correlation coefficients of each latent variable, which confirms discriminant validity [35].

TABLE 2. Discriminate validity analysis results

Constructs	SIC	TR	PR	PI	BF
SIC	0.718				
TR	0.514	0.802			
PR	0.697	0.743	0.834		
PI	0.678	0.670	0.635	0.857	
BF	0.512	0.709	0.599	0.727	0.790

4.3.2. *Structural equation modelling.* The model fit metrics are shown in Table 3 and the structural equation model and path coefficients are shown in Figure 2 and Table 4. The analysis results show that $\chi^2/df = 2.83$, in the standard interval of 2-5. The fit indices of GFI, AGFI, IFI, CFI and NFI are all above 0.9. The RMSEA value is less than 0.08, and the RMR value is less than the standard of 0.05. The results show that the hypothetical model proposed fits the sample data well, and the indices reach the fit state among each other.

TABLE 3. Structural equation model fit metrics

Metrics	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	IFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA	RMR
Value	2.83	0.98	0.95	0.96	0.98	0.91	0.045	0.027

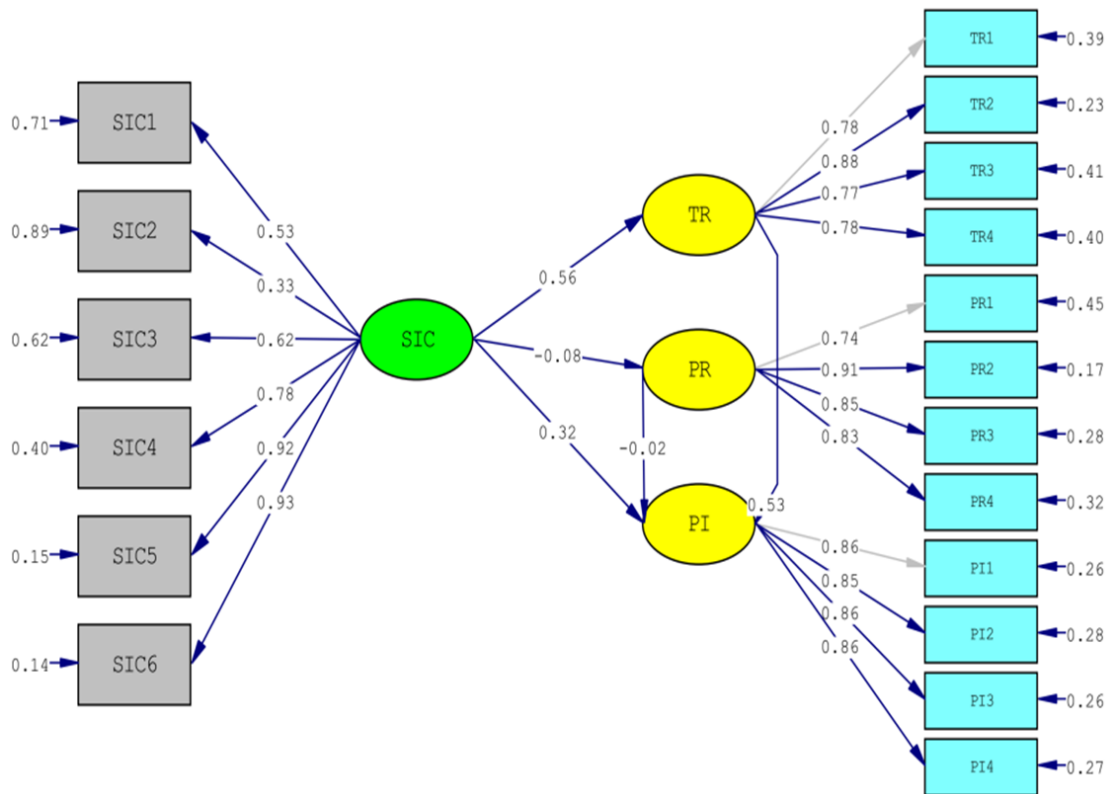


FIGURE 2. Structural equation analysis results

TABLE 4. Research model path testing results

Hypothesis	Path	Path coefficients	T-values	Supported?
H1	SIC → TR	0.56	5.42	Yes
H2	SIC → PR	-0.08	-5.05	Yes
H3	SIC → PI	0.32	2.86	Yes
H4	TR → PI	0.53	4.70	Yes
H5	PR → PI	-0.02	-2.11	Yes

The results show that online and offline store image consistency is positively associated with online store trust ($\beta = 0.56, p < 0.001$) and online purchase intention ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.001$) and negatively associated with online store perceived risk ($\beta = -0.08, p < 0.001$). These results show that H1-H3 are all supported. Furthermore, online store trust is positively associated with online purchase intention ($\beta = 0.53, p < 0.001$), and online store perceived risk is negatively associated with online purchase intention ($\beta = -0.02, p < 0.001$). These findings respectively support H4 and H5.

4.3.3. *Testing the mediating effects of trust and perceived risk.* We use regression analysis to conduct the mediating effects assessment test.

According to the data in Table 5, online store trust plays a partially mediating role in the influence of the five image consistency dimensions of goods, atmosphere, convenience, service and safety on online purchase intention ($p < 0.05$), and fully mediating role in price and promotion image on online purchase intention ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, H6 is supported.

According to the data in Table 5, online store perceived risk plays a partially mediating role in the influence of the five image consistency dimensions of goods, atmosphere, convenience, service and safety on online purchase intention ($p < 0.05$), and fully mediating role in price and promotion image on purchase intention ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, H7 is supported.

TABLE 5. Regression analysis results of the mediation effects

	Standardized coefficients	Sig.		Standardized coefficients	Sig.
(constant)		.001	(constant)		.000
SIC1	.383	.000	SIC1	.377	.001
SIC2	.119	.064	SIC2	.089	.053
SIC3	.248	.000	SIC3	.248	.000
SIC4	.325	.000	SIC4	.310	.000
SIC5	.471	.001	SIC5	.497	.002
SIC6	.446	.001	SIC6	.485	.000
TR	.551	.000	PR	-.354	.001
$R = 0.776; R^2 = 0.602; R^2_{adj} = 0.592;$ $F = 64.489$			$R = 0.689; R^2 = 0.474; R^2_{adj} = 0.462;$ $F = 48.565$		

4.3.4. *Testing the moderating effect of retail brand familiarity.* Multiple regression analysis was conducted with online and offline store image consistency as the independent variable, retail brand familiarity as the moderating variable, and online store trust and online store perceived risk as the dependent variables, respectively. The results are shown in Table 6.

TABLE 6. Regression analysis results of the moderating effect

Model (TR as the dependent variable)	Standardized coefficients	Sig.	Model (PR as the dependent variable)	Standardized coefficients	Sig.
(constant)		.000	(constant)		.002
SIC	.221	.000	SIC	-.296	.000
BF	.183	.001	BF	-.113	.000
SIC*BF	.237	.000	SIC*BF	.316	.000
$R = 0.298; R^2 = 0.251; R_{adj}^2 = 0.173;$ $F = 20.788$			$R = 0.367; R^2 = 0.292; R_{adj}^2 = 0.145;$ $F = 17.522$		

Retail brand familiarity positively moderates the relationship between online and offline store image consistency and online store trust ($\beta = 0.237$), indicating that when consumers' retail brand familiarity is high, online store trust is reinforced due to higher store image consistency. Therefore, H8 is supported. Meanwhile, retail brand familiarity positively moderates the relationship between online and offline store image consistency and online store perceived risk ($\beta = 0.316$), indicating that the higher consumers' retail brand familiarity is, the stronger the negative impact of online and offline store image consistency on online perceived risk is. Therefore, H9 is supported.

5. Research Conclusions and Prospects.

5.1. Main conclusions. The study found that online and offline store image consistency can affect online purchase intention in two ways. First, online and offline store image consistency positively affects online purchase intention. Second, online and offline store image consistency positively affects online store trust and negatively affects online store perceived risk, thus influencing online purchase intention. That is, online store trust and online store perceived risk are mediating variables. Among them, image consistency such as goods, atmosphere, convenience, service and safety indirectly affect online purchase intention through online store trust and perceived risk, and play a partially mediating role. Price and promotion image consistency can only indirectly affect online purchase intention through online store trust and perceived risk, and play a fully mediating role. Retail brand familiarity has a moderating effect between online and offline store image consistency and online store trust, and between perceived risk, both of which play a reinforcing role.

5.2. Management implications. Firstly, multi-channel retailers should improve consistency in six areas: goods, price and promotion, atmosphere, convenience, service and safety, paying more attention to the fit degree among store images. Secondly, multi-channel retailers should improve consumers' perceptions of the consistency of online and offline stores, thereby effectively reducing consumers' online store perceived risk and increasing consumers' purchase intention. Finally, multi-channel retailers should increase consumers' familiarity with retail brands, thereby strengthening the impact of consumers' perceived consistency of store image on trust and perceived risk.

5.3. Limitations and future research. The study has the following limitations. First, we use six dimensions to perceive online and offline store image consistency. Future studies can broaden the research perspective. Second, future research could consider the mechanism of store image inconsistency on the relevant variables. Third, differences between multi-channel retailers were not adequately considered, and future researchers could verify whether the proposed relationships apply to different retailer types and sizes.

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