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## SERVICE, PROMOTION, OR CONVENIENCE? RETHINKING THE O2O MARKETING MIX AND PURCHASE INTENTION AMONG GENERATION Z CONSUMERS IN CHINA

Fang Zhang<sup>1</sup>, Rozita Naina Mohamed<sup>2\*</sup>, Azlin Zanariah Bahtar<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

 [2022652626@student.uitm.edu.my](mailto:2022652626@student.uitm.edu.my)  
[azlin\\_bahtar@uitm.edu.my](mailto:azlin_bahtar@uitm.edu.my)

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7885-2366>  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5576-8293>

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

 [rozita@uitm.edu.my](mailto:rozita@uitm.edu.my)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3448-7091>

\*Corresponding Author

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### Abstract:

With the continuous integration of online and offline channels, the Online-to-Offline (O2O) model has become an important retail form in emerging markets. Although the importance of the O2O model has become increasingly evident, platform managers in practice still face a key question: which dimensions of the O2O marketing mix truly influence consumers' purchase intention? Based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR), this study focuses on Generation Z consumers in China, systematically examines the effects of different O2O marketing mix dimensions on purchase intention, and highlights the role of customer trust in this process. To empirically examine these relationships, this study collected a total of 235 valid samples through questionnaires and used the partial least squares structural equation model (PLS-SEM) for data analysis. Research results show that service, product and price all have a significant positive impact on customer trust, among which the impact of service is the most prominent; in contrast, promotion has a significant negative impact on customer trust, while convenience does not have a significant effect on customer trust. In addition, customer trust has a significant positive impact on purchase intention. Overall, research findings show that effective O2O marketing does not depend on the equal use of all marketing dimensions, but rather on strategically prioritizing those that effectively enhance customer trust. This study provides valuable practical insights for O2O platform managers to help them build customer trust in a fiercely competitive market environment and promote the continuous purchasing behavior of Generation Z consumers.

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Customer Trust; Generation Z; O2O Marketing Mix; Purchase Intention



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## Introduction

In recent years, the rapid convergence of digital platforms and physical retail environments has accelerated the development of online-to-offline (O2O) marketing in emerging markets. By combining online interaction with offline experience, O2O marketing is widely used to convert online traffic into offline consumption and promote consumers to make continuous purchasing decisions (Zhang & Wang, 2021; Yao, Osman, Sabri, & Zainudin, 2023). Against this background, how to improve consumers' willingness to buy through more effective O2O marketing strategies has gradually become an important issue of general concern for enterprises.

However, the O2O marketing mix is not a single dimension, but covers multiple dimensions such as product, price, promotion, service and convenience. In the actual operation process, managers often face the constraints of limited resources: which marketing mix dimensions have a more significant impact on consumer behavior? What dimensions should enterprises prioritize in order to improve consumers' purchase intention more effectively? Although existing studies explore O2O marketing mechanisms from different perspectives, there is still no clear consensus regarding the relative importance of different O2O marketing mix dimensions in consumer purchasing decisions.

This problem is also very prominent in the Chinese market. With the rapid development of O2O marketing, platforms such as Alibaba, JD.com and Vipshop continue to extend online business to offline scenes through physical stores, experience centers and instant distribution services, thus continuing to expand consumer contact points (Zhang & Wang, 2021). However, despite the increasing improvement of O2O infrastructure and increasing market competition, the level of consumer trust and the purchase conversion rate have not improved simultaneously. Therefore, there is still greater uncertainty about the actual effect of O2O marketing strategies, which also makes it difficult for managers to make an accurate evaluation (Bulsara & Vaghela, 2023).

This uncertainty is particularly evident among Generation Z consumers. As a digital native group, Generation Z grew up in a highly digital and platformized consumption environment. Although their online participation and platform usage frequency are generally high, existing research and industry reports show that high marketing contact does not necessarily translate into stable purchase intentions or actual purchasing behavior. For example, a 2025 consumer

report on Generation Z in China released by TOM Consulting shows that more than 93% of Generation Z consumers participate in the “Double Eleven” shopping festival, but nearly 40% of the respondents are skeptical about promotional publicity and say that they will verify the relevant discount information by themselves before buying. This phenomenon shows that the decision-making process of Generation Z consumers is more cautious and rational, rather than directly transforming from marketing exposure to purchasing behavior.

In addition, although Generation Z is active in digital participation and has relatively optimistic expectations for future income, this group still shows a strong tendency to behave cautiously and remain price sensitive in actual consumption decisions. According to McKinsey & Company, about 78% of Chinese Generation Z respondents expressed confidence in future income growth, yet this confidence does not necessarily translate into impulsive purchasing behavior. These characteristics indicate that, in the complex O2O marketing environment where multiple marketing stimuli coexist and trust needs to be continuously established across online and offline channels, Generation Z consumers face more special challenges in forming purchase intention.

From a theoretical perspective, customer trust is widely regarded as an important psychological mechanism that connects marketing investment and actual purchasing behavior. In the O2O context, trust not only helps to reduce consumers' perceived risk but also enhances their overall evaluation of platform reliability, thereby facilitating cross-channel transactions (Bulsara & Vaghela, 2023). However, existing research has mostly focused on a single marketing dimension or has followed a traditional marketing mix perspective, which to some extent limits a deeper understanding of how different O2O marketing mix dimensions play a differentiated role in the process of trust formation (Zhang & Wang, 2021).

Based on the above research gaps, this article takes the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework as the theoretical basis, defining O2O marketing mix as external stimuli, treating customer trust as an organism variable, and purchasing intention as a behavioral response. The research focuses on Generation Z consumers in China, collects data through questionnaires, and uses the partial least squares structural equation model (PLS-SEM) for empirical analysis.

In general, this study aims to provide targeted empirical evidence on how to configure the O2O marketing mix more effectively in an online and offline retail environment. By clarifying the different roles of product, price, promotion, service, and convenience in the formation of trust and purchase intention, this study not only expands the application of SOR theory in the O2O context but also provides practical insights for managers in emerging markets who seek to effectively attract Generation Z consumers.

## Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

### *Theoretical Background: The SOR Perspective in O2O Contexts*

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework was first proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) to explain how external environmental stimuli affect the internal psychological state of an individual and subsequently influence behavioral responses. Unlike the simple “stimulus–response (S–R) model”, the SOR framework clearly incorporates cognitive and emotional processes, so that it can explain the decision-making process in complex consumption situations more comprehensively and deeply.

In recent years, the SOR framework has been used more and more widely in marketing research, especially in digital and omnichannel contexts. In these environments, consumers often face a variety of intertwined stimulating factors at the same time (Huang, Xiao, & Jin, 2020; Prasanta & Janarthanan, 2020; Liu, Li, & Yin, 2022). Relevant studies generally find that consumers' behavior in the digital environment is not a direct response to external stimuli, but the result of internal psychological evaluation processes such as trust, perceived value and affective responses.

O2O business constitutes a typical hybrid consumption environment. In this situation, online information clues and offline consumption experiences jointly affect consumers' cognition and behavior. While improving the richness of information, the integration of online and offline channels also exacerbates the complexity of consumers' decision-making, making the internal psychological state particularly critical in the process of stimulus–response process. Recent empirical research shows that the SOR framework provides a solid theoretical perspective for analyzing how O2O marketing stimuli affects trust formation and purchase willingness (Hao & Xu, 2021; Chen, Su, Li, Wu, Zheng, & Xu, 2022).

Based on this, this article adopts the SOR framework to define the O2O marketing mix as an external stimulus (S), to regard customer trust as a key internal psychological state (O), and to take the purchase intention as a behavioral response (R). Unlike the research perspective that assumes that all O2O marketing mix dimensions have a consistent effect, this article aims to identify which dimensions in the O2O marketing mix have a more significant impact on shaping the trust of Generation Z consumers.

### ***Framework Development***

Based on the theoretical framework of Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR), this paper builds a research model to explain how O2O marketing mix affects consumers' purchase intention through customer trust. Under this framework, external marketing factors are regarded as stimuli, influencing consumers' psychological judgment, and thus guiding their behavioral response.

In the O2O context, consumers are exposed to online information and offline services at the same time, so that marketing stimuli are multi-dimensional and highly interactive. Therefore, this research takes the O2O marketing mix as the main stimulus factor (S), and specifically divides it into five dimensions: product, price, promotion, service and convenience to reflect the key transaction attributes and experience characteristics in the process of cross-channel consumption.

Customer trust is defined as the organism variable (O), which is used to portray the core psychological judgment formed by consumers in the face of O2O marketing stimuli. Because O2O transactions are usually accompanied by high uncertainty, consumers tend to evaluate the reliability of platforms or merchants through trust, rather than responding directly to marketing stimuli.

Purchase intention is regarded as the response variable (R), which is used to reflect the possibility of consumers participating in purchasing behavior after forming a judgment of trust. Based on the above research framework, this paper further puts forward relevant research hypotheses and empirically tests the relationship between O2O marketing mix, customer trust and purchase intention.

### ***Stimulus: Rethinking the O2O Marketing Mix***

Traditional marketing mix is usually defined by a 4P framework, namely product, price, promotion and place (McCarthy, 1960). Although the framework has long provided basic analytical logic for marketing strategy, its applicability in the digital and omni-channel environment is increasingly being questioned. In the O2O situation, with the development of mobile technology, platform services and real-time logistics systems, consumers can seamlessly switch between different channels, and the boundary between online and offline “place” is gradually blurred (Yang, Gong, Land, & Chesney, 2020; Hu & Song, 2024). Therefore, the analytical significance of “place” as an independent strategic dimension has been significantly weakened.

Recent research points out that O2O marketing should be understood as an integrated cross-channel marketing model to create a coherent customer experience by coordinating online interaction experience and offline consumption experience (Tsai, Wang, Lin, & Choub, 2015; Putra, 2024). In such an environment, enterprises not only need to achieve coordination between product configuration, pricing strategies and promotional activities, but also must pay attention to the integration of service contact points and convenience-related attributes to improve consumers’ overall perception of the credibility, reliability and experience value of the platform (Hao & Xu, 2021; Ryu, Kim, & Lee, 2022).

Based on the above perspective, this article conceptualizes the O2O marketing mix into a multi-dimensional structure, specifically including five dimensions: product, price, promotion, service and convenience. This extended framework reflects the evolution of the marketing mix under O2O and omni-channel business models. Against this background, consumer evaluation is increasingly affected by service quality, process efficiency and cross online-offline contact convenience (Li, Shia, & Badiane, 2020; Tang, Yuan, & Xu, 2024). Further empirical research shows that in the O2O situation, service reliability and transaction convenience play an important role in shaping consumer trust and purchase-related results. Their impact is often complementary to traditional transaction attributes, and even more prominent in some cases (Hao & Xu, 2021; Wang, Wang, Wang, Xiao, & Liu, 2021).

Therefore, this article takes the O2O marketing mix, including product, price, promotion, service and convenience, as the main external stimulus construct in the SOR framework.

#### ***Product and Customer Trust***

In the context of O2O marketing, product-related factors mainly involve the consistency of product quality, product information and product types between online and offline channels. A high level of product consistency can reduce information asymmetry and perceived risk, thus enhancing consumers’ confidence in the reliability of the platform. Previous empirical studies have shown that the product quality and information consistency of online and offline channels help to improve the sense of trust and promote consumers’ positive evaluation of the platform (Wang et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2022). In addition, transparent and accurate product descriptions have been found to improve consumer decision-making confidence and trust, especially in the cross-channel shopping environment (Zhu, Yue, Zhang, & Wu, 2023; Han & Wang, 2024).

H1a: Product has a positive and significant relationship with customer trust.

### ***Price and Customer Trust***

In the O2O marketing environment, the transparency and consistency of online and offline prices are important factors affecting consumer trust. Although data-based dynamic pricing strategies help improve the operational efficiency of enterprises, if consumers perceive price inconsistency or non-transparent pricing, it often weakens their perception of price fairness, thus damaging trust in the platform.

Studies have shown that clear and transparent pricing methods and the relative consistency between online and offline prices help to enhance consumers' trust and further improve their purchase intention (Wang et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2022; Cao, Guo and He, 2023). On the contrary, the lack of transparency or pricing strategies with obvious differences tend to generate consumers' skepticism, which in turn reduces their trust in the platform (Shao, 2024).

H1b: Price has a positive and significant relationship with customer trust.

### ***Promotion and Customer Trust***

As an important stimulus in the O2O marketing mix, promotional activities can attract consumers' attention and promote their participation. However, studies have shown that the impact of promotion on consumer trust is not always positive, and its effect largely depends on the transparency, authenticity and consistency of promotional information between online and offline.

Empirical research has found that credible and consistent promotional strategies help to enhance consumer trust; on the contrary, excessive, misleading or overly frequent promotional activities tend to trigger consumers' skepticism, thus weakening their trust (Li, Shia and Badiane, 2020; Wang et al., 2021; Yao, Osman, Sabri and Zainudin, 2022). These more complex and differentiated research conclusions show that it is necessary to further test the impact of promotional factors on customer trust through empirical research in the O2O context.

H1c: Promotion has a positive and significant relationship with customer trust.

### ***Service and Customer Trust***

In the O2O marketing environment, service is widely regarded as the core factor affecting customer trust. Against this background, the service covers online response ability, offline service reliability, professionalism and after-sales support. A high-quality and coordinated service experience can serve as a concrete signal of organizational ability and commitment, thus having a strong positive impact on trust (Ding & Keh, 2020; Myung & Kim, 2022). Existing research also shows that in an integrated O2O environment, service-related factors usually play a more significant role in shaping trust than transactional attributes.

H1d: Service has a positive and significant relationship with customer trust.

### ***Convenience and Customer Trust***

Convenience refers to the ease and high efficiency experienced by consumers when completing transactions across online and offline channels, including information search, payment, distribution and return and exchange. Although convenience has gradually become the basic expectation of consumers in the mature O2O market, smooth channel integration and efficient transaction processes may still have a positive impact on trust by reducing consumer costs and

risk perception (Zhu, Wei, Zhou, & Jiang, 2022; Li, Zheng, & Zeng, 2024). In view of the continuous evolution of the role of convenience in digital consumption, the relationship between it and customer trust still needs to be verified through empirical research.  
H1e: Convenience has a positive and significant relationship with customer trust.

### ***Organism and Response: Customer Trust and Purchase Intention***

Customer trust refers to consumers' confidence in the reliability, ability and fulfillment of promises of the platform or seller. Trust has long been considered a fundamental mechanism to facilitate transactions and maintain long-term customer relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In the O2O environment, trust is particularly important, because transactions usually cross digital interfaces and offline service contact points, thus increasing consumers' perceived uncertainty and risk.

A large number of empirical studies show that customer trust plays a decisive role in shaping purchase intention in a digital and platform-driven environment. Trust can reduce perceived risk, enhance confidence in transaction results, and improve purchase intention (Manzoor, Baig, Hashim, & Sami, 2020; Jadil, Rana, & Dwivedi, 2022). Recent research further confirms that even after controlling attitudes and situational factors, trust is still an important predictor of purchase intentions in online, O2O and omni-channel environments (Albarq, 2023; Jung & Kim, 2025).

Under the SOR framework, customer trust as the core organic variable transforms external marketing stimuli into behavioral responses. Therefore, trust is expected to have a direct and positive impact on the purchase intention in the O2O situation.

H2: Customer trust has a positive and significant relationship with purchase intention.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

This study adopted a quantitative research design to explore the impact of O2O marketing mix on purchase intentions through customer trust. Because the questionnaire survey method is suitable for obtaining consumers' perception, evaluation and behavioral intentions in the integrated online and offline consumption situation, this study adopted questionnaire survey as the main data collection method. The research framework is based on the SOR model, in which O2O marketing mix acts as an external stimulus, customer trust represents the internal psychological state of consumers, and the purchase intention constitutes the final behavioral response.

The research design can empirically test multiple variable relationships under the same analysis framework, which is suitable for testing theoretical assumptions related to consumer behavior in the O2O consumption environment.

### ***Sample and Data Collection***

The empirical data of this study came from Generation Z consumers in China, who are usually defined as groups born between 1995 and 2009. Generation Z was selected as the research object because the group grew up in a highly digital environment and has a high degree of

participation in platform consumption and O2O consumption mode. As digital natives, Generation Z consumers frequently switch between online and offline channels in the process of information search and actual purchase, so it is especially suitable for evaluating O2O marketing practices and reflecting their trust-related perceptions and attitudes through questionnaire tools.

In order to ensure the correlation between the sample and the research situation, two screening criteria have been set in this study. First of all, the respondents need to meet the age range of Generation Z; secondly, the respondents must have shopping experience on both online and offline channels on the same e-commerce platform. The above conditions ensure that all participants have real and recent contact experience with the O2O shopping environment, so as to provide a more accurate and effective evaluation.

The questionnaire was distributed through the social media platform widely used by Generation Z consumers in China, and the main channel is WeChat. The reason for choosing WeChat is mainly because of its high penetration rate among young people and its effectiveness in reaching digitally active consumers with relevant O2O shopping experience. In addition, the convenient sharing and communication functions of WeChat also help to improve the dissemination efficiency of questionnaires and the smooth progress of data collection.

After eliminating incomplete, inconsistent or invalid questionnaires, 235 valid questionnaires were finally obtained for subsequent analysis. This sample size is suitable for partial least squares structural equation model (PLS-SEM) analysis and is higher than the minimum sample size requirements usually recommended in model estimates and hypothesis tests.

### ***Measurement Instruments***

All variables in this study were measured using a mature scale derived from existing marketing and e-commerce research. O2O marketing mix is operated into a multi-dimensional concept, including five dimensions of product, price, promotion, service and convenience. Customer trust and purchase intention also used measurement scales that had been widely verified in existing empirical studies.

All measurement questions were measured using the Likert scale, and the scale ranges from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. In order to improve the content validity and situational adaptability of measurement tools, the study made appropriate adjustments to some questions on the basis of retaining the core meaning of the original scale to better reflect the characteristics of China’s O2O consumption situation.

### ***Data Analysis Technique***

This study used SmartPLS software to conduct partial least squares structural equation model (PLS-SEM) analysis. The choice of PLS-SEM is mainly based on the following considerations: first, this method is suitable for analyzing research models containing multiple latent variables and complex path relationships; second, PLS-SEM has good applicability for small and medium-sized sample sizes; third, this method has low requirements for the normality assumption of data distribution and is suitable for processing consumer questionnaire survey data.

Data analysis adopted a two-stage analysis procedure. The first stage was to evaluate the measurement model to test the internal consistency, convergent validity and discriminant validity; the second stage was to analyze the structural model to test each research hypothesis and evaluate the interpretation ability of the model.

## Results and Discussion

### *Overview of Empirical Findings*

Based on the structural model results obtained by the PLS-SEM method, this study found that the impact of O2O marketing mix on customer trust is heterogeneous between different dimensions. Specifically, product, price and service all have a significant positive impact on customer trust, among which service is the strongest predictor in the O2O marketing mix examined. In contrast, there is a significant negative relationship between promotion and customer trust, while convenience does not show a significant impact in the statistical sense, so it is not supported in the proposed model.

In addition, the research results show that customer trust has a significant and positive impact on purchase intention. The discovery is consistent with the role of customer trust as a core organic variable in the SOR framework, that is, customer trust plays a key connecting role between marketing stimulus and behavioral response. The summary of the structural model results is shown in Table 1.

Overall, empirical evidence shows that the effectiveness of O2O marketing strategies does not depend on the simultaneous deployment of multiple marketing tools, but more on the prioritization of specific practices that consumers consider credible and trustworthy.

**Table 1: Summary of Structural Model Results**

Hypothesised Path	Direction	Result	Relative Influence
Product → Customer Trust	Positive	Supported	Moderate
Price → Customer Trust	Positive	Supported	Moderate
Promotion → Customer Trust	Negative	Supported	Weak
Service → Customer Trust	Positive	Supported	Strong
Convenience → Customer Trust	-	Not supported	-
Customer Trust → Purchase Intention	Positive	Supported	Strong

Source: Authors' Analysis Based on PLS-SEM Results.

### *The Dominant Role of Service in Trust Formation*

In all O2O marketing mix dimensions, the service shows the strongest and most stable impact on customer trust in the structural path results. This discovery highlights the core role of service in the O2O marketing mix. It is through service that consumers evaluate the reliability and capabilities of O2O platforms. Although digital technology has improved information access and transaction efficiency, customer trust is ultimately strengthened through service, including responsiveness, professionalism and effective after-sales support.

This empirical result is consistent with existing studies, which emphasize the key feature of trust formation in the O2O situation, that is, the service can transform the abstract commitment of the platform into specific indicators of organizational credibility (Verhoef, Kannan, & Inman, 2015; Grewal, Roggeveen, & Nordfält, 2017). Further empirical evidence shows that the reason why service has become a prominent clue of trust is that it reflects the platform's commitment to the well-being of customers outside of short-term transactions (Bolton, McColl-Kennedy, Cheung, Gallan, Orsingher, Witell, & Zaki, 2018; Hao & Xu, 2021).

For Generation Z consumers, the strong “service-customer trust” relationship observed in the model is particularly important. As a consumer group with rich digital experience, high expectations for immediacy and low tolerance for service errors, Generation Z often interprets service performance as a direct signal of platform credibility (Priporas, Stylos, & Fotiadis, 2017; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). From the perspective of management, this finding shows that investment in service training, service standardization and cross-channel service integration may bring significant trust-related benefits. O2O platforms should not regard services as auxiliary functions but should regard them as strategic levers to build trust in markets with increasingly fierce competition and increasing convergence of technical characteristics (Grewal, Hulland, Kopalle, & Karahanna, 2020).

### ***Product and Price as Foundations of Platform Credibility***

Structural model results show that product-related factors and price-related factors have a significant positive impact on customer trust, although their influence is weaker than that of the service dimension. Product consistency between online and offline channels helps to promote trust formation by reducing information asymmetry and perceived risk. When consumers find that the online product description is consistent with the offline actual experience, it is easier to regard the platform as reliable and credible.

Studies have supported this explanation, pointing out that the consistency of product quality and information presentation can enhance trust in the omni-channel environment by transmitting operational reliability signals (Lin, Lyu, & Yang, 2016; Hao & Xu, 2021). On the contrary, even if other marketing efforts are appropriate, when there is a difference between online and offline product experiences, it may weaken trust (Yang et al., 2020). The empirical results of this study further reinforce the view that product-related trust is mainly driven by the accuracy and consistency of information, rather than novelty or diversity.

Especially for Generation Z consumers, product consistency serves as a fundamental prerequisite for trust rather than a differentiating factor. As users with rich digital experience and high information literacy, Generation Z consumers tend to conduct a wide range of pre-purchase information search and cross-channel comparison. Therefore, the inconsistency between online presentation and offline experience is more likely to be discovered and more likely to cause suspicion. Against this background, reliable and accurate product information as a signal of credibility can enhance Generation Z consumers' awareness of the integrity of the platform, even if it does not significantly distinguish between the platform and competitors. Similarly, the positive and statistically significant relationship between price and customer trust highlights the importance of perceived price fairness and transparency in the O2O environment. Consumers are particularly sensitive to cross-channel price differences. If they are not properly explained, they may be interpreted as opportunistic or unfair. Consistent with existing empirical studies (Ryu, Kim, & Lee, 2022; Hu & Song, 2024), the results show that transparent and

relatively consistent pricing practices can promote trust by reducing suspicion and perception of the risk of exploitation.

From the perspective of Generation Z, price consistency plays a key role in maintaining trust, not just an incentive mechanism. Considering their frequent exposure to dynamic pricing, algorithmic promotion and platform competition, Generation Z consumers pay less attention to short-term price advantages and pay more attention to fairness and transparency. Therefore, the price difference between online and offline channels may be interpreted as deliberate manipulation rather than market-driven fluctuations, thus weakening trust. Therefore, even if the price itself is not the main driver of purchasing decisions, maintaining a consistent price structure is still particularly important to maintain the trust of Generation Z consumers.

### ***The Counterproductive Effect of Promotion***

A noteworthy finding in structural model analysis is that there is a significant negative relationship between promotion and customer trust. Although promotions are often seen as effective tools to stimulate demand, research shows that frequent or high-intensity promotions may weaken trust in an O2O environment. This finding is consistent with recent studies, which point out that excessive discounts may cause consumers to doubt product quality and seller credibility, especially among digitally experienced consumer groups (Cao, Chu, Hui, & Xu, 2021).

For Generation Z consumers, recurring promotional activities may be interpreted as short-term opportunistic signals rather than real value creation. Therefore, in a mature O2O market, promotion seems to present a “double-edged sword” effect—promoting transactions in the short term, but when it is perceived as manipulative or inconsistent, it will erode trust (Hao & Xu, 2021; Tang, Yuan, & Xu, 2024). From a management perspective, this finding shows that promotional strategies should be used cautiously and supplemented by transparent communication and value-oriented information transmission to avoid adverse effects on trust.

### ***Convenience as a Hygiene Factor Rather Than a Differentiator***

Contrary to the general management assumptions, the results of the structural model show that convenience has not shown a statistically significant impact on customer trust. This result shows that in the contemporary O2O market, convenience may have evolved into a fundamental expectation rather than an attribute that can enhance trust. With the integration of mobile payment systems, fast distribution and seamless channels becoming industry standards, the incremental improvement of convenience may no longer make a significant contribution to the formation of trust (Dong, 2018; Yang et al., 2020).

Consistent with the theory of “health factors”, a recent study pointed out that insufficient convenience may lead to consumer dissatisfaction, but when convenience reaches an acceptable level, it is difficult to enhance trust by further improving convenience itself (Tang, Yuan, & Xu, 2024). For managers, this means that investing only in convenience may produce diminishing benefits, unless accompanied by the improvement of service quality, product reliability or other trust-related factors.

From the perspective of Generation Z consumers, the limited impact of convenience on trust is particularly reasonable. Generation Z grew up in a digitally integrated shopping environment

and is very familiar with functions such as mobile payment, same-day distribution and seamless online–offline integration. Therefore, these basic convenience features are regarded as standard configurations, and incremental improvements in these areas do not increase trust. For this group, trust is more influenced by experiential and relational factors, such as service quality and consistency, than convenience itself.

### ***Customer Trust and Purchase Intention***

Consistent with the SOR framework, the structural model results confirm that customer trust has a strong and positive impact on the purchase intention. This discovery strengthens the role of trust as a key psychological mechanism, that is, O2O marketing stimuli are transformed into behavioral response through trust. In an environment of information asymmetry and cross-channel complexity, trust can reduce perceived risks and enhance consumers' willingness to participate in transactions (Manzoor et al., 2020; Jadil, Rana, & Dwivedi, 2022).

Consistent with previous empirical studies in the context of online, O2O and omnichannel (Wang, Yang, Ding, Zhang, & Sun, 2022; Albarq, 2023; Jung & Kim, 2025), the intensity of the trust-purchase intention relationship observed in this study highlights the importance of trust-oriented management strategies. O2O platforms should not only focus on short-term sales stimulus but should give priority to strategies that can foster continuous trust and long-term consumer participation.

From the perspective of Generation Z consumers, trust is especially important in promoting the purchase intention. As digital natives, they are highly exposed to online information, frequently participate in omni-channel shopping, and have a strong awareness of potential risks (such as misleading information, inconsistencies in platforms or poor services). In this group, trust is not only a psychological guarantee, but also a key determinant of purchase intention. Therefore, strategies to effectively build and maintain trust have a more significant impact on the purchasing behavior of Generation Z than for other age groups.

### ***Integrated Discussion: Rethinking O2O Marketing Priorities***

Overall, PLS-SEM results provide a detailed insight into how different O2O marketing mix dimensions affect consumer behavior. By introducing the SOR framework, this study shows that different marketing stimuli contribute differently to trust formation. Service-related factors are the most influential drivers of trust, and products and prices play a role as the basic conditions for maintaining the credibility of the platform.

More importantly, the results of the study reveal that some widely adopted practices (such as high-intensity promotion) may have an unexpected negative impact on trust among Generation Z consumers. At the same time, in a mature O2O market, convenience is more like a benchmark requirement than a differentiated clue of trust. These findings show that the effectiveness of O2O marketing strategies depends not only on the existence of multiple marketing dimensions, but also on how consumers interpret these signals in an increasingly complex digital environment.

From the theoretical level, this study no longer regards the O2O marketing mix as a whole but distinguishes the differences in the role of different marketing dimensions in trust formation and purchase intention, so that the application of the SOR framework in the O2O context becomes more specific and clearer.

From a practical point of view, the research results show that it is difficult for O2O platforms to establish long-term and stable consumer relationships if they only rely on promotional means. In contrast, trust-based strategies, such as improving service quality, maintaining online and offline consistency, and enhancing information transparency, are more conducive to promoting continuous consumer participation. Based on this, this study provides a more realistic and feasible understanding perspective for the O2O platform to achieve long-term development while reducing its dependence on short-term promotion.

### **Managerial Implications**

The results of this study provide some practical insights for O2O platform managers, especially for platforms serving Generation Z consumers in China. Research shows that instead of adopting a comprehensive marketing strategy, managers should selectively pay attention to O2O marketing mix dimensions that can really promote customer trust.

#### ***Emphasising Service Quality over Promotion-Driven Growth***

A key finding of this study is that service plays a central role in building customer trust. Research results show that providing equal high-quality services online and offline has the most significant impact on customer trust. In management practice, enterprises can enhance customer trust by improving their service capabilities. For example, it is recommended to strengthen employee training and standardize online and offline service processes. In addition, the coordination ability between online customer service and offline services should also be improved. Continuous and highly responsive service performance has proven to be an effective way to convey platform reliability to consumers, which is especially important for Generation Z consumers with less tolerance.

At the same time, the study found that there is a negative correlation between promotion and customer trust. Repeated promotions across online and offline may cause consumers to doubt the platform's motivation, believing that it is more of a short-term utilitarian or opportunist behavior (Cao et al., 2021), thus weakening consumers' emotional trust and transforming trust into a defensive rational evaluation (Voigt, Schlögl, & Groth, 2021). Some scholars also suggested that the high degree of unity of online and offline promotional activities may be interpreted by consumers as "mechanization" and "lack of sincerity", which leads to consumers' distrust rather than the expected sense of security. Grewal, Roggeveen, and Nordfält (2017) and Shareef, Dwivedi, Wright, Kumar, and Kumar (2019) also confirmed that interactive, social and user-customized promotions can stimulate trust and participation; on the contrary, promotions with unified forms are more likely to be regarded as "over-standardized", thus weakening novelty and importance. Therefore, promotional activities should be customized according to the personal preferences and consumption habits of Generation Z consumers.

### ***Maintaining Product and Price Consistency as Credibility Foundations***

The study also shows that the consistency of products and prices in online and offline channels has a positive impact on customer trust. Although these factors may not be the main driver of consumer trust, they still constitute the basic conditions for O2O platforms to build trust.

In management practice, enterprises are responsible for ensuring the consistency of online and offline product information, quality standards and brand presentation. It is necessary to ensure the consistency between online product and service descriptions and consumers' offline experience. Failure to do so will quickly weaken consumer confidence and may invalidate other marketing initiatives. It is recommended that enterprises carry out regular online and offline reviews and establish internal coordination mechanisms to help reduce channel differences.

At the same time, price management must be particularly cautious. Research shows that consumers are highly sensitive to the price difference between online and offline. In the absence of a credible explanation, such differences may be considered unfair or opportunistic behavior. It is recommended that enterprises maintain a relatively consistent price structure in online and offline channels and clearly explain the reason for the price difference when necessary, so as to enhance consumers' sense of price fairness (Lim, Lew, Leow, Lee, Li, Li, Sharma, & Kee, 2024).

### ***Viewing Convenience as a Necessary Condition Rather Than a Differentiator***

Although convenience is often regarded as an important competitive advantage of O2O platforms, this study shows that from the perspective of Generation Z consumers, convenience is more of a fundamental premise than a factor that directly shapes trust. The basic expectations of contemporary consumers mainly include the high efficiency of the payment system, the reliability of the distribution mechanism and the seamless integration of channels.

Therefore, managers have the responsibility to ensure that convenience reaches an acceptable level to maintain competitiveness. However, it should be noted that simply increasing investment in convenience will not significantly improve trust. Convenience should be regarded as a supporting foundation and work together with other key elements.

This study proposes that O2O platform management should shift from a strategy dominated by promotion to a strategic path with trust as the core. By prioritizing service quality, maintaining the consistency of products and prices, and considering convenience as a basic premise rather than the main differentiating factor, managers can cultivate more stable customer trust and long-term participation in the fiercely competitive O2O market.

## **Conclusion and Future Research**

### ***Conclusion***

This study explores how different dimensions of O2O marketing mix affect the trust of Generation Z consumers in China, which in turn affects their purchase intention. This research takes the SOR framework as the theoretical basis. Research results show that each dimension of O2O marketing mix has different effects on customer trust. Among them, service is identified as the most critical determinant of customer trust, and product and price have a

positive effect on customer trust. This study also points out that promotion has a negative impact on customer trust, while the impact of convenience on customer trust is not significant. This study reveals the differentiated impact of various dimensions of O2O marketing mix on customer trust, providing a new perspective for existing O2O marketing research. A large number of studies show that the dimensions of O2O marketing mix are often regarded as equally important stimulating factors. However, the results of this study show that there are differences in the role of each dimension on customer trust. This discovery provides new ideas for the application of the SOR framework in the O2O marketing context, emphasizing the distinct role of various stimulating factors in shaping the internal psychological state and purchasing behavior of consumers.

From a practical point of view, the findings of this study show that convenience has evolved into the basic expectation of consumers. It is worth noting that frequent promotions may weaken consumers' trust in the platform, thus affecting their purchase intention. On the contrary, emphasizing the consistency of online and offline service, price and product has been proven to enhance customer trust, thus promoting the formation of long-term purchase intentions. This conclusion is especially important for Generation Z consumers, who have rich digital experience and are more inclined to build trust in the platform based on actual experience and signals, rather than relying solely on convenience, promotions or other information to make purchasing decisions.

### ***Limitations and Directions for Future Research***

Although this research has made certain contributions in theory and practice, there are still some limitations, which provide a potential expansion direction for future research. First of all, the empirical analysis of this study is based on the data of Generation Z consumers in China. Although this group is of strategic significance to the O2O platform, consumers of different age groups or cultural backgrounds may have significant differences in cognitive and behavioral responses. It is suggested that future research can promote the research model to other population groups or carry out transnational comparative research to test the robustness of the research conclusions.

Secondly, this study conceptualizes customer trust as a core organism variable under the framework of SOR. However, other psychological concepts, such as perceived value and satisfaction, may also have an impact on the purchase intention. It is suggested that future research should introduce more cognitive or emotional variables to more comprehensively reveal the internal psychological mechanism that supports O2O consumption behavior.

In addition, the model of this study mainly emphasizes the direct relationship between the O2O marketing mix dimension, customer trust and purchase intention. It is suggested that future research can explore more complex relationship structures, such as regulatory effects, to achieve a more comprehensive exploration of O2O marketing.

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