

Do Your Neighbors Matter to You? : Focused on Chinese Jiu Ling Hou (Post-'90s) Generation Online Shoppers

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Abstract

The post-'90s generation is made up of those born between 1990 and 1999 in China; it is also the generation that is driving e-commerce in China. To attract these post-'90s consumers, online retailers have adopted recommender systems based on previous purchases and personal preferences. However, current Chinese online retailers do not typically consider the purchasing histories of their neighbors, although those neighbors have been proven to influence consumer behavior intention in several fields of study. Thus, this study investigates neighbors' influences on Chinese consumer behavior in online shopping. In particular, this study examines the relationship between neighbors' purchase histories and consumers' purchase decisions among Chinese post-'90s consumers. Furthermore, this research seeks to determine whether neighbors' purchasing history has an influence on consumer perceptions (e.g., perceived enjoyment, perceived risk) and whether perceived enjoyment and perceived risk have influences on purchasing intention.

Keywords: Taobao; Neighbor effect; Purchase intention; Perceived risk; Perceived enjoyment.

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1. Introduction

Young Chinese consumers are becoming the main buyers in China and the major driving force in e-commerce (CIW Team, 2019; Qiu and Lin, 2013). The Jiu Ling Hou generation or post-'90s generation is made up of those born between 1990 and 1999, i.e., those who grew up in a time of rapid economic growth influenced by the Internet, wherein one can express one's self with few restrictions (Farrar, 2010).

The post-'90s generation is different from other generations in China. First, because they were born after the Chinese economic reform, they are more label-obsessed and enjoy luxury shopping (Achim, 2019; Doctoroff, 2016). Second, they have different consumption ideas compared with those of older generations (CIW Team, 2019). The post-'90s generation prefers spending to saving, as most of the post-'90s generation embrace the idea of living in the now and celebrating the moment, unlike their parents' generation (Doctoroff, 2016); further, 38% of post-'90s use up their money every month; 36% of them use more money than they have; and only 26% save money (Chen, 2018). Third, the post-'90s generation is a major user of digital entertainment such as music and video, much more than their elders, and are more likely to spend money in this area than other generations (Doctoroff, 2016; Soo, 2018).

The post-'90s generation is expected to be the major force of consumption in general and accounts for 45.2% of popular Chinese online commerce site Tmall's revenue (CIW Team, 2019; Gui, 2018).

Thus, it is important to understand the factors that affect post-'90s consumers' online buying behaviors, as this group becomes the leading player in the Chinese e-commerce market. With the severe competition of online shopping markets in China, online retailers must actively seek ways to influence consumer purchase decisions to increase sales.

Major players in Chinese e-commerce such as Alibaba, JD.com, Pinduoduo, Suning, Vip.com, Gome, Amazon China, Yihaodian, Dangdang, and Jumei actively adopt recommender systems to encourage the purchase of products (Kwok, 2018). In the recommender system, people provide reviews; then, the system analyzes and sends recommendations to potential consumers (Resnick and Varian, 1997).

Taobao provides recommendations by showing related products, which consumers have previously searched. According to consumers' search and browse histories, Taobao recommends products that consumers would probably

buy. Also, Taobao gives recommendations from previous consumers. Every product shopping page shows the sales volume in one month and previous consumers' comments about the product.

Currently, the recommender system of online shopping websites provides recommendations mostly based on customer interests and purchased items (Linden *et al.*, 2003) and does not consider the purchase histories of their neighbors, although those neighbors have been proven to influence consumer behavior intentions in several fields of studies (Beltramo *et al.*, 2015; Garbarino and Strahilevitz, 2004; Kim *et al.*, 2007).

Therefore, this study investigates neighbors' influence on consumer behavior in online shopping. In particular, this study examines the relationship between a neighbor's purchase history and a consumer's purchase decision among Chinese post-'90s consumers. Furthermore, this research aims to see whether neighbor's purchasing history has an influence on consumer perceptions (e.g., perceived enjoyment, perceived risk) and whether perceived enjoyment and perceived risk have influences on purchasing intention.

The paper is structured as follows. The first part introduces the factors that influence consumers' purchasing decisions and provides theoretical backgrounds. The second part contains the research model and hypotheses. The third part introduces the research methodologies. The fourth part provides the results and findings. Finally, this research provides managerial implications and future direction of the study.

2. Literature Review

Scholars have investigated the various factors that affect consumers' purchase intentions in online shopping to improve sales performance and customer satisfaction (Jiang *et al.*, 2009; Kuo *et al.*, 2009; Mittal and Kamakura, 2001). Purchase intention entails consumer willingness to buy a certain product or service and is related to consumers' actual purchases. Marketing managers routinely use purchase intentions to predict sales (Chandon *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, purchase intention is an important measurement in understanding consumers' willingness and probability of buying a product.

Particularly, perceived enjoyment was found to have a positive influence on online shopping intention (Ramayah and Ignatius, 2005). Perceived risk is also an important factor that determines initial purchase intention and repeat purchase intention (Chiu *et al.*, 2014). Chen and Chang (2012), discovered that perceived risk can have a negative effect on trust and purchase intention on green products.

Further, Wang *et al.* (2012) revealed that peer communication can affect consumers' attitudes toward a product, which in turn enhances purchase intention.

2.1. Neighbor Effect

The neighbor effect is a concept that explains why neighbors have a direct or indirect effect on individual behaviors economically or socially (Wheaton *et al.*, 2015). Further, individual decisions and characteristics of others within a common neighborhood are interdependent (Brock and Durlauf, 2007).

The neighbor effect has been investigated in many areas, e.g., dropout rates of residents in the same community. Kasarda (1993), found that educational dropout rates in severely distressed neighborhoods are more than three times as high as those in low-poverty neighborhoods. Also, the jobless rate for young high school dropouts in distressed urban neighborhoods is often over 80%. Steinberg and Cauffman (1996), claimed that peer groups have more of an influence than parents in determining high school performance.

A neighbor also plays a crucial role in mental health. Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2003), conducted a study on mental health and neighborhood poverty and discovered that parents who moved to low-poverty neighborhoods had less distress than parents who stayed in high-poverty neighborhoods. Children who moved to less-poor neighborhoods had fewer anxious and dependency problems than those who stayed in public housing.

Neighbors also have a significant influence on people's purchase intentions. Prior research has revealed that neighbor's purchasing of alternative fuel vehicles has an influence on consumers' purchasing intentions and decision-making in Finland (Grinblatt *et al.*, 2008), Sweden (Jansson *et al.*, 2017), and Canada and the United States (Axsen *et al.*, 2009).

2.2. Perceived Enjoyment and Risk

Perceived enjoyment and perceived risk play crucial roles in consumers' online purchasing intentions (Chen and Chang, 2012; Chiu *et al.*, 2014; Ramayah and Ignatius, 2005; Suki and Suki, 2011). Perceived enjoyment, i.e., the feelings of delight, pleasure, and happiness, has an impact on an individual's behavior, which encourages a person to shop online and/or to use new technology (Cheema *et al.*, 2013; Davis *et al.*, 1989). Van der Heijden (2004), also defined perceived enjoyment as "the extent to which fun can be derived from using the system."

Perceived enjoyment plays a significant role in whether or not consumers use e-shopping (Ha and Stoel, 2009). For offline shopping, perceived enjoyment has been revealed as a motivation for "bricks" shopping (Dennis *et al.*, 2005). Perceived enjoyment is positively related to shoppers' online shopping intentions in Malaysia (Ramayah *et al.*, 2003; Ramayah and Ignatius, 2005). In addition, perceived enjoyment positively affects Chinese college students' attitudes and purchase intentions to use mobile education apps for their studies (Li and Han, 2016). Perceived enjoyment also has a positive and significant effect on Chinese consumers' continuance purchase intentions about Wechat (Lisha *et al.*, 2017).

Perceived risk is the uncertainty that consumers face before buying products or services (Samadi and Yaghoob-Nejadi, 2009). Perceived risk has been studied as a significant factor that negatively influences customers' online purchase intentions (Chau *et al.*, 2007; Chen and Barnes, 2007; Lim, 2003; Lin, 2008; Mitchell, 1999; Wang and

Emurian, 2005). Once consumers have learned that there is perceived risk in online shopping, which produces negative consequences, they will avoid buying online (Chiu *et al.*, 2014). The higher perceived product risk involving online shopping is possibly due to online consumers' inability to physically examine product quality and alternatives (Alreck and Settle, 2002; Garbarino and Strahilevitz, 2004). Besides, Tsai and Yeh (2010) revealed that perceived risk of privacy on a website is strongly related to lower purchase intention. Sheehan and Hoy (1999) claimed that consumers typically avoid purchasing products on websites that require revealing personal data.

3. Hypothesis

Various studies have laid claim that neighbors can influence people's happiness. Huppert *et al.* (2005), study on the well-being and happiness of people in Canada found that neighbors strongly influence one's happiness and life satisfaction. Rath and Harter (2019), also pointed out that people's entire social network affects well-being, and that next-door neighbors' well-being has an impact on others' well-being. In addition, Jiang *et al.* (2017) revealed that neighbor relationships can indirectly influence the subjective well-being of the elderly in China.

Based on the above discussion, it is reasonable to expect that, when neighbors' purchasing history is present, it will influence a person's perceived enjoyment in online shopping.

Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: When neighbors' purchasing history is present, Chinese post-'90s consumers will feel higher perceived enjoyment than when the neighbors' purchasing history is absent.

Some studies claim that friends can influence consumers' perceived risk when consumers shop. Garbarino and Strahilevitz (2004), found that people have a lower perceived risk in purchasing online if a site is recommended by their friends. Mangleburg *et al.* (2004), pointed out that, teenagers shopping with friends reduce uncertainty and risk when making a choice. People often consider friends' and family's opinions because they trust these people (Han and Kim, 2018).

This study assumes that neighbors could have the same effect as friends and family. Previous studies also showed that neighbors are also close-network-like friends. Kruse *et al.* (2016), put forward that adolescents are likely to make friends with those who live nearby. Crandall *et al.* (2008), found that neighbors grow like friends due to social influence.

Based on these studies, it is reasonable to consider that a neighbor's purchasing history will influence perceived risk.

Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: When neighbors' purchasing history is present, Chinese post-'90s consumers will feel lower perceived risk than when neighbor's purchasing history is absent.

Previous research showed that close friends and neighbors influence consumers' purchasing intentions. Garbarino and Strahilevitz (2004), found that people have a higher intention to purchase online if a website is recommended by friends. Kim *et al.* (2007), discovered that consumers' purchasing decisions are influenced by the people they know and trust, including neighbors, when buying a product on an online website in the United States. Meanwhile, Grinblatt *et al.* (2008) claimed that next-door neighbors' previous purchasing influences purchasing decisions when choosing an automobile. Further, Beltramo *et al.* (2015) claimed, in research conducted in Uganda, that the consumers whose neighbors bought a cookstove are more likely to purchase a cookstove.

In the light of these discussions, it is justifiable to deem that one's neighbor's purchasing experience will influence one's purchasing decision.

Thus, the following hypothesis is hypothesized:

H3: When a neighbor's purchasing history is present, Chinese post-'90s consumers will have a higher purchase intention than when a neighbor's purchasing history is absent.

It is well known that consumers' perceived enjoyment has a significant positive influence on consumers' purchasing decisions. Ramayah and Ignatius (2005), found that perceived enjoyment has a positive influence on online shopping intention when shopping online in Malaysia. Lin *et al.* (2005), indicated that Internet users' perceived playfulness influences users' purchase and repurchase decisions when shopping on websites in Taiwan. Lee (2010), stated that e-learning users' perceived enjoyment has a significant effect on users' continuous intention to use e-learning. Chiu *et al.* (2009), discovered that consumers' perceived enjoyment has a significant positive effect on customers' repurchase intentions in online shopping. Besides, Chong (2013) pointed out that perceived enjoyment has a significant effect on Chinese consumers' continuous intention for e-commerce.

Thus, it is plausible to consider that consumers' perceived enjoyment has a significant positive influence on consumers' purchasing intentions.

Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis.

H4: Perceived enjoyment has a significant positive influence on purchasing intention in Taobao for Chinese post-'90s consumers.

Consumers' perceived risk plays a significant role in terms of consumers' purchasing intention in online shopping. Park *et al.* (2005), argued that there is a negative relationship between perceived risk and purchase intention when people shop online for clothes. Chang and Chen (2008), showed that perceived risk affect consumers' purchase intentions in online shopping. Also, Kim and Lennon (2013) found that consumers' perceived risk had a negative influence on consumers' mood and purchase intention. Kim *et al.* (2008) stated that Internet consumers' perceived risk has a strong impact on purchasing decisions.

Based on the above-discussed studies, it is reasonable to consider that one's perceived risk has a significant negative influence on one's purchase intention. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Perceived risk has a significant negative influence on purchase intention in Taobao for Chinese post-'90s consumers.

4. Methodology

To investigate the neighbors' influence on consumers' purchasing decisions, an online survey was conducted through Wenjuanxing (问卷星), the Chinese version of SurveyMonkey. The invitation of the online survey was sent out to Wenzhou Kean University students' group on WeChat (instant messenger similar to WhatsApp). Respondents voluntarily participated in the survey. This study adopted an online survey because online surveys can target unique populations, save time for researchers, and save money as using the electronic form [Wright \(2005\)](#).

Two hundred university students in China participated in the survey. The age range of the participants is from 18 to 25 years old; 47.5% of participants are male and 52.5% of participants are female.

The questionnaire was first created in English. Then, the questionnaire was translated into Chinese. In order to ensure the precise meaning of the questionnaires, the questionnaires were back-translated into English and compared with the original questionnaire. The survey was designed as four-part self-administered online questions. A fictitious photo of a dining table was presented at the beginning of the survey. Respondents were asked to imagine they are planning to purchase a dining table on Taobao. The collected questionnaire was divided into two conditions (neighbor purchasing history presence vs. absence).

Tao Bao is the largest electronic commerce platform and a pioneer in customer-to-customer business in China ([Ou and Davison, 2009](#)). The two conditions of fictitious Taobao shopping pages include the basic information about the table. The price, picture, and fictitious name of the shop were given on the page. One group of respondents was given a Taobao product screenshot that features a neighbor's purchase history with the statement "your neighbor bought this product," while the other group was given a Taobao product screenshot without the statement.

The study contains 16 item measurements, which were adapted from previous studies. Perceived enjoyment was measured with four items, e.g., "I shall have fun when purchasing this product" and "I think that purchasing this product shall be interesting," were adopted from [Moon and Kim \(2001\)](#). There were six items for measuring perceived risk, including, "I believe that purchasing this product are risky because the products delivered may be inferior" and "I believe that purchasing this product are risky because the products delivered may fail to my expectations." These items were adjusted ([Corbitt et al., 2003](#)). Purchase intention was assessed with six items, e.g., "I intend to purchase this product in the future," which was adapted from [Chen and Barnes \(2007\)](#). Another item, "I would strongly recommend others to buy this product," was adjusted from [Suh and Han \(2003\)](#). A Likert 7-point scale was used to measure the result, where 1 stands for strongly agree and 7 stands for strongly disagree. At the end of the survey, gender, age, and the frequency of shopping online were also measured.

5. Result

5.1. Reliability

This study conducted a reliability test to gauge internal consistency. All the items in Cronbach's alpha in this research are higher than 0.7, which means these items are reliable ([Nunnally et al., 1967](#)). Each item in Cronbach's alpha result is shown in [Table 1](#).

Table-1. Reliability

Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived enjoyment	0.948
Perceived risk	0.874
Purchase intention	0.938

5.2. T-test Analysis

This research measured the difference of influence between neighbors' purchasing history presence and neighbors' purchasing history absence on perceived enjoyment, perceived risk, and purchase intention of Chinese college students on Taobao. AT-test using SPSS computer software was conducted to test the difference between two different conditions. The data results are shown in [Table 2](#).

Table-2. Summary of T-Test Analysis

Hypothesis	Variable		Neighbor's purchasing history present	Neighbor's purchasing history absent	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Result
H1	PE	M	4.333	4.613	-1.449	0.149	Not Supported
		SD	1.432	1.296			
H2	PR	M	4.356	4.334	0.143	0.886	Not Supported
		SD	1.129	1.163			
H3	PI	M	4.115	4.128	-0.076	0.940	Not Supported
		SD	1.270	1.292			

Note: SD, square deviation; M, mean; PE, perceived enjoyment; PR, perceived risk; PI, purchase intention

In Hypothesis 1, we assumed that, when neighbors' purchasing history is present, people will feel higher perceived enjoyment than when a neighbor's purchasing history is absent. To test H1, an independent-sample T-test was used (Table 2). The result showed no significant difference between neighbors' purchasing history presence and neighbors' purchasing history absence conditions on perceived enjoyment ($p>0.05$). This result suggested that the neighbors' purchasing history does not influence people's perceived enjoyment. Hence, Hypothesis 1 is not supported.

In Hypothesis 2, we supposed that, when neighbors' purchasing history is present, people will feel lower perceived risk than when neighbors' purchasing history is absent. The result (Table 2) of independent-samples T-test showed there was no significant difference for neighbors' purchasing history presence and neighbors' purchasing history absence on perceived risk ($p>0.05$). This result implied that neighbors' purchasing history does not influence people's perceived risk. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is not supported.

In Hypothesis 3, we presumed that, when neighbors' purchasing history is present, people will have higher purchase intention than when neighbors' purchasing history is absent. An independent-samples T-test was adopted. The result (Table 2) indicated no significant difference for neighbors' purchasing history presence and neighbors' purchasing history absence on purchase intention ($p>0.05$). This result demonstrated that neighbors' purchase history does not influence people's purchase intention. As a result, Hypothesis 3 is not supported.

5.3. Regression Analysis

This research investigated the relationship between purchase intention and perceived enjoyment and purchase intention and perceived risk in Chinese college students. SPSS software was used to conduct regression analysis. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table-3. Summary of Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Items	β	t	Result
H4	PE-PI	0.654**	12.294	Supported
H5	PR-PI	0.097	1.828	Not Supported

Note: ** $p<0.01$; β = standardized coefficient; (PE, perceived enjoyment; PR, perceived risk; PI, purchase intention)

In Hypothesis 4, we posited perceived enjoyment has a significant positive influence on purchasing intention. The result (Table 3) indicated that perceived enjoyment has a significant positive influence on purchase intention ($p<0.01$). That is, Chinese college students (post-'90s) are more likely to purchase a product when they feel high perceived enjoyment. Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported.

In Hypothesis 5, we proposed that perceived risk has a significant negative influence on purchasing intention. The result (Table 3) implies that perceived risk does not have significant influence on purchase intention ($p>0.05$). That is, Chinese college students' (post-'90s) purchase decisions are more likely not affected by perceived risk. Consequently, Hypothesis 5 is not supported.

6. Discussion

Contrary to the aforementioned hypotheses, the results show that neighbors' purchasing history presence did not generate a significant difference in Chinese post-'90s perceived enjoyment, perceived risk, and purchase intention.

This study found no significant difference for neighbors' purchase history presence or absence on post-'90s perceived enjoyment. Although extant research claimed that closely networked people could influence a person's happiness (Huppert *et al.*, 2005; Jiang *et al.*, 2017; Rath and Harter, 2019), the result is in line with Weiss (2013) that people dislike invasion of privacy when their personal information is used to promote products. Therefore, it can be explained that Chinese post-'90s might have found it unpleasant that their personal information such as a home address is used to provide the recommendation from big corporations like Taobao e-commerce.

The result also revealed that whether neighbors' purchasing history present does not impact the perceived risk. This result could be affected by the fact that shoppers on Taobao are not trusted friends or family (strong tie) but merely strangers (weak tie) with similar taste in products (Shen, 2012). The relationship strength has an impact on the level of trust, which is negatively associated with perceived risk (Han and Kim, 2017; Kim *et al.*, 2008; Kim and Lennon, 2013). Thus, neighbors' (weak ties) purchase history in this study might not have lowered Chinese post-'90s' perceived risk due to lack of trust.

One notable finding is that neighbors' purchase history is not a factor influencing the purchase intention. We attribute this result to weak-tie and unknown expertise of neighbors that were mentioned on the website. Wen *et al.* (2009), claimed that strong-tie product endorsers are more effective than weak-tie endorsers and endorsers' products expertise is also important in consumers' high purchase intention. However, the respondents of the survey did not know whether their neighbors were experts in a given product, e.g., a dining table. Also, they may not consider their neighbors close to them but rather strangers who live close geographically. Hence, it can be explained that neighbors did not influence Chinese post-'90s' purchase intention, as they are not experts and close network for them.

This research also revealed that perceived enjoyment had a significant positive influence on the participants' purchase intention among Chinese post-'90s. This finding has been proven by many previous studies (Ahn *et al.*, 2007; Chiu *et al.*, 2009; Hart *et al.*, 2007), which also focus on the perceived enjoyment and purchase intention when purchasing products and services online. The positive impact between perceived enjoyment and purchase intention has been proved regardless of locations, e.g., Taiwan (Lin *et al.*, 2005), mainland China (Chong, 2013) and

Malaysia (Ramayah and Ignatius, 2005). Also, it has been supported by a study on different product and service, for instance, e-learning Lee (2010), online blogs Shiau and Luo (2013) and online clothing shopping (Kim *et al.*, 2007).

Further, the paper found that perceived risk did not impact purchase intention among Chinese post-'90s. Although extant research of online shopping claimed that perceived risk influences purchase intention, this finding also supports the previous argument that perceived risk is not an indicator of purchase intention (Kannungo and Jain, 2004). Pires *et al.* (2004), also claimed that prior online purchasing experience is negatively related to the perceived risk, and there was no association between online purchasing and perceived risk in the case of low-involvement products. Because all survey respondents had previously shopped online, their previous experience with Taobao may have offset their perceived risk.

7. Managerial Implications and Future Studies

The results demonstrated that Chinese post-'90s are more likely to purchase products when they feel high perceived enjoyment. Thus, online sellers should focus on the enjoyment if they want to attract Chinese post-'90s consumers. Online sellers can emphasize the enjoyment of using e-commerce sites (Nguyen, 2015). Providing well-designed user interface of online shopping websites increase the level of enjoyment consumers experience and that could lead to higher purchase intention (Cyr *et al.*, 2006; Van der Heijden, 2004).

In addition, online retailers can try out other sources to improve recommender systems such as consumers' peers, families, and significant others (Wang *et al.*, 2012), because neighbors' purchasing histories presence did not affect post-'90s consumers' purchase intention.

This study has several limitations. First, study participants are mostly from Southern China, especially Zhejiang province. Thus, the sample cannot represent all post-'90s online consumers of China. Future studies should include participants from different parts of China and a larger sample size, representing the post-'90s online consumers. Second, this study focused on perceived enjoyment and perceived risk and their impact on purchase intention by showing the neighbor's purchasing history. However, not only perceived enjoyment and perceived risk but also perceived ease of use are variables influencing consumers' purchase intention (Ramayah and Ignatius, 2005). Hence, future studies can study all these three factors.

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