

# **Acquiring Buyer's Trust in C2C Transactions: An Empirical Case Study in China**

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*Due to the space-time separation in C2C transactions, both buyers and sellers cannot make direct contacts with either people or commodities. It results in an increase of information asymmetry between buyers and sellers, and uncertainties to buyers in the C2C transactions, which create the trust issues for the buyer side and impede C2C transactions from proceeding smoothly. In this paper, through the literature review, empirical analysis and case study, the trust issues occurring with the buyer side have been investigated from the position of C2C websites and vendors. A C2C business trust-gaining model has been established in order to provide recommendations to C2C network operators and vendors.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

With internet trading maturing gradually, and people's views and habits of shopping changing, the demand of online shopping has emerged. C2C business have online users' favor because of its special advantages. It exhibits huge market potential and has become the main model of online shopping currently. On the other hand, although there are unlimited business opportunities, the trust crisis of Chinese consumers exists all the time, and the credit level needs to be improved immediately. Due to the space-time separation in C2C transactions, information asymmetry between buyers and sellers becomes worse. With the constant appearing of online swindles, the consumer's distrust of the C2C transaction has become aggravated, especially in China where credit system is still developing and people concern more about "guanxi" and face-to-face deals. Rosenbloom, Haefner and Lee (2012) take brand trust as one of four constructs to predict brand purchase intent within a sample of Chinese consumers. Therefore, acquiring trust from the buyer has become a significant issue in C2C transaction.

Luhmann (1979) stated that trust was a necessary and sophisticated mechanism which reduced the cost of human activities. McKnigh and Chervany (2002) developed a initial trust conceptual model, which suggested that the credit grantor's trust propensity, credit system and trust cognition decided if credit receiver accepted his initial trust. In the first transaction, the

relation of trust depends on the information that credit grantor provides, such as ability and kindness. Moreover, credit grantor's trust propensity and the awareness of the risk in the transaction system also affect the building of trust. Fung and Lee (1999) suggested that the trust-development cycle in the e-business started from the first try of online transaction. Consumers valued the results of their first transaction, and then would progress more transaction if satisfied outcomes happened in the first place. On the other hand, consumers would likely to give up further trades. Shapir (1992) pointed out that the formation of trust could be separated in the different stages and was calculus-based. As increasing of amount and frequency of inter-transaction, it becomes knowledge-based and is in the last and highest stage of trust development, it becomes identification-based trust.

Solving trust issue for buyers can directly help C2C websites and vendors to survive and grow. This article investigated in buyers' trust acquiring issue in C2C transaction, tried to analyze the factors that affected trust decision-making, mainly focused on trust formation and development in different stages, in order to give some advices about customer management and marketing in C2C transaction to web-operators and vendors.

## **BASIC THEORY AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

Occurring in the social setting with uncertainty and risk, trust is the result of different interactions among credit grantors and credit receivers, credit grantors and social setting, and credit receivers and social setting. In the C2C transaction, effect factors relates to buyers, sellers, C2C web-operators and online trading environment This paper will divide those factors into three categories: environment factors, objective factors and subjective factors, which respectively represented by systematic trust, personal trust and transaction trust (including C2C websites and vendors) respectively in sequence.

Systematic trust means individuals have certain views about specific systems that have regular and safe conditions for operation. Tucker (1986) founded the basic systematic trust theory. He stated that there were two dimensions of system trust: the first was third-party authentication, such as permits, business licenses, laws and regulations; the second was contract attached with tied aid and held by third-parties in order to secure the expected results of transactions. Mcknight (1998) also suggested two dimensions of system trust: situational standard and structure security. Situational standard was stated as the good expectation because of stable situation. Structure security meant the believing in expected good outcome based on the clearly stated transaction structure, such as contracts, regulations and warranties. Mcknight believed that the systematic trust in the online business mainly manifested as the environmental factors' effects on the consumers. Song and Yang (2004) analyzed reasons of the troubles for building trust relations in the e-business environments and suggested that law, technology and community influence should be used to build online trust. Wang and Zhang (2006) suggested that the credit management in e-business could be divided into three categories: systematic trust management, security strategy and credit services. Systematic trust management and security strategy depended on individual e-commerce website, but the credit service was provided by independent third-parties, mainly including individual identification and online credit accession for buyers and sellers. Therefore, following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: The environment of C2C online transactions has positive effects on the initial trust acquiring.

- H1.1: The development of regulations and laws of has positive effects on the initial trust acquiring.
- H1.2: The improvement of e-business technology in C2C online transactions has positive effects on the initial trust acquiring.
- H1.3: Identifications from third-party intermediaries in C2C online transactions has positive effects on the initial trust acquiring.

Dayal et al. (1999) proposed “pyramid of trust”, which included six factors: security mechanism, fame of websites, service quality, personalized service, autonomously of customer and interaction of consumers. First three of them were the necessary factors to establish online credit, and the remaining three could be adjusted based on the different websites.

Belanger, Hille and Smith (2002) considered privacy and security as the effect factors, and found out that consumers prefer security to privacy. Smith (2000) suggested that age of the websites, selections of goods, online society, friendly links, search engines and privacy were the main effect factors. Sultan (2002) suggested that the character of websites was among factors that determined customer trust in those websites. Those characters included guidance, suggestions, infallibility, satisfaction of orders, society, privacy/security, credits records, brands and web-display. Urban (2000) believed that the quantity and quality of information, timeliness and virtual privacy consult could increase online trust. Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa (2004)’s empirical test proved that serviceability of websites had positive relationship with initial trust. Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa (2004) suggested that the complex design of websites, which made them really hard to use, was one of key reasons that people don't shop online. Their empirical test proved that perceiving usability had positive relationship with initial trust from new customer. The convenience of websites could raise the serviceability for customers, increase efficiency and save time.

Therefore, following hypotheses are proposed:

- H2: C2C websites quality has positive effects on acquiring buyers’ initial trust.
- H2.1: Convenience of C2C websites has positive effects on acquiring buyers’ initial trust.
- H2.2: Serviceability of C2C websites has positive effects on acquiring buyers’ initial trust.
- H3: Advanced C2C websites has positive effect on acquiring buyers’ initial trust.
- H3.1: The raise of credibility of websites has positive effects on acquiring buyers’ initial trust.
- H3.2: The expanding of commodity scale has positive effects on acquiring buyers’ initial trust.
- H4: The security system of websites has positive effects on acquiring buyers’ initial trust
- H4.1: Providing third-party payment in C2C transaction has positive effects on acquiring buyers’ initial trust.
- H4.2: Development of transaction security policies and changing or refunding system for C2Cwebsites has positive effects on acquiring buyers’ initial trust.
- H4.3: Confidential policies for personal information data have positive effects on acquiring buyers’ initial trust.

Jarvenpaa (2000) suggested that brands, the communication of customers' satisfaction policies, purchase returns and refunding could promote online trust. Mathew (2001) suggested that policies of credit cards lost warranty, products guarantee and refunding, together with the convenience of third party contract service, artificial customer service and good user-drive webpage can effectively increase online trust. The evidences in Yoon (2002)'s research based on the students in Korean found out that company culture and credit were significantly positive related with online trust. In the long term, online trusts were built by the balance which resulted from the cooperation and interaction between online vendors and consumers. McKnight and Chervany (1998) found that reputation of websites was one of the key factors for consumers to build online trust, especially the fostering of initial trust. Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky and Vitale (2000) found that perception of the reputation can influence consumers' online trust, and Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa (2004) also held the same view. Orenstein (1999) suggested that online consumers need more actual contacts and better customer services. Gefen and Devine (2001) thought the degree of knowing the sellers can affect the purposes of searching and purchasing products. It also emphasized that high quality of service can efficiently reduce the risk perception, switch cost and relative price in order to creates customer loyalty. As online shops depend on both of marketing and information system, service quality is crucial to their successes. Therefore, service quality is key factor to affect buyers' trust. Mcknight (2001) proved that return commitment and trust had positive relationship; return commitment can raise the trust.

Therefore, following hypotheses are proposed:

- H5: Secured operation ability of C2C online sellers has positive effects on acquiring buyers' initial trust.
- H5.1: Raise of credit level and qualification of sellers has positive effects on acquiring buyers' initial trust.
- H5.2: Expanding of sale scale and enforcing the connection of different varieties of goods have positive effects on acquiring buyers' initial trust.
- H6: Delivering of products information has positive effects on acquiring buyers' initial trust.
- H6.1: Efficient communication with buyers has positive effects on acquiring buyers' initial trust.
- H6.2: Raise of efficiency and relevance of product information have positive effects on acquiring buyers' initial trust.
- H7: Trading insurance of sellers has positive effects on acquiring buyers' initial trust.
- H 7.1: Reasonable deliver method from sellers has positive effects on acquiring buyers' initial trust.
- H7.2: Suitable payment method has positive effects on acquiring buyers' initial trust.
- H7.3: Reasonable return mechanism has positive effects on acquiring buyers' initial trust.

Kini and Choobineh (1998) suggested that personal disposition had significant effects on trust. Abdul-Rahman and Hailes (2000) and Gefen (2000) found out that trust tendency directly affected the degree of trust of consumer for the websites and online shops. Lee and Turban (2001) found out that personal trust tendency adjusted the relationship between online trust causes and

trust. It also suggested that the trust procedure towards to the online shopping media had great effects on online trust. Ellen and Michal found that most of female consumers reduced their risk perception of online shopping if they are recommended by their friends. Sultan (2002) believed consumers' online trust was determined by the characters of websites and consumer themselves. The characters of consumers included that familiarity of internet, past online experiences, online shopping experiences and entertainment and chat or application of websites. Research results by Shim et al. also suggest that there is a positive relationship between the experience of successful online shopping and the willingness of using internet to search information and shop. Doney and Cannon also think that consumers tend to trade with specific vendors as the shopping experience increases.

Therefore, following hypotheses are proposed:

- H8: Buyers' personal trust tendency has positive effect on acquiring buyers' initial trust.
- H9: The social circle around the vendors' tendency has positive effect on acquiring buyers' initial trust.
- H10: The repeated trading experiences with seller have positive effect on acquiring buyers' initial trust.

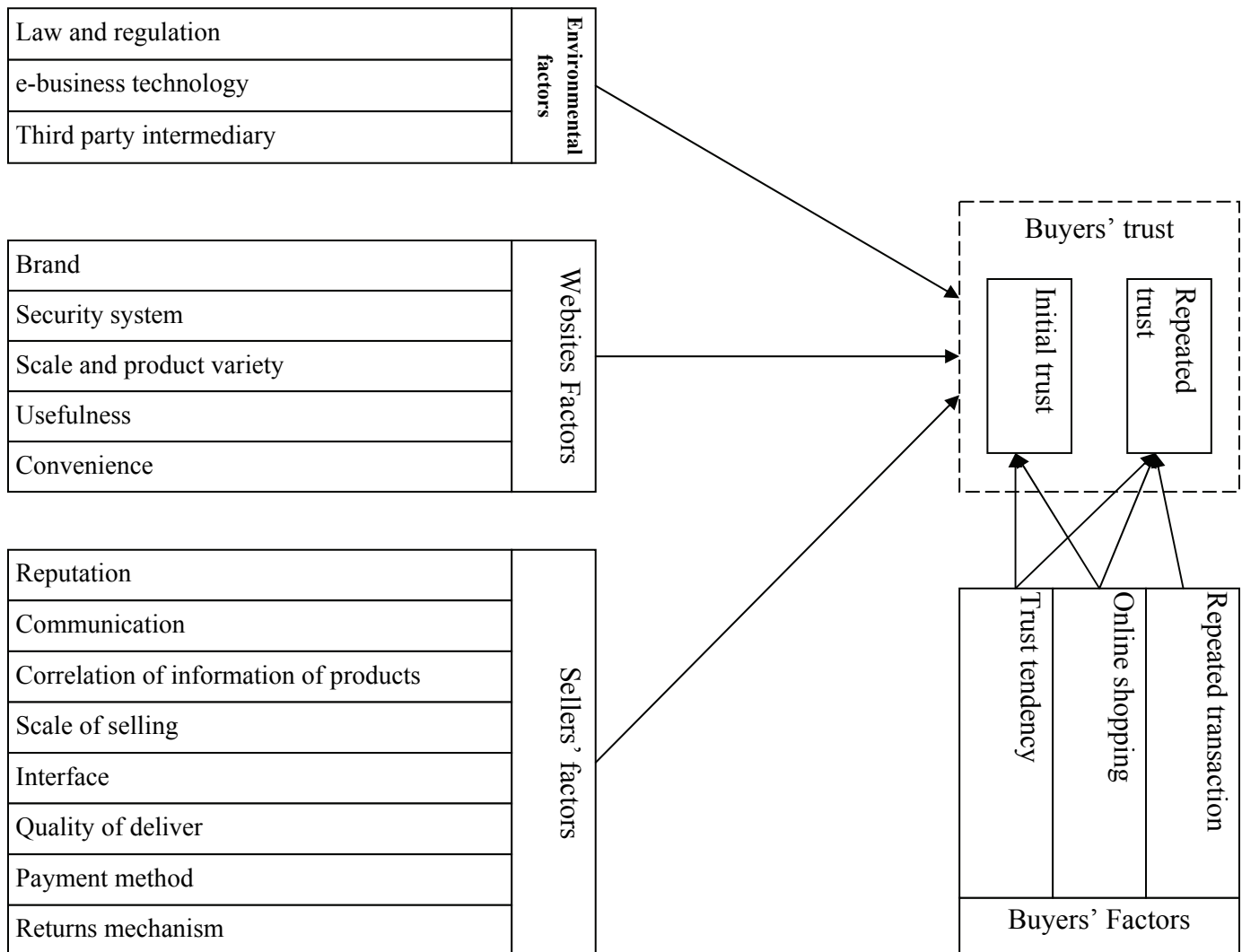
In conclusion, the factors that can affect acquiring buyers' trust in C2C transaction include environmental factors, C2C website factors, buyers' factors and sellers' factors. (See Fig. 1)

## **RESEARCH METHODS AND HYPOTHESIS EXAMINATION**

Questionnaires were used to collect and analyze data. As CNNIC stated in 2009, top two groups of internet users were students and company employees, the respondents were accordingly chosen from the undergraduates, postgraduates and MBA students and staffs in the corporations and institutions in Qingdao City. Several popular C2C websites were investigated, including Taobao, Yiqu, Baidu and Baibai. The survey period was from 2009 Dec 15<sup>th</sup> to 2010 Jan 10<sup>th</sup>.

The respondents were divided into two groups based on whether proceed repeated transactions with the same sellers in the C2C webs: Group 1 traded with different sellers and have not repeatedly trade with same seller, and Group 2 traded with same seller repeatedly. As sample data suggests, only 7.98% of C2C buyers has preceded repeated transactions. It is determined by the special character of C2C transactions. Sellers in C2C business usually have small size and limited sales, along with large numbers of competitors. The buyers tend to search products first, and select sellers secondly, which causes the small amount of repeated transactions in the sample. The data of Group 1 are sufficient, which is used to analyze the acquiring initial trust by SPSS. For Group 2, interview method is used to analyze the repeated acquiring trust.

**FIGURE 1**  
**EFFECT FACTORS OF C2C ONLINE TRANSACTION BUYER TRUST MODEL**



According to the Effect Factors of C2C Online Transaction Buyer Trust Model proposed above, and referring to researches related to the measurement indicators, the questionnaire involves the following four indicators: environmental factors, C2C site factors, the sellers' factors and the buyers' factors. (see Table 1)

**TABLE 1**  
**MEASURE OF VARIABLES**

Item	First level effect factor	Second level effect factor	References	Cronbach's Alpha
Environmental factors	EA (Environment)	EA1 (Law and regulation)	Bingjia Shao (2005)	0.708
		EA2 (e-business technology)	Mcknight (2002)	
		EA3 (Third party intermediary)	Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa (2004); Pavlou (2004)	
Website's Factor	WA (website quality)	WA1 (Usefulness)	Mishra et al (1993) ;Koufaris and Wilder (2004);Stewart (2003);Paul A.Pavlou (2003);	0.914
		WA2 (Conveniences)	Koufaris and Wilder (2004);Koufaris et al. (2004);DaVis (1989);	
	WB (website ability guarantee)	WB1 (Brand)	Koufaris (2004); Erdem and Swait (1998); Grewal et al (1998); McKnight (2002)	0.799
		WB2 (Scale and product variety)	Jian Chen (2007)	
	WC (website security mechanism)	WC (Security system)	Mcknight (2002); Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa (2004); Sultan (2002)	0.629
Sellers' factor	SA (the seller ability guarantee)	SA1 (Scale and relevance)		0.833
		SA2 (Reputation and certification)	Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa (2004);Ganesan (1994); Tractinsky and Viatle (2000)	
	SB (commodity information transfer)	SB1 (Communication)	Gefen (2003);Kennedy, Ferrell and Clair (2001)	0.903
		SB2 (Effectiveness of products)	Mishra et al (1993)	
		SB3 (Interface)	Qing Yang (2005)	
	SC (trading guarantee)	SC1 (Quality of deliver)	Gefen and Devine (2001)	0.678
		SC2 (Payment method)	Bingjia Shao, Chuanshu Wu, Bo Xu (2007)	
SC3 (Returns mechanism)		Fenghua Xie (2005)		
Buyers, Factor	PA (Trust tendency)	PA (Trust tendency)	Kini and Choobineh (1998); Abdul Rahman and Hailes (2000); Gefen (2000)	0.931
	PB (online shopping social circle)	PB (Shopping society)	Ellen and Michal (2004)	0.784
Buyers' trust	T (buyers' trust)	T (Buyers' trust)	Grewal et al (1998);Bhattacharjee (2002);Paul A Pavlou (2003)	0.924

The initial questionnaire forms were designed according to the index above. Preliminary investigation was preceded; the respondents were mostly the students of Ocean University of

China. According to the results of preliminary investigation, we improved the initial questionnaire form and got the final questionnaire form.

275 questionnaires were sent and 212 were retrieved, the retrieving rate is 77.09%. Screening and examining the questionnaire forms collected, 22 invalid ones are rejected and 190 ones are valid, which means the recovery rate of valid questionnaires are 69.09%.

Comparing to population feature of main customers in C2C online shopping market proposed by *2009 China Online Shopping Market Research Report of the CNNIC* (China internet network information center), the sample distribution agrees with that of C2C websites users in general. So the sample can represent the population of C2C websites users. The external validity of selected sample is satisfied.

## **RELIABILITY ANALYSIS AND VALIDITY ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **Reliability Analysis**

Internal reliability analysis is necessary for the research purpose. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is tested with SPSS18.0. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of all variables shown in Table 1 are all-greater than 0.6, which suggests that the design of the questionnaire and its result are consistent and reliable, the reliability is good.

### **Validity Analysis**

Validity analysis includes two parts: questionnaire content analysis and structure analysis. Factor analysis is used to exam structure validity. Base on KMO and Bartlett's test of first level effect factors, the results of factor analysis exhibit that every question that corresponds with one variable only can generate one factor. Every factor has an over 60% explanation power with its corresponding variable. Every factor has relative high factor loading, which suggests that questionnaire has good structure validity.

Content analysis is also called surface analysis or logical analysis. The measurement indexes of the questionnaires are summed up from the study of other researches in the similar topic. Some of them are repeatedly used in many empirical researches. The questionnaire also passed through the discussion of many other scholars, so it has fine content validity.

## **CORRELATION ANALYSIS**

The correlation between effect factor variables and buyers' trust has been tested. The correlation coefficients and significance testing results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that every first level effect factor has positive relationship by different degree with acquiring buyers' initial trust (T). Factors in Table 2, such as SB (commodity information transfer), SC (trading guarantee), PB (online shopping social circle), SA (the seller ability guarantee) and WA (website quality), have strong relationship with acquiring buyers' initial trust. On the other side, WB (website ability guarantee) and WC (website security mechanism) have relative weak relationship with T (buyers' trust).

**TABLE 2**  
**CORRELATION ANALYSIS OF EFFECT FACTORS OF BUYERS' TRUST C2C**  
**ONLINE TRANSACTION**

First level effect factor	correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
EA	0.580	0.007
WA	0.685	0.001
WB	0.467	0.038
WC	0.485	0.030
SA	0.698	0.026
SB	0.718	0.000
PA	0.569	0.009
PB	0.734	0.000

### REGRESSION ANALYSIS

During the regression analysis, T is considered as dependent variable; EA, WB, WC, SA, SB, SC, PA and PB are independent variables.

**TABLE 3**  
**THE REGRESSION MODEL OF ACQUIRING BUYERS' INITIAL TRUST**

Model	R	R Square <sup>b</sup>	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.598 <sup>a</sup>	.480	.474	.80959	.280	119.033	1	175	.000	
2	.673 <sup>b</sup>	.538	.531	.71432	.156	58.432	1	174	.000	
3	.721 <sup>c</sup>	.572	.566	.64675	.068	13.712	1	173	.007	
4	.767 <sup>d</sup>	.605	.594	.58675	.037	8.019	1	172	.011	
5	.801 <sup>e</sup>	.629	.612	.53941	.005	6.537	1	171	.020	
6	.834 <sup>f</sup>	.637	.628	.50247	.003	5.183	1	170	.036	1.907

The data was tested before the regression by SPSS 18.0. As Table 3 shows, Durbin-Watson value is 1.907, the correlation of the errors is not significant. Tolerance values of SB, PB, SC, WA, SA, and WC are all greater than 0.5 and close to 1. VIF value is relatively small, which suggests that there is no multi-dimension co-linearity problem.

The regression model summary table shows there are 6 out of 9 buyers –initial-trust effect factors in the regression function. Correlation coefficient is 0.834 and regression function is able to explain 62% of the overall variation. In the model 6, which includes 6 variables, the significance is 0.036 and F-value is 5.183, which suggests the regression model is significant.

Following information can be concluded from the regression model summary table: the

explain power of SB,PB,SC,WA,SA and WC are 28.0%,15.6%,6.8%, 3.7%, 0.5% and 0.3% respectively .EA, WB and PA are not considered as independent variables, which suggests that they are ineffective or do not accord with the assumptions of regression function. The regression function is obtained through buyers' initial trust effect factors stepwise regression coefficient table:

$$T = 0.274 * SB + 0.189 * PB + 0.113 * SC + 0.081 * WA + 0.078 * SA + 0.067 * WC$$

## **ANALYSIS OF ACQUIRING REPEATED TRUST**

In the questionnaire, only 15 individuals have repeatedly trade with single same seller, which means the amount of sample is not enough for data analysis. Therefore, interview is used to analyze acquiring repeated trust. Through the interviews, we found that all 15 are experienced buyers and have their own different favored C2C online shops, which mean their trust for C2C vendors' owners are buyers' repeated trust. They bookmark those online shops once they feel satisfied about their online-shopping experience. The following aspects are found out to make customers more satisfied: 1) seller's description of goods agrees with the goods themselves; 2) fast delivers and good services from the delivery man; 3) good attitude and services from the seller. If all those three aspects of the online shop are met, and its goods' style is also comprehensive, buyers would more likely to bookmark the online shop.

In the phase of acquiring buyers' repeated trust, the effect factors have changed. The importance and significance of SB, PB, SC, WA, SA and WC, which buyers used to concern, have also changed. Most individuals interviewed think that SA and SC are still very important for buyers' trust, but the level of importance of PB, SA and WC has decreased. Seller's rate, especially, would hardly affect buyers' repeated trust. Buyers concern more about other buyers' detailed comments for products. On the repeated trust of website, buyers concern more about the development of online shopping society and forums on the base of a secured website.

## **CONCLUSION**

SB, PB and SC have a relative strong relationship with acquiring buyers' trust and has the largest effect on it. On the other side, EA and WB and PA have a relative weaker relationship with acquiring buyers' trust and smaller effects on it. For customers who purchase repeatedly, previous shopping experience with high quality logistics and products has a positive effect on buyers' trust. SB and SC are still more significant. PB, SA and WC have reduced their significance. The level of the sellers hardly affects buyers' re-trust.

**TABLE 4**  
**HYPOTHESIS TESTING RESULTS**

Hypothesis	Testing result	Comment
H1: The environment of C2C online transactions has positive effects on the initial trust acquiring.	Not reject	Main second level effect factor includes EA1, EA2 and EA3. EA3 has the highest correlation with EA, and then EA2. This means that the effect from third party intermediary has highest correlation with environmental factors.
H2: C2C websites quality has positive effects on acquiring buyers' initial trust.	Not reject	Main second level effect factor includes WA1, WA2 and WA3. The credit assessment system of websites and effectiveness of information have relative high correlation with website quality.
H3: Advanced C2C websites has positive effect on acquiring buyers' initial trust.	Reject	Main second level effect factor includes WB1, WB2, but they do not affect the acquiring buyers' initial trust.
H4: The security system of websites has positive effects on acquiring buyers' initial trust	Not reject	The first level factor isn't segmented. The security system of websites includes private information protection, account securing mechanism, trading rules and financial security. Trading rules and financial security has relative high correlation with WC. For example, to ensure finance security, Taobao has Zhifubao, and eBay has Paypal.
H5: Secured operation ability of C2C online sellers has positive effects on acquiring buyers' initial trust.	Not reject	Main second level effect factor includes SA1 and SA2. Sellers' reputation and certification has relative high correlation with SB.
H6: Delivering of products information has positive effects on acquiring buyers' initial trust.	Not reject	Main second level effect factor includes SB1, SB2 and SB3. The service attitude of sellers and usefulness of product information have relative high correlation with SB.
H7: Trading insurance of sellers has positive effects on acquiring buyers' initial trust.	Not reject	Main second level effect factor includes SC1, SC2 and SC3. The deliver time, deliver inquire and third party payment have relative high correlation with SC
H8: Buyers' personal trust tendency has positive effect on acquiring buyers' initial trust.	Not reject	Buyers' personal factors have positive effect, but it is not significant.
H9: The social circle around the vendors' tendency has positive effect on acquiring buyers' initial trust.	Not reject	The first level factor isn't segmented. The recommendations from friends' have relative positive correlation.
H10: The repeated trading experiences with seller have positive effect on acquiring buyers' initial trust.	Not reject	Products and sellers' description has relative high effect to ensure buyers trust.

This paper proceeds to test the effect of factors of acquiring buyers' trust in C2C online transactions, based on the analysis of previous literature. There are limitations in this article: for facilitating research and ensuring the quality of data, the samples are selected in corporations and universities in Qingdao, which brings regional limitation. Moreover, the selection and partition of effect factors are mainly based on the view of C2C internet suppliers and sellers, which are not comprehensive enough. The scope of sample choices should be expanded and more effect factors such as buyers' personal income and professions should be considered in following research.

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