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THE IMPACT OF PLATFORM-RELATED STIMULI ON CONSUMERS' PURCHASE INTENTION TOWARD ONLINE FOOD ORDERING SERVICES: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED TRUSTWORTHINESS WITHIN THE S-O-R FRAMEWORK

Bandara, W.M.H.P[a*], Kashmika, A.G.M[b].

[a] Department of Management of Technology, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka
hasithapriyamal012@gmail.com
[b] Department of Management Sciences, Uva Wellassa University, Sri Lanka
mayukashmika@gmail.com
[*]Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this study is to examine the influence of platform-related stimuli (such as security features, brand reputation, and app or website design) on purchase intention, as well as to explore the mediating role of perceived trustworthiness in this relationship. This study employs a quantitative approach, using purposive sampling to collect data from 184 respondents. Data were collected using a self-administered structured questionnaire. The findings reveal that app or website design significantly impacts consumers' purchase intention. Similarly, security features have a significant effect on consumers' purchase decisions. In addition, brand reputation of the delivery platform emerges as a key driver of consumers' purchase intention. Finally, the results indicate that perceived trustworthiness mediates the relationship between these three factors and purchase intention. The study makes a significant theoretical contribution, particularly in the context of the rapidly expanding online food delivery sector in Sri Lanka. The findings also offer practical implications for companies to incorporate trust-enhancing features, improve platform design, and strengthen brand reputation to attract new customers and retain existing ones.

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1. Introduction

Consumers worldwide are increasingly engaging in online transactions across various business sectors. Online shopping through mobile phone apps is becoming popular among people in the world. The rise of e-commerce has shifted the conventional dining experience toward digital food delivery platforms. The COVID-19 outbreak sped up this shift, causing a sharp rise in digital and mobile transactions (Sha et al., 2022). The e-commerce expansion has rapidly expanded because of the widespread internet access and improved security in electronic transactions (Jayathilake & Udara, 2024). It is anticipated that online food delivery would expand at a rate of 10.52% globally from 2023 to 2032 (Smith, 2023). The pandemic increased the digital adoption of food delivery systems, reporting a 30% to 50% increase in online orders

during the lockdown period during COVID-19 (Fan et al., 2021). The online food delivery sector in Sri Lanka has grown significantly, especially post-COVID-19, with platforms like Pick Me Food, Uber Eats, and Kapruka Food gaining traction.

Consumers can easily place meal orders from their preferred restaurants and food outlets via websites or mobile apps, appealing to professionals, families, and individuals who favor home delivery (Liu & Lin, 2020). The key driver behind the popularity of online food delivery platforms is the convenience they provide, which outweighs that of traditional eating. Uzir et al. (2021) discovered that convenience is a major factor fueling the rise of online services since it allows individuals to order food from anywhere and at any time without visiting a restaurant with a minimal effort. In addition to its convenience, online food delivery provides access to a larger selection of restaurants and food options than traditional consumption (Ladhari et al., 2017), enables customers to customize their meals (Schneider & Kock, 2020), and provides attractive discounts and promotions (Zhou & Li, 2018). Due to the above factors, consumers are attracted to online food delivery systems.

The online food delivery system is growing significantly around the globe and in Sri Lanka. Prior studies have found that factors such as the convenience of the consumer, food quality, and app usability (Zhou & Li, 2018; Ladhari et al., 2017), but recently it has been suggested that the focus should be more on trust and digital engagement (Marakanon et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2024). But these studies omit the structured theoretical framework, like the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, which is used to understand how external platform-related stimuli influence internal psychological states like trust and how it affects the behavioral intention of consumers. Marakanon et al. (2023) explored the role of trust in and perception of food safety on purchase intention, but they did not include the S-O-R framework to study consumer purchase intention. Tan et al. (2024) explored the effect of restaurant promotions on consumer purchase intention but did not consider trust as a mediator. Madhuwanthi and Wijewardene (2023) and Perera et al. (2023) explored the general food purchasing behavior and considered factors like the convenience of use and price attitude of the consumer in online food ordering platforms. They never tested and included the S-O-R framework in their study to explore the behavior of Sri Lankan consumers. Less international studies applied the S-O-R framework in domains like live stream commerce , but they have not considered trust as a mediator in their studies (Wang et al., 2022).

Consequently, this study is utilizing the S-O-R framework as the theoretical model to examine how the platform-related stimuli (App or Website design, security features, Brand reputation) influence consumer purchase intention through trust as the mediator. This study contributes by providing novel insights into enhancing user experience, customer satisfaction, and loyalty in digital food ordering platforms.

2. Literature Review

2.1.Evolution of Online Food Ordering Services

The evolution of online food delivery services has improved because of technological advancements, a shift in consumer behavior, and the rise of digital platforms. In the initial stage, consumers placed their orders through mobile phone calls, and at that time, the online ordering system was in its infancy (Fan et al., 2021). In the 2010s, there was a rapid growth in online food delivery services due to the usage of smartphones. Platforms like Uber Eats and DoorDash emerged and offered a seamless app interface, faster delivery, and real-time tracking options for consumers (Li et al., 2021). The COVID-19 Pandemic, which occurred during 2020, accelerated the adoption of online food delivery services around the globe. The social distancing measures imposed by the government led consumers to order food through online delivery apps for their convenience and safety (Mehrolia et al., 2021). As the world adjusted to life after the pandemic, online food delivery services continued to evolve. The industry witnessed the emergence of dark kitchens, also known as ghost kitchens, which are specialized commercial kitchens designed to handle online orders. This model enables businesses to minimize expenses related to traditional dine-in establishments (Li et al., 2021).

2.2.Online Food Ordering Services in Sri Lanka

Online food delivery services in Sri Lanka have also evolved as a result of the increased usage of smartphones and the rise of consumer demand for convenience. Online food delivery services emerged in Sri Lanka in 2010, with the emergence of platforms like PickMe and UberEats. These platforms allow consumers to use their apps to place orders. Mid-2010s, global food delivery platforms like UberEats and Food Panda expanded their presence in Sri Lanka (Uber Eats, 2019). These platforms allowed consumers to order from a wide variety of restaurants and provided delivery services across major cities like Colombo, Kandy, and Galle. The COVID-19 outbreak facilitated to the growth of Online food delivery services across Sri Lanka. Platforms like PickMe Foods and UberEats demand increased during the pandemic because customers preferred to have contactless and hygienic food handling during the pandemic (Mehroli et al., 2021).

2.3. S-O-R Framework and Consumer Online Food Ordering Purchase Intention

The S-O-R model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) explains how external stimuli (S) trigger internal states (O), leading to behavioral responses (R). The S-O-R model provides a comprehensive framework to understand consumer behavior by investigating the interaction between external stimuli and internal cognitive and emotional states, and behavioral responses. Models like the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Unified Theory of Acceptance do not explicitly emphasize the role of the internal states, cognitive states, and affective responses of the user that translate into human behavior (Kengatharan, 2017; Li et al., 2021; Marakanon et al., 2023). In the S-O-R framework, perceived trustworthiness is a critical factor mediating the platform-related stimuli and consumer purchase intention. According to Chiu et al. (2014),

trust and consumer satisfaction mediate loyalty of consumers towards that online platform. Nguyen et al. (2025) found that the platform influences consumer trust and engagement in live commerce. However, the application of the S-O-R framework is limited in emerging markets like Sri Lanka. This approach offers deeper insights into the psychological mechanisms underpinning online ordering behavior, informing strategies to enhance consumer trust, satisfaction, and loyalty in this competitive digital space.

2.4.Impact of Platform-related stimuli on Online food ordering intention among consumers

A well-developed website or app can significantly improve the consumer's purchase intention. The design of a platform can influence consumer attitude and consumer purchase intention (Guo et al., 2023). According to Gefan (2000), if the security concerns of a platform are addressed, consumers' purchase intention is positively impacted. A strong brand reputation can directly influence consumer purchase decisions. Guo et al. (2023) submitted that consumers tend to trust platforms with established and reputable brands, leading to increased purchase intentions. A positive brand reputation signals reliability, quality, and dependability, which encourages consumers to follow through with purchases. Thus, the hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H1a: App or Website design of online ordering platform positively influences purchase intentions.

H1b: Security features of online food ordering platform positively influence purchase intention

H1c: Brand reputation of online food ordering platform positively influences purchase intention

Previous studies have shown that the design of a website or a mobile app plays a critical role in increasing consumer trust in online food delivery services. A well-organized, user-friendly, and aesthetically pleasing design creates an impression of professionalism and dependability, thereby improving the trustworthiness of the online delivery platform. Li et al. (2021) found that positive customer reviews enhance trust and credibility over the online food delivery platform. Pavlou (2003) suggests that consumers' trust in online platforms is greatly affected by their perception of security and the safeguarding of personal information of the user. Therefore, it’s clear that the security features of the online delivery platform increase trust in the online delivery platform. According to Guo et al. (2023), a strong brand reputation enhances consumer trust in online platforms. Thus, the hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H2a: App or Website design positively influences consumers' perceived trustworthiness of online food ordering platforms.

H2b: Security features positively influence consumers' perceived trustworthiness of online food ordering platforms.

H2c: Brand reputation positively influences consumers' perceived trustworthiness of online food ordering platforms.

2.5.Impact of Perceived Trustworthiness on Consumer Purchase Intention

Perceived trustworthiness can be simply defined as the degree to which consumers believe that the online platform is reliable, trustworthy, and has the potential to fulfill the requirements of the consumers. According to Setiawan et al. (2023), the trustworthiness of the online platform significantly influences the consumer decision-making process. Furthermore, consumers' perception of trustworthiness in online food ordering platforms has a positive impact on their satisfaction and subsequent purchase intentions (Lee & Lin, 2005). Thus, the hypothesis is formulated as:

> **H3:** Consumers' perceived trustworthiness of the online food ordering platform positively influences their purchase intentions.

2.6.Mediating impact of perceived trustworthiness on the relationship between platform-related stimuli and consumer purchase intention

Trust has been widely recognized as a critical mediating mechanism that links external platform-related stimuli to consumers' purchase decisions. Gefen (2000) emphasizes that trust plays a pivotal role in reducing uncertainty in online environments, thereby enabling consumers to translate favorable platform attributes into actual purchase behaviour. In the context of online food ordering platforms, consumers are more likely to engage in purchasing behaviour when they perceive the platform as trustworthy. This perception is shaped by key platform-related stimuli such as app or website design, security features, and brand reputation, which collectively enhance users' confidence in the platform.

Accordingly, perceived trustworthiness is expected to function as a central psychological mechanism through which platform-related stimuli influence purchase intention. Thus, the following hypotheses are developed as follows:

> **H4a:** Perceived trustworthiness mediates the relationship between app or website design and purchase intention
>
> **H4b:** Perceived trustworthiness mediates the relationship between Security features and purchase intention
>
> **H4c:** Perceived trustworthiness mediates the relationship between Brand reputation and purchase intention

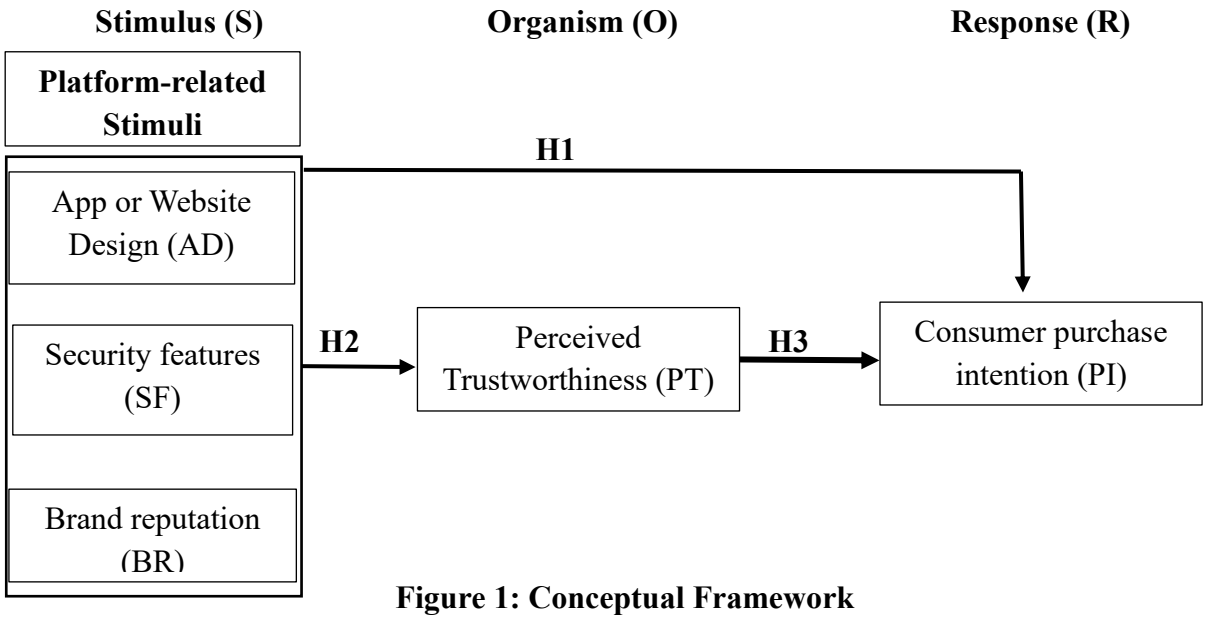

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Developed by Researchers

3. Methodology

This study used a quantitative cross-sectional research approach to investigate the relationship between platform-related variables, perceived trustworthiness, and consumer purchase intention in an online food ordering environment. The quantitative technique is useful because it allows us to test the causal relationship between the constructs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The cross-sectional design was employed since the data were collected all at once, and this approach is commonly used in consumer behavior research when consumer perception is evaluated (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020).

The study's target group consists of consumers who actively use food ordering services in Sri Lanka such as Uber, Pick Me, Kapruka Foods, and others. Because no comprehensive sampling frame exists to identify all users, a purposive sampling strategy was adopted. This strategy is appropriate when researchers want to select respondents who have the exact characteristics required for the study (Etikan et al. 2016).The data were obtained using a self-administered questionnaire. A total of 220 responses were received, of which 184 were deemed valid. Before participating in the study, respondents were informed about its purpose and assured of the confidentiality of their data and their voluntary participation. According to Hayes (2018), the final sample should include at least 100 respondents to meet the threshold for accurate statistical estimation.

Measures

All constructs in the investigation were operationalized using a validated multi-item scale adapted from previous literature. A five-point Likert scale was employed to assess the constructs. App/website design was adopted from Cyr (2008) and Yoo and Donthu (2001), with a focus on visual appeal, ease of navigation, and responsiveness of the platform and

content included. Security aspects were incorporated from Lai et al. (2011)'s four categories, which include encryption, privacy protection, and online payment security. Perceived trustworthiness was assessed using four measures adapted from Mayer et al. (1995), demonstrating the platform's reliability, transparency, responsiveness, and benevolence. Four items were used to assess purchase intention, including Pavlou and Fygenson (2006), Zeithaml et al. (1996), Dodds et al. (1991), and Venkatesh et al. (2012).The items assessed repeat usage, recommendation intention preference, and platform selection over other platforms.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed with SPSS version 27. Cronbach's alpha was used to quantify the constructs' internal consistency, and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was used to assess validity. The correlation analysis was used to investigate the associations between variables. The VIF (Variance inflation factor) and tolerance values were used to assess multicollinearity. Finally, hypotheses were assessed using Hayes' (2018) PROCESS Macro Model 4.

Table 1: Demographic Profile

Description	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	58%	106
	Female	42%	78
Age	18-24	30%	55
	25-34	45%	83
	35-44	19%	35
	45-54	4%	7
	55 and more	2%	4
Monthly Income	Below LKR 25,000	10%	18
	LKR 25,000 – 50,000	20%	37
	LKR 50,000 – 100,000	40%	74
	Above LKR 100,000	25%	46
	Prefer not to say	5%	9
Frequency of Ordering	Daily	0%	0
	A few times a week	8%	15
	Once a week	20%	37
	A few times a month	60%	110
	Rarely	12%	22
Platform	Uber Eats	50%	92
	Pick Me Foods	30%	55
	Kapruka Food	5%	9
	Other	15%	35

Source: Survey data

As can be seen in Table 1, the survey data reveals that most online food delivery users are male (58%) aged 25-34 (45%), with a significant portion earning LKR 50,000–100,000 monthly (40%). Customers typically order food a few times per month (60%), with only 20% ordering weekly and none daily. Uber Eats dominates the market (50%), followed by PickMe Foods (30%), while Kapruka Food and other platforms have smaller shares. The results show that food delivery services are most popular among young, middle-income adults who use the platforms occasionally rather than daily. This indicates opportunities to increase engagement among occasional users while maintaining appeal to the core demographic of young professionals.

4. Findings

The descriptive statistics indicate that respondents hold generally favorable perceptions of online food ordering platforms in Sri Lanka. Among the evaluated dimensions, app and website design reports a relatively high mean score (M = 4.13), suggesting that users place considerable importance on platforms that are visually appealing and user-friendly. Security features also demonstrate a moderately high mean (M = 3.96), implying that consumers are more inclined to trust platforms that ensure the protection of personal and payment information. Notably, brand reputation records the highest mean value (M = 4.24), underscoring the critical role of established and credible brands in fostering consumer trust. Furthermore, purchase intention exhibits a strong mean score (M = 4.19), indicating a high level of willingness among users to engage with online food ordering platforms. Collectively, these findings suggest an overall positive consumer orientation toward such platforms in the Sri Lankan context.

The reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, as presented in Table 2. Consistent with the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Bacon et al., 1995), all constructs in the study report alpha values exceeding this benchmark. This confirms that the measurement items exhibit satisfactory internal consistency, thereby supporting the reliability of the instrument and the robustness of the data used for subsequent analyses.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

Variable	Dimensions	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Independent Variable	App or Website Design (AD)	4	0.710
	Security Features (SF)	4	0.781
	Brand Reputation (BR)	4	0.836
Mediator Variable	Perceived Trustworthiness (PT)	4	0.723
Dependent Variable	Consumer Purchase Intention (PI)	4	0.817

Source: Survey data

Moreover, the results of the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity indicate that the data are suitable for factor analysis. Specifically, the KMO values

for all constructs range from 0.700 to 0.829, which fall within the "middling" to "meritorious" categories of sampling adequacy as classified by Kaiser (1974). These values exceed the minimum recommended threshold of 0.60, thereby confirming that the sample is adequate and appropriate for subsequent multivariate analyses.

Furthermore, Pearson's correlation analysis was employed to examine the strength and direction of associations among the key study variables, namely app and website design, security features, brand reputation, perceived trustworthiness and consumer purchase intention. This analysis provides preliminary insights into the interrelationships among the constructs prior to conducting more advanced inferential analyses.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix

Variables	1. AD	2. SF	3. BR	4. PT	5. PI
1.App/Website Design (AD)	-----				
2. Security Features (SF)	.554**	-----			
3. Brand Reputation (BR)	.605**	.587**	-----		
4.Perceived Trustworthiness (PT)	.451**	.453**	.562**	-----	
5. Purchase Intention (PI)	.494**	.509**	.671**	.731**	-----

**p<0.001*
Source: Survey data

As reported in Table 3, all bivariate correlations are statistically significant at the 0.001 level ($p < 0.001$), indicating meaningful associations among the study variables. The strongest relationship is observed between perceived trustworthiness and purchase intention ($r = 0.731$), highlighting the pivotal role of trust in shaping consumers' behavioral intentions. Brand reputation also demonstrates strong positive correlations with purchase intention ($r = 0.671$) and perceived trustworthiness ($r = 0.562$), underscoring its importance as a signal of credibility. In contrast, app and website design and security features exhibit moderate yet positive associations with the other constructs, suggesting their supportive role in influencing consumer perceptions. Collinearity diagnostics further confirm the robustness of the model. Specifically, all tolerance values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.10, while the Variance Inflation Factor values remain well below the critical value of 5. These results indicate the absence of multicollinearity concerns, thereby affirming that the independent variables are sufficiently distinct and that the regression estimates are stable and reliable.

The regression results presented in Table 4 provide further empirical support for the hypothesized relationships. app and website design exerts a significant positive effect on perceived trustworthiness (PT) ($t = 6.82$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that well-designed and user-friendly platforms enhance users' trust. In turn, perceived trustworthiness has a strong and statistically significant positive impact on purchase intention ($t = 11.67$, $p < 0.001$), reinforcing its central role as a key predictor of consumer behavior. Additionally, app and website design demonstrates a significant direct effect on purchase intention ($t = 3.76$, $p < 0.001$), indicating

that design quality not only builds trust but also directly influences consumers' willingness to engage with online food ordering platforms.

Table 4: Results of Regression Analysis-AD, PT and PI

Path	B	SE	t	p-value	95% CI
AD → PT	0.4935	0.0724	6.8182	.0000	[0.3507, 0.6363]
AD → PI	0.2306	0.0613	3.7607	.0002	[0.1096, 0.3516]
PT → PI	0.6542	0.0560	11.6721	.0000	[0.5436, 0.7648]

Source: Survey data

According to Table 5, the indirect effect of app and website design on purchase intention through perceived trustworthiness is statistically significant. This is evidenced by the bootstrapped confidence interval (0.1759 to 0.4594), which does not include zero, thereby confirming the existence of a statistically meaningful mediation effect. Accordingly, it can be concluded that perceived trustworthiness significantly mediates the relationship between app and website design and purchase intention. This result indicates that improvements in app and website design enhance purchase intention not only directly, but also indirectly by strengthening consumers' perceived trustworthiness toward the platform.

Table 5: Indirect Effect-PT

Mediator	Effect	Boot SE	95% Boot CI	Significance
Perceived Trustworthiness (PT)	0.3228	0.0726	[0.1759, 0.4594]	Significant

Source: Survey data

The full structural model, incorporating perceived trustworthiness and purchase intention, explains 56.85% of the variance, indicating a substantial level of explanatory power and an overall well-fitted model. In aggregate, app and website design demonstrates both a statistically significant direct effect and an indirect effect on purchase intention, confirming its dual pathway of influence. As reported in Table 6, Security Features exert a statistically significant and positive effect on perceived trustworthiness ($p < 0.001$, $t = 6.8475$), with the bootstrapped confidence interval (0.3066 to 0.5549) excluding zero. This finding indicates that consumers are more likely to develop trust in online platforms when they perceive strong security safeguards. In addition, security features also demonstrate a significant direct effect on purchase intention ($p < 0.001$, $t = 4.1149$), suggesting that consumers' purchase decisions are influenced by perceived security independently of trust formation.

Moreover, perceived trustworthiness exhibits a strong and statistically significant positive effect on purchase intention ($t = 11.5893$, $p < 0.001$, confidence interval: 0.5356 to 0.7554), underscoring its central role as a key determinant of consumer purchasing behavior. Taken together, these results confirm the presence of partial mediation, indicating that security features influence purchase intention both directly and indirectly through perceived trustworthiness.

Table 6: Results of Regression Analysis– SF, PT and PI

Path	B	SE	t	p-value	95% CI
SF → PT	0.4308	0.0629	6.8475	.0000	[0.3066, 0.5549]
SF → PI	0.2181	0.0530	4.1149	.0001	[0.1135, 0.3227]
PT → PI	0.6455	0.0557	11.5893	.0000	[0.5356, 0.7554]

Source: Survey data

Based on the results, the indirect effect is statistically significant, indicating that Security Features exert a meaningful influence on purchase intention through perceived trustworthiness. This is supported by the bootstrapped confidence interval (0.1643 to 0.4091), which does not include zero. Accordingly, these findings confirm the presence of a partial mediation effect, as both the direct and indirect pathways are statistically significant. The final structural model further indicates that security features and perceived trustworthiness jointly explain 57.46% of the variance in purchase intention, demonstrating a substantial level of explanatory power and an overall well-fitted model.

As presented in Table 7, brand reputation has a statistically significant and positive effect on perceived trustworthiness ($t = 9.1575$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that stronger brand reputation enhances consumer trust in the platform. In addition, brand reputation also exhibits a significant direct effect on purchase intention ($t = 6.9911$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that consumers are more likely to engage in purchasing behavior when the platform is associated with a reputable brand. Furthermore, perceived trustworthiness demonstrates a strong and statistically significant positive effect on purchase intention ($t = 9.5245$, $p < 0.001$), reinforcing its role as a key mediating mechanism in shaping consumer purchase decisions.

Table 7: Results of Regression Analysis- BR, PI and PT

Path	B	SE	t	p-value	95% CI [LLCI, ULCI]
BR → PT	0.5246	0.0573	9.1575	.0000	[0.4116, 0.6377]
BR → PI	0.3638	0.0520	6.9911	.0000	[0.2611, 0.4665]
PT → PI	0.5306	0.0557	9.5245	.0000	[0.4206, 0.6405]

Source: Survey data

Brand reputation and perceived trustworthiness together explain 63.37% of the variance in purchase intention, indicating that both predictors are strong determinants and that the model is well-fitted. The confidence interval does not include zero (0.1846, 0.3847), confirming the statistical significance of the effects. The indirect effect (0.2783) is also significant, indicating that perceived trustworthiness mediates the relationship between brand reputation and purchase intention . Since both the direct and indirect effects are significant, the results confirm the presence of partial mediation.

5. Discussion

This study examined how platform-related stimuli affected Sri Lankan customers' purchase intentions for online food ordering services, with perceived trustworthiness acting as a mediating factor. The study made use of the SOR framework. According to the study's findings, purchase intention and perceived trustworthiness are strongly influenced by all three stimulus, brand reputation, security features, and app/website design. The strongest predictor of a consumer's purchase intention is brand reputation, which is followed by app/website design and security features. Both consumer purchasing intention and trust are increased by app/website design. This result is consistent with earlier research that shows how well-designed interfaces lower cognitive effort, enhance perceived dependability, and boost confidence in online platforms (Cyr, 2008). Additionally, security characteristics have a significant impact on consumers' trust and inclination to buy, supporting earlier research findings that perceived security and privacy are important variables influencing digital transactions (Wang et al., 2022). Brand reputation improves trust, decreases uncertainty, and improves service quality (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

The results also demonstrate that perceived trustworthiness has a considerable influence on purchase intention, emphasizing the importance of online decision-making for customers, particularly in the context of social media and digital platforms. This finding is consistent with Mayer et al. (1995), who defined trust as a willingness to be vulnerable based on positive expectations of a service provider. According to recent research on online food delivery systems, trust plays a crucial role in driving purchase intention and repeat purchases (Sha et al., 2022; Marakanon et al., 2023). In the Sri Lankan context, where digital transactions and social media usages (Kengatharan, 2017) are still evolving, trust becomes increasingly vital in converting purchase intentions into actual purchasing behavior.

Furthermore, the mediation analysis demonstrates that perceived trustworthiness partially mediates the relationship between platform-related stimuli and purchase intention, thereby validating the S-O-R framework applied in this study. The findings are also consistent with previous academic research, which indicates that trust is a critical psychological factor in converting digital stimuli into behavioral responses or actual purchase intentions (Teo et al., 2024). Accordingly, this study shows that digital consumer behavior is influenced not only by functional features but also by internal cognitive evaluations such as trust. Therefore, the findings emphasize the importance of focusing on trust in addition to functional attributes. In conclusion, this study highlights that trust is a key determinant influencing the adoption and use of digital platforms.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes new insights to the existing body of Sri Lankan literature by examining how platform-related stimuli influence consumers' purchase intentions on online food ordering platforms. It also explores the mediating role of perceived trustworthiness in the relationship between these platform-related factors and purchase intention. This contribution is significant, as the online food delivery sector is rapidly expanding in the Sri Lankan market. The study demonstrates that perceived trustworthiness plays a crucial mediating role between

platform-related stimuli and consumers' purchase intentions. With the rapid growth of online food ordering platforms, it is increasingly important to understand how features such as promotions, app design, and service quality influence customers' willingness to purchase, and how their sense of trust in the platform plays a key role in this process. Theoretically, this study enriches the understanding of consumer decision-making within digital service environments by integrating trust into the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S–O–R) framework, thereby offering novel insights into the psychological processes underlying online food ordering behavior in an emerging market context.

Practical Implications

This study provides fresh insights for platform developers, digital marketers, and managers of online platforms in the online food delivery industry. It shows that well-designed platforms directly enhance trust and encourage consumer purchases. In addition, transparent security features on the platform also increase consumers' trust and purchase intention. Furthermore, brand reputation is an important factor that encourages consumers to increase their purchases and strengthens their trust in digital platforms. The findings offer practical guidance for companies to incorporate trust-enhancing features, improve platform design, and strengthen brand reputation in order to attract new customers and retain existing ones. Practitioners can use these insights to design more effective platforms and attract potential customers. Overall, these findings provide practical guidance for businesses seeking to attract and retain customers by integrating trust-enhancing elements, improving platform usability, and strengthening brand reputation.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study focuses on examining the impact of platform-related stimuli on consumers' purchase intentions towards online food ordering services. To measure platform-related stimuli, this research considered only app or website design, online reviews, perceived security features, and brand reputation, indicating a relatively limited scope of stimuli and a focus on a narrow set of platform-related factors. Additionally, due to the rapid evolution of online platforms, the findings may become outdated unless continuously updated. Furthermore, as Sri Lanka is a developing country, the generalisability of the findings may be limited.

This study confirms that platform-related stimuli have a significant effect on consumer purchase intentions, with perceived trustworthiness acting as a mediator. Therefore, future researchers may expand the scope of this study by examining how platform-related stimuli and perceived trustworthiness vary across different cultural contexts. Moreover, future research could explore how AI-driven recommendations or chatbot interactions influence perceived trustworthiness and purchase intention in online food ordering services. In addition, researchers may investigate the impact of negative stimuli, such as data breaches, poor delivery experiences, and privacy concerns, on trust and purchase intention. Furthermore, future studies could examine how emotional design elements (e.g., colours and animations) influence trust and consumer behaviour. Overall, this research area offers several broader opportunities for future investigation.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the impact of platform-related stimuli such as app/website design, security features, and brand reputation on consumers' purchase intentions toward online food ordering services in Sri Lanka, using the S-O-R (Stimulus-Organism-Response) framework. The findings revealed that these stimuli significantly influence purchase intention both directly and indirectly through the mediating role of perceived trustworthiness. The results underscore the importance of building consumer trust as a psychological mechanism that bridges platform attributes and consumer behavior. From a practical perspective, businesses in the online food delivery sector should prioritize user-friendly designs, strong security protocols, and brand credibility to enhance trust and drive consumer engagement. Overall, the study adds to the growing literature on digital consumer behavior in Sri Lanka and provides actionable insights for online platforms aiming to strengthen customer relationships and increase market competitiveness.

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