

# Salient Factors Affecting The Reputation Of Real Estate Agency Migration In China

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## Abstract:

*In the era of social media, the management of real estate reputation encounters formidable challenges. The research aimed to identify and analyze the correlations between factors such as Repeated exposure, Online review, CEO reputation, Welfare of employees, Quality of service, Innovation ability, and social responsibility, and their impact on real estate agency reputation. A non-probability judgment sampling method was employed, focusing on middle and senior-level personnel in real estate companies and consumers in Beijing using Douyin. The sample consisted of 506 valid responses. Data analysis was conducted using statistical tools to compute reliability, validity, confirmatory factor analysis, path analysis, along with the Bootstrapping algorithm for testing mediating effects, hence, to construct a structural equation model. The results revealed that all these variables positively correlated with real estate agency reputation. The study concludes that digital engagement and organizational characteristics significantly influence consumer perceptions in the real estate sector. These findings provide valuable insights for real estate agencies, platform developers, and policymakers, highlighting the importance of a multifaceted approach in the digital real estate market. This research contributes to the academic literature by integrating traditional theories with digital platform dynamics, offering a novel perspective on consumer behavior in the digital age. However, limitations such as the sampling method and platform-specific focus suggest the need for broader future research.*

**Keywords:** Digital Platforms, Real Estate Reputation, Consumer Perceptions, Douyin, Organizational Characteristics.

## 1. Introduction

The burgeoning realm of real estate, intricately intertwined with economic development, has witnessed a transformative shift with the advent of social media (Cowan, 2018). This dynamic landscape offers a fertile ground for scholarly exploration, particularly in understanding how these digital platforms shape the reputation of real estate

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agencies (Robertson & Rogers, 2017; Shaw, 2020). The relevance of this research lies in deciphering the complex interplay between social media and real estate, a sector pivotal to global economic frameworks. The real estate sector, a cornerstone of economic prosperity, encompasses a diverse range of activities and professionals, from architects to property managers (Christensen, 2017). It not only contributes significantly to employment but also plays a vital role in infrastructure development, such as constructing roads and bridges, thus enhancing quality of life, and facilitating commerce (Smart & Lee, 2003; Warburton, 2016). The advent of social media has revolutionized the traditional paradigms of real estate marketing, networking, and client engagement (Dwivedi et al., 2021). However, this digital transformation is not without its challenges. Issues like data overload, privacy concerns, and reputation management have emerged as pivotal areas of concern. In China, the real estate industry constitutes a substantial portion of the GDP, indicating its critical role in the nation's economic fabric (X. Zhang, 2015). However, recent trends, fluctuations in market stability and growth patterns, influenced by external factors like the COVID-19 pandemic. These shifts necessitate a nuanced understanding of the real estate market, particularly in the context of evolving digital landscapes.

Additionally, the largely overlooks the interplay of social media with recent global disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic, which has drastically altered market dynamics and consumer behaviors (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). This research aims to fill these gaps by offering a contemporary perspective on the challenges and opportunities faced by real estate agencies in managing their reputation in the digital age. Hence, this research aims to

- 1) Identify and analyze the relationship between social media and the reputation of real estate agencies, considering both the opportunities and challenges presented by these platforms.
- 2) Explore potential mediating variables that may influence the relationship between social media and the reputation of real estate agencies, such as client engagement strategies, content management, and regulatory compliance.
- 3) Construct a theoretical model to conceptualize the influence of social media on the reputation of real estate agencies, integrating theoretical frameworks such as cultivation theory, service quality theory, and social responsibility theory.

In essence, this study endeavors to bridge the existing research gaps by offering an in-depth exploration of the nuanced ways in which social media impacts the reputation of real estate agencies. By focusing on the Chinese market, the study provides a unique perspective on a rapidly evolving and economically significant sector, yielding insights that are pertinent to global real estate practices and policies. Through this comprehensive analysis, the research aspires to contribute significantly to the academic discourse on real estate development and digital media, offering a robust foundation for future empirical studies and practical applications.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Theoretical approach**

Cultivation Theory, initially developed in the context of television media, has evolved to encompass the realm of digital media, particularly social media (Mosharafa, 2015). At its core, the theory postulates that prolonged and consistent exposure to media content influences and shapes viewers' beliefs and perceptions about the world (Potter, 1993). In the

context of social media, this theory suggests that repeated exposure to certain narratives or representations can cultivate specific perceptions and attitudes among users. For real estate agencies, this implies that the persistent portrayal of their brand or services on platforms like Weibo, Douyin, or WeChat can significantly influence public perceptions and reputation, either positively or negatively. Development Motivation Theory posits that human behavior is driven by a hierarchy of developmental needs, with a prominent focus on personal growth and the achievement of one's potential (R. M. Ryan, 2012). In the digital age, social media platforms play a crucial role in fulfilling these developmental needs, particularly the need for social recognition and connection (Larson & DeChurch, 2020). This theory underscores the idea that social media can be a double-edged sword for real estate agencies: while providing a platform for positive brand building and client engagement, it also exposes them to potential reputation damage through negative feedback or cyberbullying.

Service Quality Theory provides a framework for assessing and enhancing the quality of services based on customer perception across five key dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Aryee et al., 2016). Applied to the social media context, these dimensions translate into how real estate agencies manage their online presence and interactions. For instance, the tangibility of an agency's digital footprint, the reliability of their online communications, the responsiveness to client inquiries, the assurance of credible online content, and the empathy shown in digital interactions all play a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions and, consequently, the agency's reputation. Social Responsibility Theory posits that businesses have an inherent duty to act in a manner that benefits society, extending beyond mere financial gains (Garriga & Melé, 2004). In the context of social media, this theory emphasizes the importance of ethical and responsible communication by real estate agencies. The way agencies engage with stakeholders, address concerns, and present themselves online significantly influences their reputation. Ethical and transparent social media practices can enhance trust and credibility, while irresponsible use can lead to reputational damage and erosion of stakeholder trust.

In conclusion, these four theoretical frameworks collectively provide a comprehensive approach to understanding the impact of social media on the reputation of real estate agencies. Cultivation Theory and DMT address the psychological and motivational aspects of media consumption, while SQT and SRT offer practical guidelines for managing online interactions and content. Together, they form a robust foundation for analyzing the complex dynamics of social media and its implications for reputation management in the real estate sector.

## 2.2 Hypothesis development

Cultivation theory suggests that social media have a positive impact on CEO reputation by shaping people's attitudes and perceptions of the CEO through exposure to positive content and interactions on social media platforms (Yue et al., 2020). Social media positively affect CEO reputation is by allowing CEOs to share their personal values, vision, and leadership style with a wider audience. By sharing their thoughts and insights on social media, CEOs showcase their expertise, thought leadership, and commitment to their company's mission and values (Yue et al., 2019)). Thus, to build trust and credibility with customers,

employees, and other stakeholders. Social media provides a platform for CEOs to engage with customers, employees, and other stakeholders in a more personal and direct way (Heavey et al., 2020). Thus, the study assumes:

- H1. Repeated exposure positively affects the CEO reputation.
- H2. Online review positively affects the CEO reputation.

Cultivation theory suggests that people's perceptions and attitudes are influenced by the media they consume, and extend to their attitudes towards corporations and their reputation (Agmeka et al., 2019). When it comes to social media, the theory suggests that the more people are exposed to positive content about a corporation on social media, the more they will perceive that corporation in a positive light. Social media allows corporations to interact with their customers in a more personal and engaging way. By responding to customer inquiries, comments, and concerns on social media platforms, corporations can build stronger relationships with their customers and demonstrate their commitment to customer satisfaction (Uzir et al., 2020). Social media provides a platform for corporations to showcase their values and social responsibility initiatives (Y. Zhang & Yang, 2021). Hence, the study posits:

- H3. Repeated exposure positively affects the real estate agency reputation.
- H4. Online review positively affects the real estate agency reputation.

Development motivation theory (DMT) posits that individuals are motivated by the desire for personal growth, achievement, and the fulfillment of their potential (Askew & Williams, 2021). When applied to the context of a CEO's reputation and corporate reputation, DMT suggests that a CEO who is highly regarded and respected motivates employees to perform at their best, leading to improved corporate performance and reputation. A highly regarded CEO attracts and retains top talent, who may be motivated to work for a company with a strong leader. CEO's reputation is signal to stakeholders, such as investors and customers, that the company is well-managed and trustworthy (Baruah & Panda, 2020). Hence, in the real estate industry, this study puts forward:

- H5. CEO reputation positively affects real estate agency reputation.

Corporate reputation refers to the collective perception of an organization by its stakeholders, including customers, investors, and employees. Social media is significant to build the company's reputation, as it provides a platform for customers and stakeholders to share their experiences and opinions (Cartwright et al., 2021). Positive reviews and comments on social media enhanced a real estate agency's reputation, while negative reviews and comments will damage it. However, the impact of social media on a real estate agency's reputation can be mediated by its corporate reputation (Abu Zayyad et al., 2021). A strong corporate reputation acts as a buffer against negative reviews and comments on social media, as stakeholders may have a more positive overall perception of the agency based on its past performance, brand image, and values. In contrast, a weak corporate reputation may amplify the negative impact of social media on the agency's reputation, as stakeholders may have less trust and confidence in the agency to begin with (Aderibigbe & Fragouli, 2020). Hence, the study proposes the first mediation hypothesis.

H6. Corporate reputation mediates the relationship of repeated exposure and real estate agency reputation.

H7. Corporate reputation mediates the relationship of online review and real estate agency reputation.

Cultivation theory is a social theory that examines how media exposure can shape an individual's perception of reality (Tsoy et al., 2021). It suggests that repeated exposure to media messages influence an individual's beliefs and attitudes about the world. When it comes to social media, cultivation theory would argue that employees who use social media frequently are more likely to perceive positive effects on their welfare because they are exposed to a wide range of positive social interactions and support from their social media networks (Verduyn et al., 2020). Social media platforms provided employees with opportunities to connect with friends and colleagues, engage in discussions about work-related topics, and receive emotional support during challenging times (David et al., 2022). Hence, in the real estate agency, the study assumes:

H8. Repeated exposure positively affects the welfare of employees.

H9. Online review positively affects the welfare of employees.

Development motivation theory suggests that individuals are motivated to seek out and engage in activities that foster personal growth and development (R. Ryan et al., 2021). In the context of a real estate agency, this can be applied to the welfare of employees and how it can positively impact the agency's reputation. When employees are satisfied with their job and feel that their welfare is being prioritized, they are more likely to be motivated and engaged in their work. Detailly, the situation will lead to improved performance, increased productivity, and a better overall customer experience (Grewal et al., 2020). Overall, DMT suggests that prioritizing the welfare of employees can have a positive impact on the reputation of a real estate agency by improving employee motivation, performance, and retention, leading to a better customer experience and positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Siqueira et al., 2020).

H10. Welfare of employees positively affects the real estate agency reputation.

Development motivation theory suggests that the welfare of employees acts as a mediator in the relationship between social media use and real estate agency reputation (Dweck, 2017). According to this theory, when employees feel that their welfare is being prioritized, they are more likely to be motivated and engaged in their work (Brieger et al., 2020). As a result, they may be more active and effective in using social media to promote the agency and engage with clients, which lead to a better reputation for the agency. Similarly, cultivation theory suggests that repeated exposure to media messages can influence an individual's beliefs and attitudes about the world (Shah et al., 2019). Thus, the study proposes the second mediation hypothesis:

H11. Welfare of employees mediates the relationship of repeated exposure and real estate agency reputation.

H12. Welfare of employees mediates the relationship of online review and real estate agency reputation.

Cultivation theory suggests that repeated exposure to media messages can influence an individual's beliefs and attitudes about the world (Shah et al., 2019). In the context of social media and the quality of service provided by a business, cultivation theory explains how social media positively affects the quality of service. Social media provides customers with a platform to express their opinions and experiences with a business (Kim & Choi, 2019). When customers share positive experiences on social media, it leads to increased exposure and credibility for the business. Thus, the results shape the perceptions and attitudes of other potential customers, leading to a positive perception of the business and its quality of service (Roy et al., 2020). Hence, the study posited:

H13. Repeated exposure positively affects the quality of service.

H14. Online review positively affects the quality of service.

The service quality theory (SQT) claims that the quality of service provided by a business has a significant impact on customer satisfaction, loyalty, and ultimately, the reputation of the business (Thanh Khoa, 2020). In the context of a real estate agency, the service quality theory can explain how the quality of service positively affects the agency's reputation. When a real estate agency provides high-quality service to its clients, the customer satisfaction and loyalty is higher (Themba et al., 2019). Satisfied customers are more likely to recommend the agency to others, leading to positive word-of-mouth recommendations and an improved reputation. Additionally, satisfied customers may also be more likely to leave positive reviews on social media or other online platforms, further enhancing the agency's reputation (Susanto et al., 2021). Hence, the study posits:

H15. Quality of service positively affects the real estate agency reputation.

The SQT proposes that customer satisfaction is determined by the perceived quality of a service, which is based on the customer's expectations of the service and their perceptions of the actual service delivery (Uzir et al., 2020). In the context of the real estate agency reputation and social media relationship, the theory suggests that the quality of service provided by the agency plays a mediating role in the relationship between social media and agency reputation (Mansoor, 2021). Positive reviews and recommendations on social media platforms can enhance the agency's reputation, while negative comments can harm it. However, the impact of social media on reputation may be mediated by the quality of service provided by the agency (Arshad & Khurram, 2020). Hence, the study develops the third hypothesis:

H16. Quality of service mediates the relationship of repeated exposure and real estate agency reputation.

H17. Quality of service mediates the relationship of online review and real estate agency reputation.

The cultivation theory suggests that media exposure shape an individual's perception of the world and their attitudes towards it (Tsoy et al., 2021). In the context of social media and innovative ability, the theory proposes that exposure to social media can positively affect an individual's innovative ability by exposing them to a variety of

perspectives, ideas, and information (Mousavi et al., 2020). Social media platforms provide users with access to a vast amount of content from different sources and individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences (Naeem, 2021). By engaging with this content, individuals are exposed to different perspectives and ideas that they may not have encountered otherwise. This exposure to diverse content expands an individual's knowledge and understanding of various topics, including innovative ideas and practices (De Silva et al., 2020). Therefore, the study posits:

H18. Repeated exposure positively affects innovative ability.

H19. Online review positively affects innovative ability.

The DMT is a psychological theory that explains how individuals are motivated to pursue personal growth and development (Shim et al., 2020). Individuals are driven by a need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, and that these needs can be fulfilled through engaging in challenging activities and pursuing mastery in their chosen domains (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). When it comes to innovative ability and real estate agency reputation, the DMT emphasizes the positive relationship between the two (Ferrie Reina, 2020). Thus, the research proposes:

H20. Innovative ability positively affects real estate agency reputation.

DMT suggests that individuals are motivated to develop and improve their abilities and skills to achieve their personal and professional goals. DMT explains how innovative ability mediates the relationship between social media and real estate agency reputation (Reed et al., 2020). Specifically, if a real estate agency is motivated to develop and improve its innovative ability, it may be more likely to use social media platforms in innovative ways to promote its services and build its reputation (Bruns, 2019). Cultivation theory, on the other hand, posits that media exposure shapes individuals' perceptions and attitudes over time. In the context of social media and real estate agency reputation, cultivation theory suggests that exposure to innovative and effective social media campaigns by real estate agencies influence the public's perception of the agency's reputation (Varadarajan et al., 2021). Hence, the research develops the fourth hypothesis:

H21. Innovative ability mediates the relationship of repeated exposure and real estate agency reputation.

H22. Innovative ability mediates the relationship of online review and real estate agency reputation.

The cultivation theory claims media exposure over time shapes an individual's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Slater, 2007). Social media platforms provide users with a constant stream of information related to social issues, such as climate change, social justice, and inequality (Resurrección et al., 2019). The repeated exposure cultivates a sense of awareness and concern among users, leading to increased engagement and involvement in social responsibility-related activities (Alsaad et al., 2023). Thus, the study assumes:

H23. Repeated exposure positively affects social responsibility.

H24. Online review positively affects social responsibility.

The social responsibility theory uncovers that organizations have a responsibility to act in the best interest of society as a whole, beyond just their own profits or interests (Ashrafi et al., 2020). When a real estate agency operates in a socially responsible manner, such as by engaging in sustainable practices or supporting local community initiatives, it increases trust and credibility among its customers and stakeholders (Hiep et al., 2021). By prioritizing social responsibility, a real estate agency can build stronger relationships with stakeholders, such as clients, employees, and local communities (Dmytriiev et al., 2021). Hence, the research posits:

H25. Social responsibility positively affects real estate agency reputation.

The social responsibility theory introduces that organizations have an ethical obligation to act in the best interests of society, beyond just their own self-interests (Nilakant, 2012). Real estate agencies have a responsibility to use social media in a way that positively impacts society, such as by providing accurate information about their services and being transparent about their practices (Shin & Park, 2019). The cultivation theory, on the other hand, reveals that media exposure shapes individuals' perceptions of reality over time (Prince, 2018). Hence, this study puts forward the sixth mediation hypothesis.

H26. Social responsibility mediates the relationship of repeated exposure and real estate agency reputation.

H27. Social responsibility mediates the relationship of online review and real estate agency reputation.

### **3. Research method**

A non-probability judgment sampling method was used to select the sample. The target population for this study consists of consumers in Beijing who use Douyin (TikTok) for renting or buying houses. To ensure an adequate number of participants, the researcher distributed 600 questionnaires during the formal testing phase, collected 537 responses, and ultimately obtained 506 valid questionnaires. Online questionnaire survey was conducted to collect the data. In this study, a comprehensive set of variables is measured using validated scales and a Likert 5-point scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" to ensure precision and depth in capturing the relevant data. The Social Media Use Scale (SMUS) by Primack et al. (2017) is utilized to assess two key aspects of social media usage: Repeated Exposure and Online Review. Repeated Exposure is measured across five dimensions: Frequency, Duration, Density, Contextual, and Intensity of Exposure. Online Review is assessed through five criteria: Number of Reviews, Rating Score, Review Sentiment, Review Length, and Reviewer's Reputation. The CEO Reputation Index (CEORI), developed by Konadu et al. (2020), evaluates 'CEO Reputation' on six fronts: Professional Ethics, Professionalism, Commitment to the Public, Leadership and Management Ability, Market Opportunity Grasping Ability, and Company Performance during their tenure. Employee welfare is gauged using the Perceived Organizational Support Scale (POS) as per (Wen et al., 2019), covering areas such as Reasonable Wages, Safe Working Environment, Challenging Jobs, Involvement in Decision-making Processes, Promotion Opportunities, and Friendly Work Environment Relations. Service Quality is appraised using the SERVQUAL Scale (Pekkaya et al., 2017), examining Attitudes of



Service Personnel, Professional Skills of Service Personnel, Quality of Service Environment Facilities, Security during Service, Enterprise Service Specifications, and Customer Waiting Time for Service. The study employs the Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) Scale by Dahiya & Raghuvanshi (2021) to measure Innovation Ability, focusing on Information Acquisition, Research and Development Capacity, Management Innovation Ability, Industry Insights, Enterprise's New Idea Creation Ability, and New Business Model Creation Ability. Corporate Social Responsibility is assessed using a combined approach from the corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Index Olanipekun et al. (2020); and the Socially Responsible Behavior Scale Afsar & Umrani (2020).

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Descriptive analysis

This study focusing on Beijing's real estate market, researchers used a judgment sampling method targeting middle and senior-level personnel in real estate intermediary companies. The study, which aimed to understand factors influencing company reputation, surveyed Douyin (TikTok) users involved in renting or buying houses. 506 valid responses were obtained. Table 1 uncovers that the respondents were predominantly young and middle-aged, with 37.4% aged 18-24 and 44.5% aged 25-44. Gender distribution was balanced, with 46.6% male, 50.8% female, and 2.6% preferring not to disclose. Educational levels were high, with 48.8% holding a diploma and 23.1% a bachelor's degree. Regarding household income, 33.6% earned between 36,001 and 66,000 yuan annually. This demographic profile of Beijing consumers using Douyin for real estate purposes suggests a young, educated, and economically stable audience.

Table 1 Sample Basic Characteristics

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	236	46.6
	Female	257	50.8
	Prefer not to say	13	2.6
Age	18-24	189	37.4
	25-44	225	44.5
	45-59	61	12.1
	Over 60	31	6.1
Educational background	Diploma	247	48.8
	Bachelor's Degree	117	23.1
	Master's Degree	136	26.9
	Doctoral Degree	6	1.2
Household Annual Income	Below 36,000 yuan	83	16.4
	36,001-66,000 yuan	170	33.6
	66,001-96,000 yuan	149	29.4

Over 96,001	104	20.6
Total	506	100.0

#### 4.3 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient is a commonly used measure of internal consistency, used to assess the reliability of measurement tools or scales. The results of the reliability analysis of the research sample data are as follows (see Table 3). From the table, it can be observed that the internal consistency of "Repeated exposure," "Online review," "CEO reputation," "Welfare of employees," "Quality of service," "Innovation ability," "Social responsibility," and "Real estate agency reputation" is good, with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients ranging from 0.872 to 0.963. These results indicate that the measurement tools or scales exhibit high reliability when assessing the respective variables. This also enhances the reliability and validity of the research results.

**Table 2 Results of Reliability Analysis**

Variables	Items	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Repeated exposure	5	0.872
Online review	5	0.903
CEO reputation	6	0.915
Welfare of employees	6	0.962
Quality of service	6	0.917
Innovation ability	6	0.896
Social responsibility	6	0.963
Real estate agency reputation	6	0.917

#### 4.4 Validity Analysis (CFA)

Based on the provided data, the study conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to assess the structural validity of the scale. Firstly, the fit indices for the measurement model were examined, and the results indicate that the measurement model fits well ( $\chi^2/df=1.962$ ,  $GFI=0.865$ ,  $NFI=0.909$ ,  $IFI=0.953$ ,  $TLI=0.949$ ,  $CFI=0.953$ ,  $SRMR=0.048$ ,  $RMSEA=0.044$ ). These values demonstrate a good fit between the model and the actual data. Next, tests were conducted to assess the convergent and discriminant validity of the scale's variables.

**Table 3 Convergent Validity Test Results**

Variables	Items	loading coefficients	CR	AVE
Repeated exposure	A1	0.795	0.875	0.583
	A2	0.754		
	A3	0.784		

	A4	0.728		
	A5	0.755		
Online review	B1	0.825	0.904	0.653
	B2	0.791		
	B3	0.782		
	B4	0.845		
	B5	0.795		
CEO reputation	C1	0.838	0.915	0.643
	C2	0.779		
	C3	0.796		
	C4	0.797		
	C5	0.815		
	C6	0.787		
Welfare of employees	D1	0.887	0.962	0.809
	D2	0.801		
	D3	0.923		
	D4	0.843		
	D5	0.958		
	D6	0.973		
Quality of service	E1	0.808	0.919	0.654
	E2	0.675		
	E3	0.792		
	E4	0.816		
	E5	0.883		
	E6	0.862		
Innovation ability	F1	0.760	0.899	0.600
	F2	0.800		
	F3	0.780		
	F4	0.659		
	F5	0.762		
	F6	0.871		
Social responsibility	G1	0.898	0.963	0.814
	G2	0.972		
	G3	0.916		
	G4	0.832		
	G5	0.879		
	G6	0.909		
Real estate agency reputation	H1	0.857	0.918	0.653
	H2	0.844		
	H3	0.732		
	H4	0.808		
	H5	0.811		
	H6	0.789		

#### 4.5 Structural Equation Model

In this study, the researcher constructed an initial structural equation model based on the previous research hypotheses. The model includes a total of 8 latent variables and 46 observed variables. Based on the provided data, an assessment of the fit of the structural model was conducted. The model's  $\chi^2/df$  ratio is 2.087 ( $<5$ ), indicating relatively good model fit. The model's RMSEA value is 0.046, within the range of 0 to 1, and less than 0.1, suggesting good overall model fit. GFI, NFI, IFI, CFI, TLI: The values of these indices are 0.858, 0.895, 0.927, 0.931, and 0.931, respectively. These values are close to or above 0.9, indicating good overall model fit. The model's SRMR value is 0.040, which is less than 0.08, indicating good overall model fit. In summary, based on the provided data, the structural model demonstrates good fit, and all the indices suggest that the model's fit is acceptable. This indicates that the structural model in this study is capable of effectively explaining and predicting relationships among the research variables, with a high degree of reliability and accuracy.

**Table 4 Structural Model Fit**

Fit Indices	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	GFI	NFI	IFI	CFI	TLI	SRMR
Fit Results	2.722	0.046	0.855	0.902	0.947	0.946	0.943	0.072

The table 5 lists the various hypotheses and their corresponding non-standardized path coefficients, standardized path coefficients, standard errors (SE), T-values, and P-values. In all hypotheses, the standardized path coefficients are positive, indicating that the relationships between variables are all positively correlated. Moreover, in all hypotheses, the P-values are less than 0.05, signifying the statistical significance of these hypotheses. Combining the information mentioned above, the following summary can be provided: For H1-H5, which pertain to the relationships between 'Repeated exposure' (REE), 'Online review' (ORW), 'CEO reputation' (CRN), and 'Real estate agency reputation' (REAR), all coefficients for H1-H5 are positive, and the P-values are less than 0.05, supporting these five hypotheses. In H8 and H9, concerning the relationships between 'Repeated exposure' (REE), 'Online review' (ORW), and 'Welfare of employees' (WOE) in the enterprise, both H8 and H9 coefficients are positive, with P-values less than 0.05, supporting these two hypotheses. In H11, which explores the relationship between 'Welfare of employees' (WOE) in the enterprise and 'Real estate agency reputation' (REAR), the coefficient for H11 is positive, and the P-value is less than 0.05, supporting this hypothesis. For H13 and H14, relating to the relationships between 'Repeated exposure' (REE), 'Online review' (ORW), and 'Quality of service' (QOS) in the enterprise, both H13 and H14 coefficients are positive, with P-values less than 0.05, supporting these two hypotheses. In H15, examining the relationship between 'Quality of service' (QOS) in the enterprise and 'Real estate agency reputation' (REAR), the coefficient for H15 is positive, and the P-value is less than 0.05, supporting this hypothesis. For H18 and H19, dealing with the relationships between 'Repeated exposure' (REE), 'Online review' (ORW), and 'Innovation ability' (IAY) in the

enterprise, both H18 and H19 coefficients are positive, with P-values less than 0.05, supporting these two hypotheses. In H20, which investigates the relationship between 'Innovation ability' (IAY) in the enterprise and 'Real estate agency reputation' (REAR), the coefficient for H20 is positive, and the P-value is less than 0.05, supporting this hypothesis. For H23 and H24, exploring the relationships between 'Repeated exposure' (REE), 'Online review' (ORW), and 'Social responsibility' (SRY) in the enterprise, both H23 and H24 coefficients are positive, with P-values less than 0.05, supporting these two hypotheses. In H25, which studies the relationship between 'Social responsibility' (SRY) in the enterprise and 'Real estate agency reputation' (REAR), the coefficient for H25 is positive, and the P-value is less than 0.05, supporting this hypothesis.

**Table 5 Path Analysis Results**

				Unstandardized Path Coefficients	Standardized Path Coefficients	SE	T	P
H1	REE	→	CRN	0.236	0.194	0.057	4.163	***
H2	OR W	→	CRN	0.705	0.635	0.058	12.194	***
H3	REE	→	REA R	0.163	0.123	0.073	2.245	0.025
H4	OR W	→	REA R	0.199	0.164	0.095	2.098	0.036
H5	CRN	→	REA R	0.222	0.203	0.071	3.121	0.002
H8	REE	→	WO E	0.245	0.169	0.077	3.181	0.001
H9	OR W	→	WO E	0.579	0.439	0.072	8.072	***
H11	WO E	→	REA R	0.091	0.099	0.042	2.194	0.028
H13	REE	→	QOS	0.250	0.211	0.064	3.923	***
H14	OR W	→	QOS	0.492	0.455	0.060	8.195	***
H15	QOS	→	REA R	0.119	0.106	0.055	2.157	0.031
H18	REE	→	IAY	0.175	0.182	0.058	3.021	0.003
H19	OR W	→	IAY	0.245	0.280	0.053	4.674	***
H20	IAY	→	REA R	0.184	0.133	0.059	3.117	0.002

H23	REE	→	SRY	0.212	0.176	0.0 71	3.010	0.00 3
H24	OR W	→	SRY	0.258	0.235	0.0 63	4.075	***
H25	SRY	→	REA R	0.108	0.098	0.0 44	2.447	0.01 4

Figure 2 portrays the structural equation model for the reputation of real estate agents.

In this research, the researcher continued to employ the Bootstrapping algorithm to test the mediating effects of Repeated exposure, Online review, CEO reputation, Welfare of employees, Quality of service, Innovation ability, social responsibility, and Real estate agency reputation. The specific results are presented in the following table. From the table, we can observe that Repeated exposure has significant indirect effects on Real estate agency reputation through CEO reputation, Welfare of employees, Quality of service, Innovation ability, and social responsibility, with indirect effect values of 0.039, 0.017, 0.022, 0.024, and 0.017, respectively. The 95% confidence intervals for these indirect effects do not contain zero, indicating that CEO reputation, Welfare of employees, Quality of service, Innovation ability, and social responsibility mediate the relationship between Repeated exposure and Real estate agency reputation significantly. Similarly, Online review has significant indirect effects on Real estate agency reputation through CEO reputation, Welfare of employees, Quality of service, Innovation ability, and social responsibility, with indirect effect values of 0.129, 0.043, 0.048, 0.037, and 0.023, respectively. The 95% confidence intervals for these indirect effects also do not contain zero, indicating that CEO reputation, Welfare of employees, Quality of service, Innovation ability, and social responsibility mediate the relationship between Online review and Real estate agency reputation significantly.

**Table 6** Mediation Effect Test Results

	Path	$\beta$	Lower	Upper	P
Direct Effect	REE→REAR	0.123	0.005	0.245	0.040
Direct Effect	ORW→REAR	0.164	0.004	0.324	0.044
Indirect Effect	REE→CRN→REAR	0.039	0.007	0.098	0.010
Indirect Effect	REE→WOE→REAR	0.017	0.001	0.045	0.026
Indirect Effect	REE→QOS→REAR	0.022	0.004	0.056	0.013
Indirect Effect	REE→IAY→REAR	0.024	0.003	0.067	0.020
Indirect Effect	REE→SRY→REAR	0.017	0.001	0.052	0.028

Indirect Effect	ORW→CRN→REAR	0.129	0.029	0.253	0.013
Indirect Effect	ORW→WOE→REAR	0.043	0.002	0.093	0.038
Indirect Effect	ORW→QOS→REAR	0.048	0.008	0.103	0.018
Indirect Effect	ORW→IAY→REAR	0.037	0.009	0.090	0.008
Indirect Effect	ORW→SRY→REAR	0.023	0.003	0.060	0.027

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

### 5.1 Theoretical implication

In this empirical study, the influence of various factors on the reputation of real estate agencies among Beijing consumers using Douyin for housing transactions was rigorously examined. Utilizing a Bootstrapping algorithm to assess mediation effects, the research established positive correlations across 18 hypotheses, with all standardized path coefficients indicating positive relationships, and P-values below 0.05, signifying statistical significance. The study revealed that 'CEO reputation' (CRN), 'Welfare of employees' (WOE), 'Quality of service' (QOS), 'Innovation ability' (IAY), and 'Social responsibility' (SRY) significantly mediate the impact of 'Repeated exposure' (REE) and 'Online review' (ORW) on real estate agency reputation (REAR). This was evidenced by significant direct effects of REE ( $\beta=0.123$ ) and ORW ( $\beta=0.164$ ) on REAR, and notable indirect effects through the mediators. The findings, underscored by R-squared values ranging from 0.134 to 0.582, illuminate the pivotal roles of digital engagement and organizational attributes in shaping the perceptions of real estate consumers in a digitally centric market. The significant mediation effect of 'CEO reputation' and 'Welfare of employees' on the relationship between digital exposure and agency reputation suggests a reevaluation of training theory. Traditional cultivation models emphasize skill and knowledge transfer (D'Lima & Smith, 2022). However, this study highlights the need for training that also enhances personal branding and employee welfare as key components of organizational reputation, a perspective less emphasized in earlier studies like those by Story et al. (2016). The moderate perception of 'Quality of Service' impacting agency reputation aligns with but also expands the service quality theory. Prior research, such as that by Shemwell et al. (1998), primarily focused on direct interactions between service provider and customer. This study introduces the concept of online reviews as a significant influencer of perceived service quality, echoing findings from Pekkaya et al. (2017) but extending it into the real estate domain, where such dynamics were less explored. The importance of 'Innovation ability' in influencing real estate agency reputation underscores an extension of development motivation theory. Traditionally, this theory focused on internal organizational factors and employee motivation Chiniara & Bentein (2016). The present study suggests that external perceptions of innovation also play a critical role, a finding that

resonates with but goes beyond the scope of earlier studies like those by Ketata et al. (2015). The high impact of 'Social responsibility' on agency reputation offers a new dimension to social responsibility theory in the digital age. While previous research (Sanders & Carpenter, (1998) has emphasized corporate social responsibility from an internal policy perspective, this study highlights the importance of external perceptions of social responsibility, especially in online environments.

## **5.2 Practical implication**

Given the significant impact of 'Repeated exposure' and 'Online review', real estate agencies should invest in their online presence, particularly on popular platforms like Douyin. This could involve creating engaging content, leveraging influencer marketing, and actively managing online reviews to enhance visibility and reputation. The study underscores the influence of 'CEO reputation' and 'Welfare of employees' on agency reputation. Agencies should focus on building a strong personal brand for their CEOs, highlighting their expertise and achievements. Concurrently, investing in employee welfare programs can improve internal satisfaction, which in turn positively affects external perceptions. With 'Quality of Service' being a critical factor, agencies must continually strive to improve their service standards. This could involve regular training for agents, implementing customer feedback systems, and adopting technological tools that enhance the buying or renting experience. Platforms like Douyin should provide tools and features that facilitate greater engagement between real estate agencies and users. This could include features for virtual tours, live Q&A sessions, or dedicated sections for verified real estate listings. Encouraging ethical and transparent content creation, particularly in relation to property listings and agency reviews, can enhance the overall credibility of the platform and its users. Consumers should leverage online reviews and content to make more informed decisions. However, they should also be aware of the potential for biased or inaccurate content and seek out diverse sources of information. Policymakers should consider regulations that ensure transparency and authenticity in online real estate marketing, protecting consumers from misleading information. Initiatives to improve digital literacy among consumers can empower them to better navigate and utilize digital platforms for real estate transactions. Academia should continue researching the evolving impact of digital platforms on real estate, providing insights that can guide industry practices and policy decisions. Marketing professionals in the real estate sector must integrate digital strategies, such as social media marketing and online reputation management, into their broader marketing plans. There is a demand for innovative technological solutions tailored to the real estate sector, such as VR property tours or AI-driven property recommendation systems. In conclusion, these practical implications suggest a multifaceted approach involving various stakeholders in the real estate ecosystem, focusing on leveraging digital platforms effectively, enhancing service quality, and ensuring the welfare and development of employees, all of which are crucial in shaping the reputation and success of real estate agencies in the digital age.

## **5.3 Conclusion**

This research has provided a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing the reputation of real estate agencies among consumers using Douyin in Beijing. Through an



extensive survey and statistical analysis, the study has identified key variables such as 'Repeated exposure', 'Online review', 'CEO reputation', 'Welfare of employees', 'Quality of service', 'Innovation ability', and 'Social responsibility', and their impact on real estate agency reputation. The findings indicate that these factors are positively correlated with the reputation of real estate agencies, highlighting the importance of digital engagement and organizational characteristics in shaping consumer perceptions in the real estate sector. The study's results offer valuable insights for real estate agencies, platform developers, consumers, policymakers, academia, and marketing professionals, suggesting a need for a multifaceted approach in addressing the challenges and opportunities within the digital real estate market. For real estate agencies, the emphasis on online presence, CEO branding, employee welfare, and service quality stands out as critical areas for development. For platform developers like Douyin, the findings underscore the importance of creating and maintaining a trustworthy and engaging digital environment. Moreover, this research contributes to academic literature by integrating traditional theories like training theory, service quality theory, development motivation theory, and social responsibility theory with the dynamics of digital platforms, offering a novel perspective on consumer behavior in the digital age. It bridges theoretical concepts with practical applications, particularly in a digitalized market environment like that of real estate. However, the research is not without its limitations, which include its sampling method, platform-specific focus, cross-sectional design, and the potential subjectivity of self-reported data. These limitations provide direction for future research, which should aim to broaden the scope and depth of understanding, encompassing diverse demographics, various digital platforms, longitudinal analysis, and additional relevant variables. In conclusion, the study underscores the evolving nature of the real estate market in the context of digital platforms, pointing towards an increasingly integrated approach where online presence, organizational attributes, and consumer engagement play pivotal roles. It not only provides a contemporary snapshot of the market dynamics but also sets the stage for ongoing exploration in this fast-evolving field.

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