

# The Influence of Corporate Social Responsibility and Customer Retention on Customer Relationship Management Performance with the Mediating Effect of Customer Trust in Smes of Ningxia Province, China

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## Abstract

*In recent years, e-commerce has experienced rapid expansion and developed as the mainstream business practice in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in developing areas of China. There are a variety of channels for consumers to purchase from. Therefore, maintaining customers is increasingly important. In the meantime, companies expect to gain more significant insights into their consumers' demands to earn customer trust, thus achieving customer relationship management (CRM) performance. This study develops based on trust theory and consists of four latent variables: corporate social responsibility (CSR), customer retention, customer trust, and customer relationship management performance. The current study used probability and random sampling techniques. It conducted the questionnaire survey to collect data from managers of SMEs in Ningxia province of China. The Partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) technique was used for this study. As a result, a total of 150 respondents were usable for these questionnaires. The study revealed that corporate social responsibility and customer retention have a positive effect on customer relationship management performance. Moreover, customer trust has been examined that it had a positive effect on customer relationship management performance. In addition, customer trust was discovered as a partial mediation between the relationship of corporate social responsibility, customer retention, and customer relationship management performance. Furthermore, based on the samples analyzed, the proposed model seems to be fitted considerably well. Therefore, this study intends to contribute to a better understanding of factors influencing customer relationship management performance in Chinese SMEs, thereby providing companies with practical ideas to improve overall performance.*

**Keywords:** *Corporate Social Responsibility, Customer Retention, Customer Trust, Customer Relationship Management Performance, Smartpls.*

## Introduction

In recent years, the business environment in China has experienced significant changes. With the emergence of the Internet economy, firms are more exposed to the fiercely competitive e-commerce market environment. Corporate competition, a fundamental component of the market economy, has started to grow more intense and complex in light of the pace of economic globalization and the advent of the knowledge economy (Dahlman & Aubert, 2001). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have a steadily increasing impact on the economy, particularly in China's developing regions. Some data show that, accompanied by the accelerating pace of structural adjustment of Chinese SMEs, the potential economic superpower has maintained an annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate from 7% to 13% for almost thirty years (Pulka & Gawuna, 2022). In this respect, preventing the profit base of enterprises from being gradually eroded by competitive pressure and effectively increasing CRM performance is crucial (Attia, 2023).

Since China entered the World Trade Organization (WTO), more than 42 million SMEs have witnessed a substantial increase in size and number (Gao, 2022). In detail, SMEs contribute more than 60% of GDP, pay 50% of the national tax revenue, and provide 80% of national employment (Sun et al., 2022). Nevertheless, 68% of SMEs intend to terminate the business in the first five years, around 19% can survive for 6 to 10 years, and only 13% can continue over ten years (Huang et al., 2020). In the current scenario, the role of customers has changed from single consumers to multiple parts. In addition to being customers, they cooperate with enterprises and create value, knowledge, and capabilities. The role of consumers

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continues to increase, causing their position to gradually grow in the market (Saha et al., 2021). Therefore, companies must make effective measures to maintain consumers to gain benefits during long-term development. Accordingly, corporate social responsibility, corporate absorptive capacity, and customer retention will influence customer purchase behaviors, gain customer trust, create corporate profits, and determine CRM performance outcomes (Chengwu, 2020).

In recent decades, corporate social responsibility has been referred to as an essential content of administrative and managerial science. To survive, businesses continuously participate in social interactions (Aguilera-Caracuel et al., 2015). Various studies proposed the positive relationships between CSR and CRM performance (Kakakhel et al., 2015), CSR and customer satisfaction (Saeidi et al., 2015), and CSR and customer loyalty (Sindhu & Arif, 2017). There are various ways in which corporate social responsibility impacts an organization's performance. It contributes to improving the business's performance, which helps it expand quickly and retain more customers. A business can undoubtedly outperform rivals if it strives to please customers and practices corporate social responsibility (Tsoutsoura, 2004). Moreover, as corporate social responsibility (CSR) gains recognition and appeal, an increasing number of businesses are taking a leading position in promoting community development, environmental regulations, human rights, and business ethics. Organizational performance rises when businesses that engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) gain a positive reputation in the marketplace and draw in more clients and job applicants (Viswesvaran et al., 1998). However, by engaging in CSR, the business is able to improve both commercial performance and consumer loyalty. This, in turn, continually results in more successful CRM outcomes.

As a competitive tool, customer retention helps the business understand customer needs better, enables it to offer tailored goods and services, and preserves a long-term customer-business relationship. On the other hand, consumer retention is treated as the implication of strategy to improve CRM and gain customer trust, thereby stimulating the performance of CRM (Peppard, 2000). From creating the opinion of customer trust, researchers acknowledged that customer trust meant self-reliance. However, the supplier of goods or services can be trusted to behave in customers' best interests (Dagger & O'Brien, 2010). Similarly, Morgan and Hunter (1994) conceptualized that trust is an essential determinant of long-term relationship intentions and relationship commitment and is a significant milestone in establishing mutual loyalty. Besides, Brennan and Canning (2002) also concluded that companies can maximize customer relationship management performance by enhancing trust between both parties (Brennan & Canning, 2002).

Previous research has intended to focus on the direct relationship of CSR and customer retention to improve CRM performance (Lamrhari et al., 2022). However, most researchers have focused on CRM performance from the B2C side, and this research is more interesting from the B2B side. Moreover, as use spreads, companies discover variances in their results due to the practices of customer trust. The primary purpose of the paper is to explore the relationship among corporate social responsibility (CSR), customer retention, customer trust, and customer management relationship management (CRM performance). The suggested hypotheses are also supplied. In addition, this paper proposes a conceptual model to explain total relationships in Chinese SMEs. The contexts of the study are arranged as follows. Firstly, it illustrates the relevant literature review on defining variables and provides the proposed conceptual model. Then, this paper discusses the evolution of hypotheses. After that, it will include a description of the methodology and summaries and a discussion of the present conclusion and future research.

## Literature Review

### *The underlying theory: RBV Theory and Trust Theory*

Resource-based view (RBV) is considered as one of the most significant theories to explain how companies could acquire competitive advantages. In addition, RBV indicates that the critical point of competitive merits and performance is powerful resources. In essence, RBV concentrates on the capability of the business to implement the internal resources to compete (Barney, 1991). According to Barney (1991), the value can be defined as the ability of the business to conceive strategies which improve organizational

effectiveness and efficiency, which could achieve when resources can nullify threats and capitalize opportunities (Meso & Smith, 2000).

Based on RBV, a company is able to gain the rival superiority when it can perform value-creating strategies which cannot be implemented by competitors simultaneously and remain competitive advantages while other businesses could not imitate (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). Therefore, the business physical, organizational and human capital, allowing the company to consider and come up with competitive strategies which trigger organizational effectiveness and efficiency, are called organizational resources (Barney, 1991). Youndt and Snell (2004) have highlighted that social capital resources are magnificent at an equal level, which are derived from the business's abilities to develop and remain ideal relationships with others, including employees, customers and other organizations. According to Amit and Schoemaker (1993), capabilities are regarded as a company's capacity to expand the resources, mostly in integration, applying organizational procedures to affect the eager results, and contain teamwork between management and workers and trusts among customers (Foo et al., 2007).

On the other side, RBV is an adequate multi-dimensional perspective for CRM deployment because it integrates superior performance with business resources and capability pools (Drohan, Lynch, & Foley, 2009). Xu et al. (2008) state that to maintain customer relationships through CRM has been the only competitive strength in e-commerce marketing. Plakoyiannaki and Tzokas (2002) suppose that companies need five capabilities to implement CRM successfully, including learning capabilities, integration capabilities, analytical capabilities, operational capabilities and directional capabilities.

This study supposes that customer retention and CSR as the intangible resources and capabilities to manage customer relationships. Through the promotion of these measurements, Chinese SMEs can be more competitive, so that eventually influence their CRM performance. In this study, it hypothesizes that customer retention and CSR can develop and maintain customer trust with consumers, further enhance the effect of customer trust on CRM performance.

Trust is a complex, multidisciplinary opinion considered a strategic asset and a significant determinant of performance. Accordingly, developing customer trust is a viable way to absorb new consumers and retain existing customers in increasingly competitive markets; hence, performance can be promoted further (Dietz & Gillespie, 2011). Besides, trust theory has experienced a considerable increase in scholarly interest in various service industries. In response to the growing interest that has coincided with the focus shifting from transactional to relational due to service orientation, academics have embraced several conceptualizations of trust theory to examine (Isaeva et al., 2020). It illustrates how customer trust balances the relationships between latent variables in this study, which have not been previously discussed. Moreover, it could suggest that companies must carefully consider the study and practice of building client trust to enhance performance and develop more competitiveness (Ayyagari, 2021). From the perspective of management, studies on trust primarily concentrate on participants' trust in the organization, confirming that trust is not only a crucial tool for managers to maintain control over the business and its members but also a key mechanism to lower transaction risks and performance deviation (Wicks et al., 1999). As a result, trust theory enables us to analyze correlations displayed in this research effectively.

### *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)*

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the obligation of organizations to make decisions and take activities that will advance the interests and well-being of businesses and society (Daft et al., 2010). Carroll & Buchholtz (2009) demonstrate that corporate social responsibility (CSR) mainly focuses on the demands that arise from organizational decisions about specific issues or problems that, according to normative norms, have positive rather than negative consequences on the relevant company stakeholders. The primary goal of CSR is to ensure that corporate action products are normatively accurate. The economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (philanthropic) expectations that society has on an organization at a particular moment in time are all included in the concept of social responsibility of business (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2009). The emerging viewpoint on CSR places more stress on the welfare of stakeholders than on the perspective of shareholders through the maximization of profit and trust maintenance (Jamali, 2008).

Among the Fortune 500 firms, 90% have a CSR activity plan, and over 50% publish an 'Annual CSR Report' (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2009). Therefore, the organization can quickly exceed its rivals by concentrating on community expansion and financial success (Kim et al., 2018).

There is limited literature to identify that CSR is the alliance between commercial practices and societal norms. This means that organizations are more interactive by conducting social actions and acquiring individual trust. In essence, CSR can affect customer relationship management's performance in different aspects. It aids in improving the social influences of businesses, enabling them to gain customer trust and expand quickly, thus maximizing performance in the marketplace (Müller, 2014). Organizations can undoubtedly beat their competitors if they practice corporate social responsibility and try to satisfy their stakeholders. In recent years, there has been a forward rise in the activities and issues of CSR. A protracted argument has arisen among shareholders, stakeholders, and community organizations regarding who will gain and who will suffer the expense of adopting CSR activities due to their greater understanding of the requirements and needs of CSR (Tsoutsoura, 2004).

Consequently, this study contributes that CSR has been regarded as increasing customer relationship management performance through establishing good social influence and maintaining consumers (Iglesias et al., 2020). Dibella and Woodilla (2006) supposed that CSR could bring harmony between companies and customers and influence their trust, which was also tested by Goergen and Renneboog (Siddiq & Javed, 2014). As a result, the implementation of CSR cultivates the sense of taking care of society and environmental connections in total parties engaging in companies; hence, it can influence consumers and retain them. Therefore, every corporation applies distinctive ways to operate CSR in their businesses, and finally, it affects CRM performance. Hence, as observed in the literature presented in this section, it is evident that there are indications suggested in the relationship between corporate social responsibility, CRM performance, and customer trust:

H1a: Corporate social responsibility is positively related to CRM performance.

H2a: Corporate social responsibility is positively related to customer trust.

### *Customer Retention*

Consumers satisfied with a company's offerings are typically eager to repay the trust and goodwill they have received. From an organizational standpoint, a higher proportion of customer retention helps foster more productive and reliable relationships with consumers (Gittell, 2002). Furthermore, organizations must understand who will support their customers and focus on the caliber of the goods and services provided, as these factors are essential in retaining customers and fostering greater customer trust (Raza et al., 2020). Statistically, Lin and Wu (2011) hypothesize that there is a significant relationship between customer retention, customer trust, and products since customer retention can have an impact on future product usage, which in turn can affect customer trust (Wang et al., 2011). In the meantime, Rizan et al. (2014) have demonstrated that companies with appropriate connections with their clients may develop customer trust with advantageous impact (Rizan et al., 2014).

On the other hand, the e-commerce environment presents significant challenges to customer management relationship performance due to the sudden expansion of customer choice, the gradual decrease in customer loyalty, and highly personalized customer requirements. These factors have made it more challenging to maintain customer relationships (Arora & Narula, 2018). Consequently, businesses' marketing efforts transfer from attracting valuable consumers to keeping their current consumers, analyzing the trend of customer attrition, and further enhancing customer relationship management performance (DAM & DAM, 2021). Thus, the concept of customer retention influences CRM performance and customer trust. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1b: Customer retention is positively related to CRM performance.

H2b: Customer retention is positively related to customer trust.

### *Customer Trust*

Customer trust plays a magnificent part in the relations between customers and enterprises and is regarded as the critical factor in the continuation and achievement of relationship performance (Sahay, 2003). Customer trust, a fundamental viewpoint that influences customer behaviors and marketing performances, can form long-term relationships. There is a strong connection between customer trust and CRM performance (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Consequently, it is suggested that customer trust directly impacts CRM performance implementation (Chang & Ku, 2009), evidencing that gaining customer trust in the market is challenging. On the other hand, Gray and Balmer (1998) recognize that corporate social responsibility and customer maintenance are essential contributors to maintaining corporate competitiveness and propose that firms need to strive to be more competitive by carefully managing their intangible assets (Han & Lee, 2021). Besides, the development of trust is more momentous than others in organizations since it is the foundation for long-term relationships, bringing achievable customer relationship management performance (Noor, 2013).

As a result, corporate social responsibility and customer retention play a critical role in customer trust. More specifically, a strong business reputation is seen as the element that fosters trust among businesses (Stravinskienė et al., 2021). Conversely, when a company's reputation deteriorates due to focusing only on increasing profits, trust in business relationships with other related partners is diminished (Schwaiger, 2004). Furthermore, various measures companies use to retain consumers are regarded as customer retention. Through these ways, consumers who are provided with satisfied products and services can build trust in the firms, maintain long-term relationships, and improve customer relationship management performance (v et al., 2018). Consequently, corporate social responsibility and customer retention are fundamental to building customer trust in business relationships.

Accordingly, organizations want to work harder on relationship interaction (Lasrado et al., 2023). Many factors need to be considered when establishing and maintaining relationships between companies. Generally, a broad perspective could be taken on business connections because the financial variables must be satisfied. Furthermore, the non-economic components contain the element that influences the relationship in the business interaction (Høgevold et al., 2020). Therefore, many marketing scholars have focused on examining the antecedents of customer trust because it is crucial to relational, economic exchanges, and business relationships, arguing that customer trust is an essential element that decides features of successful relationships, such as commitment and long-term relationships (Dwyer, 2007). Moreover, there are several researchers frequently regard trust as the critical component of cooperative partnerships and explain that trust is the factor that has a positive influence on the performance of the relationship between suppliers and customers, leading to mutual benefits between them (Dimiyati & Subagio, 2018). Based on these arguments, there are hypothesized that:

H3: Customer trust is positively related to CRM performance.

H4a: Customer trust mediates the relationship between corporate social responsibility and CRM performance.

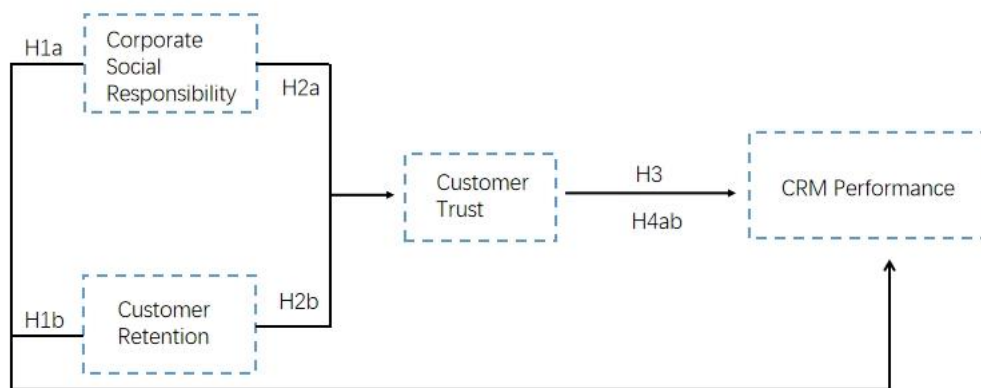
H4b: Customer trust mediates the relationship between customer retention and CRM performance.

### *Customer Relationship Management Performance*

The customer, who serves as the primary resource for the business, is a crucial metric that indicates how well the customer relationship management is working. The primary rationale is that customer relationship management is built on the customer, and corporations' consumer-related performance directly affects their competitive performance (Boulding et al., 2005). In addition, the most essential resource for customer relationship management operations is the customer itself. It is acknowledged that developing customer habits and stickiness, which not only retains customers but also raises their cost of conversion, is significant

to the success of SMEs (Wang et al., 2016). However, despite these well-documented requirements, numerous organizational CRM programs fail or perform poorly. The weak importance of performance measures is consistent with the answers from prior scholars, which show that enterprises increase their revenue, stimulate customer growth, and also improve customer loyalty when they implement measures of CRM performance (Dalla Pozza et al., 2018)

Due to the increase in customer trust, CRM performance will witness a climbing trend with the improvement of customer satisfaction accordingly (Juliana et al., 2021). It is challenging for firms to secure a steady stream of revenue for operations and manufacturing in the increasingly cutthroat marketplace without devoted customers (Arslan, 2020). When an enterprise has a specific corporate social responsibility and implements relevant customer retention measures for a long time, it can make customers form certain habits of using the products or services, and their behaviors will tend to trust this company (Fernández-Ferrín et al., 2021). At the same time, when these habits and trust are deprived, it will cause customer loss, thus affecting the performance of customer relationship management (Ullah & Narain, 2020). Consequently, it is reasonable to measure the comprehensive effectiveness of enterprises in building and securing customer relationships through the previous analysis of customer relationship management performance in Chinese SMEs.



**FIGURE 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework**

## Methodology

The survey for the present study was selected and created based on the previous literature review. Subsequently, the researcher modified the questionnaires to fit the Chinese respondents. The questionnaire aims to access the current study based on the CRM performance of Chinese SMEs. Besides, this study used a pre-test, and three marketing and organizational management experts were involved in the test to analyze factors that influence corporate social responsibility, customer retention, and customer trust. According to Hawkins, Swanson, Kremer, & Fogg (2014), three experts are enough for fine-tuning and verification in earlier research to confirm the reliability and content validity of a questionnaire. Finally, the finding-based statistical analysis of this study expects to contribute to valuable assumptions, including the general overview of customer retention and corporate social responsibility.

There are two kinds of customers in the market - internal customers and external customers. The stakeholders and employees that rely on companies' goods, services, or procedures are internal customers. The people who pay for goods or services are external customers, also known as clients, consumers, or end users. It can be challenging to balance their requirements, particularly when they clash or change quickly (Davis, 1992). Therefore, this study regarded employees as internal customers. Furthermore, most SMEs in this research have a limited number of employees, and managers always communicate frequently with them,

which can help managers understand their opinions and present them in the questionnaire. As a result, data were collected from a self-administered questionnaire conducted in Chinese SMEs in March 2024. The current study targeted managers, as we know that managers are the most important people in deciding organizational business strategies to achieve performance. To keep the quality of the current study, the researcher found that 180 respondents participated. According to Chin, Marcolin, and Newsted (2003), any investigation can use partial least squares (PLS) with a minimum sample size. Wilson Von Voorhis and Morgan (2007) countered that the sample size is deemed appropriate if the response rate exceeds 50 observations. From the analysis of this study, the respondents were identified as managers from Ningxia SMEs, the developing region of China.

The current study uses the PLS structural equation modeling technique for several reasons. In order to create a model that explains the relationship between these variables, this study will first explore and identify the elements that affect CRM performance in Chinese SMEs. It will do this by expanding the technology acceptance with corporate social responsibility, customer retention, and customer trust. As a result, the current study complied with the general guidelines (Hair et al., 2017). Secondly, PLS was used in this investigation since, according to Urbach F. (2010), this analytic method may need a minimum sample size. A SmartPLS is one of the valuable analyses that may be applied if the study only has a limited sample size, according to Hair et al. (2017).

#### *Instrument Development*

For this study, the data collection is from primary data sources. The respondents are managers of SMEs in China. The adapted questionnaire will be divided into 27 objective questions related to corporate social responsibility, customer retention, customer trust, and CRM performance. The network questionnaire is the most dependable coordinating means for a higher response rate (Safdari, 2021). To conclude, the probability sampling design permits the individuals to demonstrate factual feelings and experiences of the pandemic influences on CRM performance. The present study used 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1=agree to 5=strongly agree), where participants are expected to tick (X) or mark in the options that illustrate their responses to the statement (Jebb et al., 2021). According to Matell and Jacoby (1971), 5 points Likert scale strongly correlates with the t-test result. For this study, there are four scale measurements to measures based on previous studies: (i) 10 items of corporate social responsibility (Akremi et al., 2015), (ii) 5 items of customer retention (Hyeong-Yu, 2008), (iii) 6 items of customer trust (Kim et al., 2004; Madjid, 2013), and (iv) 10 items of CRM performance (Zhang et al., 2020).

This study comprised four constructs: corporate social responsibility, customer retention, customer trust, and customer relationship management performance. The values of the CR in this study exceeded 0.8, and among them, the CR of the two variables of CRMP and CT is more significant than 0.9, which is excellent. The Cronbach's alpha value of these four constructs is discussed in Table 1, which exhibits the strong reliability of this instrument.

**TABLE 1: The Cronbach's Alpha Value of Four Constructs**

	Cronbach's alpha value
corporate social responsibility (CSR)	0.856
customer retention (CR)	0.841
customer trust (CT)	0.910
customer relationship management performance (CRMP)	0.911

#### *Measurement Model Assessment*

This study examined its convergent and discriminant validity before moving on to test its hypotheses. The convergent validity was evaluated using outer loading and AVE. For the outer loading, the result discovered that all items can pass. The values of AVE were above 0.5. Discriminant validity was employed in this study

to determine which of the constructs contributed to the uniqueness that other studies had not noted. This suggests that there is no correlation between the measurements. The Fornell-Larcker criterion serves as the study's foundation. According to Table 2, the square root result demonstrates that the constructs are higher than the off-diagonal cross.

**TABLE 2: The Result of The Discriminant Validity Based on The Fornell-Larcker Criterion**

	Mean	SD	CRMP	CR	CSR	CT
CRMP	3.3	1.768	0.718			
CR	3.5	1.414	0.935	0.726		
CSR	3.333	1.532	0.930	1.131	0.712	
CT	3.416	1.296	0.934	0.767	0.768	0.793

Notes: CU=customer retention; corporate social responsibility; CU=customer trust; CRMP = customer relationship management performance; the italic and bold values indicated the uniqueness of the constructs, and it shows that the value has a more significant correlation than any other constructs. Thus, the result establishing the proposed model of discriminant validity

### *Multicollinearity*

The purpose of multicollinearity is to determine if there is a correlation between the components. Specifically, the analysis aims to determine whether the independent variables tend to interact with one another. The failure to perform multicollinearity will impact the false interpretation of data analysis (Vatcheva et al., 2016). However, some general guidelines must be adhered to to find multicollinearity. The multicollinearity for VIF in this study, which ranged from 1.5 to 2.5, matched Durbin & Watson's (1951) thumb rule. Therefore, the multicollinearity problem is not present in our study.

### *Structural Model Assessment*

The structural model must be tested after the measurement model's validity and reliability have been established. It is crucial to ensure that the structural model has no collinearity problems, as Ramayah et al. (2016) stated in their preceding examination and evaluation of the structural model. Using VIF statistics, the literal collinearity was investigated. A possible collinearity issue may be indicated by a VIF value of 3.3 or above (Diamantopoulos et al., 2008). The VIF values are displayed in Table 3 below.

**TABLE 3: Results of Lateral Collinearity Assessment**

	VIF
CRMP	3.143
CR	1.968
CSR	1.987
CT	2.964

The hypothesized effect in the research model-based one-tailed test type was used to measure the model assessment in this study. Thus, this study's figure presents the structural model test with predicted path coefficients. The results showed that each hypothesis was critical. Corporate social responsibility and customer retention significantly influence customer relationship management performance, specifically with a t statistic of 3.387 ( $p=0.001$ ) and 3.090 ( $p=0.002$ ), respectively. Additionally, corporate social responsibility and customer retention found statistically significant values for customer trust with a t statistic of 3.229 ( $p=0.001$ ) and 3.230 ( $p=0.001$ ), respectively. In addition, with a t statistic of 5.980 ( $p=0.000$ ), customer trust was a significant determinant of customer relationship management performance and was determined to be the most significant effect. As a result, the hypothesis of this study, H1a, H1b, H2a, H2b, and H3, are supported. This study shows the structural model test with estimated path coefficients in Figure 2. The results of the hypothesis testing are summarized in the summary Table 4.



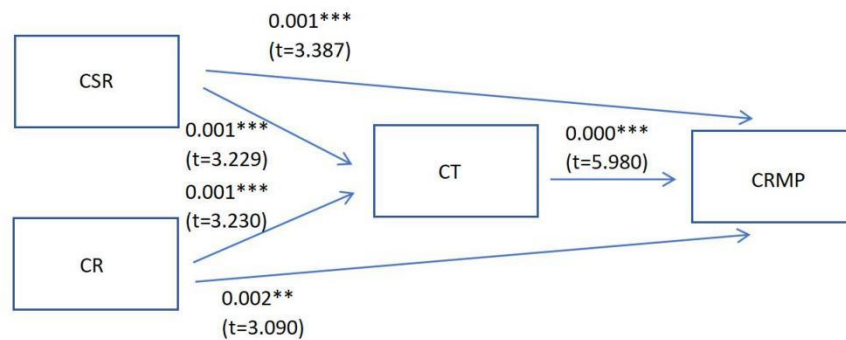


FIGURE 2: Path Coefficient

TABLE 4: The Summary of The Path Analysis

Hypotheses	Path	T-Statistics	P-values	Results
H1a	CSR -> CRMP	3.387	0.001	Supported
H2a	CSR -> CT	3.229	0.001	Supported
H1b	CR -> CRMP	3.090	0.002	Supported
H2b	CR -> CT	3.230	0.001	Supported
H3	CT -> CRMP	5.980	0.000	Supported

Notes: CU=customer retention; CSR=corporate social responsibility; CU=customer trust; CRMP = customer relationship management performance

### Mediation Analysis

The mediation analysis is another goal of this research. Based on this, no study has examined the perception of customer trust as the mediator between customer retention, corporate social responsibility, and customer relationship management performance while the observation and analysis are concerned. Thus, this study aims to find the mediation analysis, represented by the tests of the hypotheses H4a and H4b. According to Preacher and Hayes (2008), this study employed a bootstrapping technique to complete the mediation analysis. Consequently, the current study found a substantial indirect influence of customer trust on customer retention, corporate social responsibility, and customer relationship management performance.

In this study, the intermediate effect test still uses the Bootstrapping analysis in the SmartPLS software. According to some scholars, the Bootstrapping analysis applies to small, medium, and various kinds of intermediary models. It is suitable for studying malefactors and can achieve better results than other intermediary effect research methods (Streukens & Leroi-Werelds, 2016). The criterion is still: the upper and lower bounds of the confidence interval do not contain 0. In this paper, a 97.5% confidence interval is used, and the results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: The Analysis of Intermediary Effects

Paths	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values	2.5%	97.5%	Results
CR -> CT -> CRMP	0.069	3.100	0.002	0.074	0.350	Supported
CSR -> CT -> CRMP	0.086	2.434	0.015	0.067	0.400	Supported

As a result, these results indicate that customer trust partially mediates the association between customer retention, corporate social responsibility, and customer relationship management performance. Therefore, this study strongly aligns with Baron & Kenny's (1986) study on partial mediation.

## Discussions

This paper investigates the factors that influence CRM performance in Chinese SMEs. Thus, the study also intends to test customer trust as a mediator between customer retention, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and CRM performance. Hence, the present study has extended customer retention and CSR characteristics to be measured at the managers' level from the perspectives of social and technological factors. The findings of this research support H1a and H1b with customer retention and CSR significantly affect CRM performance, and the result is consistent with past research (Yang & Qi, 2019; Lamrhari et al., 2022). Meanwhile, customer retention and CSR findings significantly influence customer trust. Hence, support (H2a, H2b). Moreover, the empirical results of customer trust found mainly influence CRM performance, and the findings reported are consistent with previous studies (Azmat & Ha, 2013; Sun & Lin, 2010; Pambudi et al., 2021). Thus, support (H3).

Also, the current study of the mediation analysis revealed that customer retention, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and CRM performance are partially carried through customer trust. However, there are fewer findings for this result (Hossain et al., 2021). Therefore, organizational managers should concentrate on the effects of customer trust on customer relationship management performance. As managers with decision-making power regarding the future directions of companies, this information may stimulate them to create profits and bring business competitiveness. Therefore, this paper attempts to review the relationship between all factors and find that they may affect CRM performance to varying degrees. Hence, this research has provided researchers with a raw viewpoint on CRM performance studies and has enhanced the consciousness of CRM performance of Chinese SMEs. Thus, it can inspire efforts to develop more competitively in the Chinese marketing environment. Theoretically, the essential factors for CRM performance are CSR, customer retention, and customer trust acting as mediators. However, empirical data is helpful to support these relationships as well.

### *Significance of the Study*

Using RBV theory and trust theory as the guiding theories, this study examined the characteristics of customer retention, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and customer trust that led to the CRM performance of SMEs in Ningxia province, China. Customer trust was regarded as a mediator in this study. The current study will shed light on the relationships between the variables and what affects CRM performance in SMEs. As a result, this study offers fresh theoretical connections and empirical support for the interplay between four factors on the B2B side. This study adds to the existing literature in two key ways by examining the relationship between CRM performance, customer trust, and corporate social responsibility.

First, they ascertain whether the businesses can grow smoothly to win customers' trust. This implies that the Internet serves as the trading platform for commercial operations and that customer initiative is more important in trading behaviors (Al-Tit, 2020). Second, businesses can obtain the right mix of market variables, including cost, labor, capital, resources, and information, which rivals can quickly copy (Isik et al., 2010). If not, competitors cannot copy the best practices for corporate social responsibility and customer retention, and customer trust and CRM performance can be developed accordingly (Esmark et al., 2016). Consequently, CSR and customer retention are crucial for Chinese SMEs to attract new business and retain existing clients. CRM performance is therefore established by fostering customer trust. Lastly, the study's use of customer trust as a mediator was discussed. Prior research has demonstrated a direct correlation between customer trust and performance. Reimann et al. (2010) state that there is still a dearth of knowledge on the relationship between innovation, trust factors, and CRM performance measurements.

In order to determine if customer trust functions as a mediator between CSR, customer retention, and CRM performance, this study tried to investigate the impact of customer trust on CRM performance.

According to earlier studies, trust significantly impacts CRM performance (Gefen, 2000). Without trust, connections will ultimately fall apart and cease to function regularly. Trust is also essential for a successful and long-lasting customer relationship. Therefore, trust serves as the primary mediator in the communication between various parties, primarily leading to the development of relational cooperation (Aydin et al., 2005). This study offers empirical support for the theoretical connections between the variables looked at from a methodological standpoint. In order to do this, existing methods were modified to ensure they worked in the context of Chinese SMEs. Additionally, the measurements were validated and the proposed relationships between the variables were tested using the PLS-SEM path modeling. A methodical evaluation of the instruments used in this study may help future researchers develop more valid and dependable instruments.

Managers of SMEs gain from high CRM performance, but so do staff members and the community at large. According to Wolff and Pett (2006), improved CRM performance can increase a company's earnings, create more job opportunities, and boost the local economy. Therefore, achieving high CRM effectiveness is necessary, given organizations' limited resources (Uden et al., 2007), to target specific customers and gain their trust. It is anticipated that despite their modest size, managers of SMEs would be able to comprehend the importance of customer retention and corporate social responsibility. It is anticipated that this study will assist managers in adapting to the cutthroat business climate and improving CRM performance by implementing corporate social responsibility and customer retention. Because of the increased market homogenization of their goods and services, most SMEs will have to contend with more intense competition in this fast-paced development of the client economy. Thus, to further gain their customers' trust and enhance CRM performance, SMEs must investigate effective CRM tactics in the competitive market (Nasir, 2015). CRM performance success is fueled by customer trust. Long-term survival is unattainable for businesses that maintain the status quo without gaining the trust of their clients (Gao et al., 2017). This study is anticipated to help managers comprehend the buyer factors that support consumer trust within the company, enhancing CRM performance. Managers must prioritize CSR and customer retention if their organization hopes to compete for customers' trust in the marketplace. By doing this, CRM performance will be improved to make the companies more competitive, and customer trust can penetrate all company levels (Noor, 2012).

#### *Limitations and Future Directions*

With the development of information and network technology and the continuous improvement of customer demand, customer relationship management performance will continue to mature and develop in theory and application. Most studies have concentrated on independent relationships, such as CSR and CRM performance, customer retention and CRM performance, organizational absorptive capabilities and CRM performance, and customer trust and CRM performance. However, there are fewer studies on how customer trust affects its relationship as an intermediate variable (Hossain et al., 2021). In addition, many studies have explored the relationships between CRM performance and customers and conducted the research scope in B2C; this study still carries out research from the company side of B2B (Rathore et al., 2016). Thirdly, there is no classification of essential factors such as gender, age, and education of business managers, which may also affect the accuracy of the questionnaire results. Moreover, only 180 respondents participated in this study. Thus, the result cannot represent the entire population. Hence, future studies should enhance the number of respondents to participate in the future study. Finally, due to time constraints, the questionnaire was not precisely categorized according to the industry of the organizations, which may also lead to significant differences in the choice of answers by the managers. At the same time, for the future direction of development, the following aspects need to be studied:

Research on customer relationship management based on an e-commerce network platform. Due to the constraints of technology, law, environment, talent, and other issues, the development of e-commerce in China is still in the primary stage, and most enterprises' network platforms are still imperfect. With the further development and improvement of e-commerce, the popularization and application of enterprises on a large scale, and the improvement of personalization and diversification of customer demand, it is necessary to study the online management of various customers by various enterprises on e-commerce network platforms in the future—research on the indicator system of customer value. In the thesis, the

customer retention part needs to classify customers, and then the dynamic customer segmentation index system centered on customer value is particularly important. In the analysis of customer value for the enterprise, you can, through the RFM (Recency > Frequency > Monetary) fundamental indicators, the initial analysis of the value of customer transaction behavior while combining the enterprise's actual products and services to determine the classification criteria, to analyze the composition of customer value more accurately.

In conclusion, under the external environment of gradual popularization of the network and further deepening of e-commerce, the intensification of competition and the individualization, diversification, and maturity of customer demand require that the research on CRM performance be comprehensively weighed and considered. The sources of information, the way of thinking, and research work should stand in a systematic perspective, based on the network as a broad, developing vision to apply to the performance of CRM in specific enterprises. This is the only way to apply CRM performance to a specific organization.

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