

The Factors Influencing Service Quality on E-commerce Customer Satisfaction in China: The Mediating Role of Social Influence

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Abstract— *Electronic commerce began in the early 1990s and is a method of conducting business over computer networks. Almost anybody with a computer may use the Internet to access all the e-commerce features and purchase and sell goods and services, with the rise of new technologies poised to revolutionize business procedures, the Internet has become a vital component of society. E-commerce has made it easier for people to save time and reduce physical labor, unlike traditional commerce, which is carried out by physically getting the products. In the context of e-commerce in China, SERVQUAL Model components affect the quality of e-services provided by online shopping platforms, and the social influence of social networks, peer recommendations, and online reviews on individual behaviors and attitudes is crucial due to the collectivist culture, which frequently shapes decisions based on the opinions and actions of others. The results of this study will offer helpful details for e-commerce platforms seeking to expand customer social influence, improve service quality, and increase their satisfaction.*

Keywords— *Customer Expectations, Electronic Commerce, Social Influence, SERVQUAL Model, Technologies*

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, e-commerce has been influenced by changing industry trends, customer expectations, and information technology breakthroughs to ease online company demands (Attar et al., 2022). The Industry 4.0 Revolution, which involves advanced technologies in manufacturing and production management, has also contributed to the e-commerce evolution by enabling businesses to deliver faster, more personalized, and more efficient services. This digital transformation aligns with the growing demands of online shoppers who value convenience and flexibility in shopping without time or space constraints, as a result, enterprises strive to improve service quality to build stronger customer loyalty and encourage positive word-of-mouth (WOM) referrals (Attar et al., 2022).

The SERVQUAL model was introduced in 1985 by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry as a conceptual framework to measure service quality, factors like reliability, responsiveness, and empathy service, these dimensions of service quality influence customer satisfaction and are essential for ensuring that businesses retain their online shoppers by exceeding their expectations. This study aims to understand and address customer needs to remain central to providing reliable, responsive, and empathy e-commerce services, and make suppliers engage with their customers effectively at every touchpoint, building trust and influencing satisfaction. Besides, social influence enhances these relationships, as it fosters trust and shapes customer perceptions through shared experiences and recommendations (Zheng et al., 2020). For example, in China, where digital platforms and social commerce amplify customer feedback and

purchasing behavior, reinforcing the importance of service quality in achieving customer satisfaction.

1.1 Background of Research

China's e-commerce market has continued to expand significantly, maintaining its position as the largest online retail market globally. In 2023, China's online retail sales reached RMB 15.42 trillion (\$2.17 trillion), marking an 11% year-on-year increase, this accounted for 27.6% of the nation's total retail sales, with the e-commerce sector increasingly vital to driving consumption and economic growth (*China E-commerce Market Size | Mordor Intelligence*, 2024) (Times, 2024). The integration of online and offline platforms has also spurred new trends, including advancements in digital payment systems and innovations like live-stream e-commerce. Also, the transaction volume of major platforms has consistently risen, supported by leading companies such as Alibaba, JD.com, and Pinduoduo, Alibaba's gross merchandise volume (GMV) has consistently surpassed \$1 trillion annually, demonstrating the immense scale of e-commerce in China (*China E-commerce Market Size | Mordor Intelligence*, 2024). The rise of m-commerce through smartphones and payment tools like Alipay and WeChat Pay has played a crucial role in this growth, and e-commerce revenue has been further bolstered by cross-border transactions and the booming digital economy. According to data, sales of imported goods through domestic platforms amounted to RMB 290.34 billion in 2023 (Times, 2024). Moreover, online services such as tourism and entertainment also saw substantial growth, contributing significantly to the sector's overall expansion.

And the rapid growth of e-commerce in China highlights a shift in consumer behavior towards more digital and integrated shopping experiences, supported by innovations and a resilient digital infrastructure.

1.2 Problem Statement

The e-commerce industry in China has grown exponentially, with platforms competing to deliver exceptional services to attract and retain customers (Zheng et al., 2020). However, despite this rapid development, customer satisfaction remains a challenge due to inconsistencies in key service dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, and empathy. Many customers report dissatisfaction with unreliable service delivery, delays in addressing complaints, and a lack of personalized and empathetic interactions (Zheng et al., 2020), these shortcomings hinder the development of trust and loyalty, which are essential for the long-term success of online retailers. Although numerous studies have examined customer satisfaction in e-commerce, most focus on generalized factors without delving deeply into the impact

of specific service quality dimensions (Yang et al., 2024). Also, existing research predominantly emphasizes Western or global perspectives, offering limited insights into China's unique e-commerce landscape, which is influenced by cultural differences, and rapid technological innovation (Andonov et al., 2021). Moreover, the rapid evolution of e-commerce driven by trends such as influencer marketing, live-stream shopping, and social commerce, has introduced new avenues for social influence to shape customer expectations and satisfaction. But these dynamics remain underexplored, particularly in culturally distinct markets like China, where collectivist values may amplify the effects of social norms and peer behavior on perceptions of service quality (Zheng et al., 2020).

1.3 Research Gap

The research on customer satisfaction in e-commerce has advanced significantly, but there remain critical gaps in understanding how specific service quality factors such as reliability, responsiveness, and empathy influence customer satisfaction in the unique context of China's e-commerce market. While many studies employ broad frameworks like SERVQUAL Model to evaluate customer satisfaction, they often lack a detailed analysis of the individual contributions and interactions of these dimensions (Yang et al., 2024). For example, research on reliability typically focuses on general service consistency and timeliness but fails to address logistical challenges and regional disparities that are specific to the Chinese market (Shi & Shang, 2020), such as slower delivery times in rural areas compared to urban centers and the growing demand for same-day or next-day delivery. Similarly, while responsiveness is recognized as a key determinant of customer satisfaction, prior studies overlook the impact of real-time communication tools and innovations like 24/7 chatbots, which are widely used on Chinese platforms such as Alibaba and JD.com (Shi & Shang, 2020). Empathy, as another critical factor, has been widely studied in traditional retail environments, but there is little understanding of how it manifests in the highly automated and technology-driven customer service systems prevalent in Chinese e-commerce (Yang et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the majority of existing studies are conducted in Western contexts, which have different cultural, technological, and operational environments compared to China (Kumar & Kashyap, 2022). For example, Western consumer expectations and preferences for customer service differ significantly from those of Chinese consumers, who place a higher emphasis on trust, interpersonal harmony, and culturally driven shopping behaviors such as relying on peer reviews, and livestream shopping (Kumar & Kashyap, 2022). This lack of

contextualization limits the applicability of global research findings to the Chinese market, additionally, most studies analyze SERVQUAL factors simply and without exploring their combined effects on customer satisfaction, this fragmented approach fails to capture the synergistic relationships between these dimensions, such as how reliable deliveries might enhance perceptions of responsive service, or how empathy in complaint handling could offset minor service delays (Shi & Shang, 2020).

Another significant gap is the limited attention given to the consumer perspective in existing research, while many studies focus on operational factors like logistics, technology, and cost optimization, they often ignore to explore the expectations, perceptions, and experiences of consumers themselves (Shang et al., 2023). For example little is known about what Chinese consumers specifically expect in terms of reliability, responsiveness, and empathy, or how they perceive and prioritize these factors in their overall satisfaction with online shopping. Additionally, existing research seldom investigates how Chinese consumers respond to trade-offs between service quality and cost, such as choosing slower delivery for cheaper prices or tolerating minor service flaws in exchange for lower costs (Shang et al., 2023). Although studies have extensively investigated service quality's direct impact on customer satisfaction, limited research explores how social influence mediates these relationships by enhancing trust, perceived value, or emotional connection between consumers and e-commerce platforms (Zheng et al., 2020). This research aims to fill these gaps by providing actionable insights for improving customer satisfaction and enhancing service quality in China's rapidly evolving e-commerce industry.

1.4 Research Questions

What are the factors influencing e-commerce reliability service to customer satisfaction in China?

What are the criteria impacting e-commerce responsiveness service to customer satisfaction in China?

How does the e-commerce empathy service relate to customer satisfaction in China?

Does social influence mediate the relationships between reliability, responsiveness, and empathy service to e-commerce customer satisfaction in China?

1.5 Research Objectives

To identify the factors influencing e-commerce reliability service on customer satisfaction in China.

To examine the criteria impacting e-commerce responsiveness service on customer satisfaction in China.

To analyze how e-commerce empathy service relates to customer satisfaction in China.

To determine social influence mediates the relationships between reliability, responsiveness, and empathy services to e-commerce customer satisfaction in China.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Service Quality

Service quality is a critical determinant of success in e-commerce, as it directly impacts customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty (Ge et al., 2021). In e-commerce, service quality refers to the platform's ability to deliver efficient, reliable, and customer-focused services that meet or exceed customer expectations throughout the purchasing journey. The key dimensions of SERVQUAL Model in e-commerce include tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy services (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Platforms in China such as Pinduoduo, Douyin Shopping, and JD.com have prioritized service quality by integrating technology like artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, and live customer support to enhance service quality (Ge et al., 2021). However, customers in China are not only influenced by the direct experiences they have with a platform but also by social validation in the form of reviews, ratings, and recommendations, and this dynamic amplifies the importance of service quality, as customer perceptions are increasingly shaped by the collective feedback of other users.

For example in the Chinese e-commerce market, where platforms like JD.com and Taobao operate at high volumes, reliable services foster a sense of confidence among customers, which directly contributes to satisfaction and long-term engagement with the platform (Zhong & Moon, 2020). After that, Chinese consumers who are accustomed to instant communication via platforms like WeChat and Aliwangwang, expect highly responsive service, e-commerce platforms that prioritize timely support, and efficient problem resolution often achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction (Ge et al., 2021). Next, in the context of China where emotional connections and personalized experiences are highly valued, empathy plays a crucial role in differentiating platforms and fostering customer satisfaction. Platforms that understand and address the unique needs of their users create deeper emotional bonds, leading to increased customer loyalty (Zhong & Moon, 2020).

2.1.1 Reliability

Reliability is the ability of an e-commerce platform to consistently provide accurate and dependable services, such as delivering the correct products, ensuring timely

delivery, and fulfilling promises (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Research has consistently demonstrated that reliability is a crucial predictor of customer satisfaction in e-commerce (Miao et al., 2021), China with the rapid growth of e-commerce, platforms like Alibaba and JD.com have heavily invested in building systems that enhance the reliability of their services, improving customer satisfaction as a result (Miao et al., 2021). In this study, reliable services build trust, and customers who experience reliability are more likely to be satisfied, leading to repeat business and customer loyalty. Moreover, Chinese market where consumers demand quick and accurate services, reliable delivery systems have a strong positive impact on satisfaction, such as real-time tracking, automated warehouses, and AI-driven logistics has further boosted the perceived reliability of e-commerce platforms, enabling businesses to meet consumer demands efficiently while minimizing errors in the supply chain (Yuwen et al., 2022).

2.1.2 Responsiveness

Responsiveness involves the willingness and ability of a service provider to promptly address customer needs, including answering queries and solving problems in a timely manner (Parasuraman et al., 1985). In e-commerce, responsiveness is reflected in the speed of customer service interactions, the availability of support, and how quickly a platform can resolve issues (Yuwen et al., 2022).

With this research, a quick response to inquiries or problems is strongly correlated with customer satisfaction. In China, where digital communication is a central part of consumer behavior, customers highly value responsiveness, especially in resolving issues with online purchases. Platforms like Alibaba and JD.com have established 24/7 customer service systems and utilize AI chatbots to handle routine queries instantly, ensuring that customers receive timely support. Quick responses not only reduce frustration but also enhance trust in the platform, especially during high-demand periods like Double 11 (Singles' Day) or other shopping festivals (Miao et al., 2021).

2.1.3 Empathy

Empathy refers to the degree to which a service provider understands and cares for the individual needs of customers, often reflected in personalized services such as tailored recommendations and attentive communication (Parasuraman et al., 1985). In the e-commerce sector, empathy is demonstrated by providing customers with personalized shopping experiences, offering customer service that understands their specific needs, and establishing emotional connections through thoughtful interactions (Guan & Sun, 2023). Services that are

perceived as empathetic can significantly boost customer satisfaction by making customers feel valued and cared for (Parasuraman et al., 1985). In China, where customers expect personalized services and emotional engagement from brands, empathy is a strong driver of satisfaction. For example, offering proactive solutions during delivery delays or providing follow-up support to ensure satisfaction can greatly enhance loyalty (Guan & Sun, 2023). Furthermore, empathetic practices in e-commerce foster trust and emotional connection, encouraging repeat purchases and a positive word-of-mouth (WOM).

2.2 Social Influence

Social influence is the ways in which individuals' decisions are shaped by the opinions and behaviors of others, such as peer reviews, social media posts, and recommendations (Yang et al., 2021). In this study, social influence as mediator and it bridges the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction by amplifying or modifying how customers perceive and value these services. For example, reliable service builds trust, but social influence, through positive online reviews or word-of-mouth (WOM) acts as an additional layer of validation. Then, responsiveness can be evaluated by looking at the speed and effectiveness of service providers in addressing customer needs, social influence helps in this context by allowing consumers to gauge the quality of customer service through reviews or social media. Moreover, empathy in e-commerce can be amplified by social influence, when consumers see that others have had positive, personalized experiences with a brand, they are more likely to feel that the service provider will meet their emotional and practical needs (Yang et al., 2021). Moreover, social media posts, online reviews, and influencer endorsements help create a sense of community, further validating the empathetic nature of the service and leading to higher satisfaction.

2.3 Customer Satisfaction

SERVQUAL Model dimensions collectively reflect the level to which platform can meet or exceed customer expectations at different stages of the purchase process, from product selection to post-purchase support, and they have an impact on customer satisfaction in e-commerce (Qing et al., 2023). Social influence plays a particular role in the Chinese e-commerce industry, as websites like Taobao, JD.com, and Douyin Shopping mostly rely on user-generated content and social interactions (Zheng et al., 2020). In addition to the immediate results of high-quality services, the views and experiences of the whole consumer community also have significant impacts on customer satisfaction (Qing et al., 2023). This dynamic highlights the interplay between the service quality, social influence,

and customer satisfaction, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding customer behavior in e-commerce.

III. HYPOTHESIS

H1: Reliability service positively influences customer satisfaction in e-commerce in China.

H2: Responsiveness service positively influences customer satisfaction in e-commerce in China.

H3: Empathy service positively influences customer satisfaction in e-commerce in China.

H4: Social influence mediates the relationship between reliability service and e-commerce customer satisfaction in China.

H5: Social influence mediates the relationship between responsiveness service and e-commerce customer satisfaction in China.

H6: Social influence mediates the relationship between empathy service and e-commerce customer satisfaction in China.

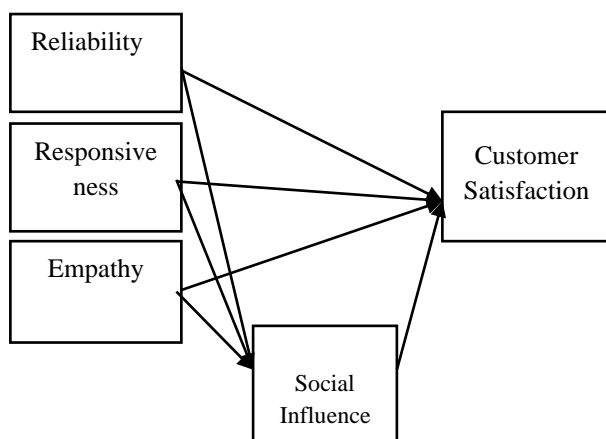


Fig 3.1: Conceptual Framework

IV. CONCLUSION

Customers are more likely to be satisfied with platforms that provide excellent service quality and effectively leverage social influence mechanisms in China's quickly changing e-commerce industry. In addition to enhancing the benefits of high-quality services, social influence also helps customers feel more connected to one another and builds trust. This is especially important in a market as highly technological and socially connected as China. Platforms may strengthen relationships with customers and keep a competitive edge by concentrating on providing reliable, responsive, and empathetic services while actively interacting with users through social media and user-generated content. To increase consumer satisfaction and loyalty, this study emphasizes the necessity for e-

commerce companies to combine providing excellent customer service with strategies that build on social impact.

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