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An Empirical Research on the Evaluation System of

Cross-border E-commerce

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Abstract: With the development of e-commerce, abroad online shopping has become popular in China. However, as a newly emerged form of shopping, incomplete information and lacking of professional evaluation on abroad online shops cost consumers a lot in searching, exploring and comparison. Meanwhile, cross-border e-commerce platforms do not know for sure how to attract abroad customers effectively. In this research, we try to establish assessment criteria for cross-border e-commerce from the perspective of customers, combined with experts' opinion. Firstly, based on participant experiencing nearly 100 abroad websites and content analysis on consumer review, we generalize 4 main criteria and 16 sub-criteria that may influence consumers' satisfaction. Then, based on an expert interview and Analytic Hierarchy Process, we found that the most weighted factors successively are commodity quality, relative price, deliver speed and payment methods.

Keywords: Cross-border E-commerce, Evaluation System, participant-experiencer, Analytic Hierarchy Process

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, more and more Chinese consumers are shopping overseas via Internet, that is, searching for commodities and ordering on abroad online shops, paying by international payment card and goods being delivered from abroad^[1]. Consumers can purchase successfully only need to know a little English and a valid payment card. The prospect will be even cheerful if RMB payment and direct delivery to China being accepted by more and more online shops. However, as a newly emerged form of shopping, although more risky than domestic online shopping, there is lack of a professional risk evaluation mechanism for abroad online shops. Consumers have no choice but to gather experience from purchase due to incomplete information. Thus may cost consumers a huge energy and money in searching, exploring and comparison. In this research, through participant observation and expert group interview, we try to establish a systematic evaluation system for cross-border e-commerce to improve consumers' experience in finding a proper website.

Otherwise than using adoption theory, we establish evaluation index based on satisfaction theory to cover complete purchase procedure. There are a great deal of researches on online shopping satisfaction, yet few of them are concerned with Chinese customers' satisfaction on abroad shops. Lee^[6] put forward a four-index model to evaluate online shopping satisfaction, including price, service on the website and during purchase, after service. Cho and Park^[4] regard product information, promotion, waiting time and cost of delivery and payment as the most important factors. Devaraj^[5] emphasizes price, promise, practicality and reliability. Ponnavolu and Anderson^[3] stress on feature of the website and products, range of choices, after service and virtual community. Zha and Wang^[7] give credits to perceived security, tailored service, quality guarantee and ease of operations. Guo Haibo^[8] adds to the literature with remedying improper service and privacy protection. Chang, Liu and Yan^[9] further point out that completeness, offline service and compensation are equally important. Xie, Xi and Wei^[11] proves the value of payment for delivery, safety and privacy protection, customer service, response time, etc. However, most of the satisfaction factors in previous literature was focused more on online features and coming from customers' afterward statements, which may be distorted or filtered by thinking. In this research, we would like to get some direct and whole-process experience on cross-border online shopping.

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In the second section, we establish an evaluation index tree based on literature review and participant experiencing nearly 100 abroad websites by a team. In the third section, more than 20 experts were invited to rate the evaluation factors. The weights were calculated via Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP)^[2] on the basis of rating. In the last section, management advices were drawn from the implications of factors and their weights.

2. A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON EVALUATION INDEX

2.1 Methodology

An investigation team was recruited to participant observe the overseas online shops and experience the whole shopping process. Observation in online research is different from observing people in their nature offline settings. Internet provides a virtual social interaction rather than only text on screen, thus online observation involves not only watching text and images on a computer screen, but also participant observation. However, Walstrom^[15] uses "participant-experiencer" to replace "participant-observer" because the researcher has no opportunity to "being there" and directly observe the behavior and living environment of people being studied, but can experience what it is like to participate in the online activities.

All the 5 members are college students without difficulty in browsing English websites. After being trained on participant experience method, they were required to browse 100 US online shopping websites to purchase one representative product in each website. The investigation lasted for one month. 54 purchases in total were successfully completed out of 100 websites, eight of which were shipped directly while the rest adopted transshipment. To avoid observer's bias, we use content analysis on Chinese customers' online review on cross-border online shopping to back up the participant experience result.

Because we focus on the shopping experiences on websites, the data of their experiences were recorded in the form of "thinking aloud" and "observation log". Observation log objectively records all the key process and result of shopping. Thinking aloud records what experiencers perceive and feel during the process, which is a popular method in online usability testing based on Ericsson and Simon's Model of verbalization^[16]. Ericsson and Simon suggested that verbalization will decreasingly reliable with interference caused by non-task-related processing. Thus, we only collect "Hard" verbal data, the verbalizations which need not be transformed or transformed before they can be verbalized without additional cognitive processes such as filtering process. During the investigation, we encourage the participant to speak constantly "as if alone in the room", and the only interaction with he is the reminder informing the participant that he falls silent (perhaps 15–60 seconds).

2.2 Qualitative data analysis

All the experiences and review were analyzed using typical term coding and frequency statistics. On the basis of literature review, the typical experiences were terms in Table 1 and were generalized into four groups: searching, payment, delivery and after service, either in positive side or in negative side.

Dimensions	Positive experience	Frequency	Negative experience	Frequency
Searching criteria	Big discount	12	Fewer selection	6
	Large select range of commodities	8	Higher price	6
	Good experience of searching	7	General quality	3
	High quality	5	Poor aesthetic design	2
	GST refund	2	Late response	2
			Complicated marked price	2
			Low speed of browsing	1
Payment	Accept multiple currencies	6	Credit card payment failure	14
criteria	Charging after delivery	5	Not smoothly in payment	10
	Accept other countries' credit card	3	Not accept Chinese credit card	9
	Easy and quick payment	2	Cannot fill the billing address	9

Dimensions	Positive experience	Frequency	Negative experience	Frequency
	Accept purchase through Borderfree	2	Alipay payment failure	7
	Accept Union Pay	1	Paypal payment failure	4
	Need mobile phone test code for payment	1	Order being canceled after payment	3
Delivery criteria	Quick shipment	22	Cannot inquire the order situation	8
	Free shipment above certain amount	16	Slow delivery	7
	Multiple choices of delivery methods	13	Slow shipment	4
	Easy return	11	Difficult in return	2
	Notice before arrival	4	Difficult in cancel order	1
	Order situation informed on website	3	Limited in distribution area	1
	Shipment date can be selected	2	Not deliver to China	1
	Low delivery fee	1	Require sign on delivery sheet	1
After service criteria	Good manner of customer service	12	Low efficient of customer service	10
	Cope better with claim	8	Cope worse with claim	10
	High efficient of customer service	7	Not provide Chinese customer service	4
	Provide Chinese customer service	3	Bad manner of customer service	3
			Contact information not clear	3
			Poor quality goods being delivered	3
			Complicate exchange and refund	2
			No after-sale maintenance	1

2.3 Evaluation criteria for cross-border e-commerce

Having generalized customers' experience on cross-border online shopping, we get 16 factors may influence the evaluation on cross-border shopping websites, which could be categorized into 4 dimensions.

2.3.1 Searching criteria (H1)

Comparative Price (h1), Selection Range (h2), Searching experience (h3) and Product Quality (h4) are the most frequently considered factors when Chinese consumers search and select commodities.

"Big discount" and "higher price" are most frequently mentioned in our investigation. Lee^[6], Devara^{i[5]}, Cho and Park^[4] all proposed comparatively lower price as a crucial factor in evaluating online customer satisfaction. In our investigation, it is popular for websites to provide 10% to 20% discount for newly registered members or shipment free within US if purchasing over a certain volume. The actual price after discount is the overriding criteria when consumers face several options. For example, Carter's manages to incentivize repetitive buying via competitive prices and rebate upon a certain amount ordering. Nevertheless, some websites adopt price discrimination on Chinese customers or pre-collect customs, which leads to the shrinking of purchase.

Selection range is the assortment or a range of goods available from a shop. Ponnavolu and Anderson^[3], Ganesh et al. ^[13]maintain that merchandise variety is important factors influencing consumers' satisfaction. This is further supported by our investigation. "Large select range of commodities" and "Fewer selection" are frequently appeared in the feedback of consumers. Abundant commodities, wide ranges of product variety, high proportion of well-known brands provide consumers for one-stop shopping, which providing wider choices and enabling them to seek qualified goods in a single website. This also helps consumers saving freight rate.

Terms of "Good experience of searching", "Poor aesthetic design", "Late response", "Complicated marked price", "Low speed of browsing" all refer to user experience of website. Devaraj^[5], Cho and Park^[4] value the impact of the ease of use on satisfaction. Zha & Wang^[7], Guo^[8], Chang et al.^[9] highlight the role of web design and functions. The aesthetic design and ease to operate directly shape user experience, which will enhance consumer's willingness of repetitive purchase. Otherwise, if the website complicates the purchase procedures and has no clear guidance, consumers may click away to other websites. The layout and presentation

of commodities largely influences user experience, especially in the case of clothing. In addition, the speed of downloading webpages overseas and whether they need a VPN affect the searching experience to a large extent.

Zha & Wang^[7], Guo^[8], Hao & Zhu^[10] and Tony Ahn et al.^[14] point out the influence of product quality on consumers' satisfaction. Compared to traditional shopping, online shopping risks more on product quality. Therefore if websites can offer products as descriptions, flawless and even better than competitors', consumers may find their expectations well fulfilled. On the opposite, if consumers find goods received different from what have been described online, they tend to return it, not come back again or even spread negative word-of-mouth.

2.3.2 Payment criteria (H2)

Availability of Payment Methods (h5), Ease of Payment (h6), Payment Security (h7), and Billing Address (h8) are important factors Chinese consumers considered in payment for abroad online shopping.

Cho& Park^[4] maintain that payment methods will influence online shoppers' choice especially in the context of abroad online websites. For Chinese customers, they were accustomed to the wide choices of payments methods on jd.com and taobao.com, which easy to shift to alternatives while payment failure. Many domestic payment tools, such as Alipay and UnionPay, cannot be accepted abroad or frequent payment failure offten worried Chinese consumers. In our investigation, terms of "Accept multiple currencies", "Accept Union Pay", "Not accept Chinese credit card" are often mentioned. Little choices of payment methods and greater risks in abroad online payment increase the break of purchase.

The easiness and convenience of payment stand as another factor influencing online shopping. Terms of "Charging after delivery", "Easy and quick payment", "Not smoothly in payment", "Payment failure" all indicate that easy of payment serves as an important factor. Payment on abroad website seems more complexity than payment in Chinese shops because they often need fill in billing address. But the simplification of payment in repetitive purchase will help to win hearts of Chinese consumers.

Many literature, such as Xie et al. ^[11], Guo^[8], Ganesh et al. ^[13], Tony Ahn et al. ^[14], put forward the necessity of security in online shopping. Specifically, few customers will take time to carefully read information concerning safety and privacy policy. Thus most consumers don't clear about the difference among websites as for the guarantee of safety. However, customers will still strive to seek consumers' review or other cues to judge payment reliability. For example, they will notice that if it "need mobile phone test code for payment".

Content analysis on Chinese customers' review shows that "cannot fill the Chinese billing address" break the transaction. Different from overseas website, there needs not billing address for online payments in China. If China address cannot be compatible with the pre-set address selections of the website, some may select transship or make up billing addresses, which increases the risks of "orders being cancelled after payment", most consumers choose to halt shopping immediately. So whether abroad website being friendly to Chinese credit card and billing address serves as a concern of Chinese consumers.

2.3.3 Delivery criteria (H3)

Delivery Modes (h9), Delivery Speed (h10), Products Tracking (h11), Delivery Terms (h12) are factors Chinese consumers worry about when they face cross-border distribution problems.

In the very beginning, goods being shopped online have to be transshipped. In this case, responsibilities of websites end when the goods arrive at transshipping places. As overseas shopping becomes popular, many US websites provide direct delivery to China. "Limited in distribution area", "Not deliver to China", "Shipment date can be selected" being frequently mentioned by Chinese consumers, indicate that more and more people concern on whether cross-border shopping websites could provide more delivery choice and wide range of destinations.

Cho& Park^[4], Hao& Zhu^[10], Tony Ahn et al. ^[14]think of delivery speed as an important factor for online shopping. In our investigation, Chinese customers incline to value the high speed of delivery and often complain about the slow shipment. Sometimes consumers may endure long distance shipping for products that are not in

urgent need. But still, delivery efficiency serves as a key aspect for competition among websites.

In our investigation, "Notice before arrival", "Order situation informed on website", "Cannot inquire the order situation" are often mentioned. If products have to go through a long distance to arrive at consumers, a products tracking system will enhance the sense of security, especially for Chinese consumers, who has familiar with tracking their packages at any time. When it comes to shopping overseas, provided that consumers invest more time and money on the transaction, a reliable products tracking system is required.

Delivery terms on cross-border transaction are different from domestic ones because of the complex import and export regulations and customs. Cho& Park^[4] have maintained that expenses of delivery directly impact purchases. Delivery cost increases for complex customs clearance. Also, restrictions on purchasing special items such as lotion, fragrance and milk occur because of difficulties in shipping abroad. Some websites refuse to provide direct delivery for these items. Consumers have to refer to transshipment or abort the transaction. Thus, terms such as "Free shipment above certain amount", "Low delivery fee", "Easy/Difficult in return", "Difficult in cancel order", "Require sign on delivery sheet" indicate that delivery terms will affect user satisfaction.

2.3.4 After service criteria (H4)

Service Manner (h13), Claim Settlement (h14), Service Efficiency (h15), Service language (h16) are major factors Chinese consumers concerning when they thinking about the customer service of abroad websites.

Xie, Xi & Wei^[11] propose that customer service is a major factor affecting online chopping choices. Tony Ahn et al. ^[14] specify 6 factors such as reliability, confidence, empathy, follow-up service, competence in customer service quality will affect online purchasing. Han^[12] believes that claim settlement is a crucial component shaping the satisfaction level of customers.

In the context of e-commerce, customers may understand products disaccording with described, however, they would not tolerate inconvenience of returning unsatisfactory goods or irresponsive of service center. Amazon is widely praised for its high quality customer service by promising to resend package immediately and unconditionally. The more customers' benefits are protected, the more repetitive purchases will be incurred. It may be particularly difficult for Chinese customers to bargain with customer service. Thus, cordial and empathy attitudes of service representatives, and add Chinese as service language, turn out to enhancing customer loyalty. Feedbacks from abroad online shopping forum show that Chinese consumers would rather sacrifice other interest to shop in websites with Chinese service language because that may enhance its perceived reliability.

According to feedbacks from Chinese consumers, main reasons of refusing to claims include high freight rate caused by long distance, special goods excluded from return, the expiry of transaction, goods damaged by trans shippers (or the damage of goods can be identified as under the responsibility of websites), etc. In absence of related laws and regulations, abroad websites refuse to shoulder any responsibilities and let customers to pay the risk. Therefore the ease of claim settlement largely affects how abroad shoppers evaluate websites.

In our investigation, websites differ in the complexity of return policies and procedures. Some websites agree to refund only after returned products arrives without damage. Some websites specify the necessity of providing pictures or writing an e-mail detailing specification. Some websites provide free reverse delivery services while in some websites customers have to wait for months to received refunds. Therefore, apart from agreeing to accept customer claims, websites should also pay attention to the efficiency of settlement.

3. A QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH ON EVALUATION WEIGHTS

To evaluate the weights of factors discussed above, we use AHP (Analytic Hierarchy Process) analysis, a method of measurement used to derive ratio scales from paired comparisons in multilevel hierarchic structures^[17]. 26 respondents were invited to weigh priorities for each pair of main criteria by judging their relative importance based on the normal scale of AHP, and then compare the sub-criteria that belong to each main criterion. Among these respondents, there were five industry experts from certain consultancies that

focused on the industry research, four experienced staff working for Chinese B2B platform open to the overseas market, two operational managers from transshipment companies and 15 consumers randomly picked up from large overseas online shopping forum. The data was put into an AHP software, Expert Choice. The results come up with individual weights of each criterion in comparison to the goal of the evaluative system (see Figure 1).

Firstly, the average values of each pairwise comparison of the 4 main criteria are put into Expert Choice.

Secondly, we compare the relative importance of main criteria with the focus of this research: Chinese consumers' evaluation on abroad online shopping. It turns out the individual weights of each criterion: H1 is 0.341, H2 is 0.302, H3 is 0.234, H4 is 0.122. And the inconsistency = $0.05 \le 0.1$, which is acceptable.

Thirdly, the first two steps repeated for the sub-criteria in comparison to their main criteria. Then it turns out the independent weights of each sub-criterion.

Sub-criteria of H1: h1=0.319, h2 =0.109, h3 =0.101, h4 =0.471. Inconsistency = $0.02 \leq 0.1$, acceptable.

Sub-criteria of H2: h5 =0.385, h6=0.143, h7 =0.350, h8 =0.121. Inconsistency=0.10≤ 0.1,acceptable.

Sub-criteria of H3: h9=0.260, h10 = 0.353, h11=0.218, h12=0.169. Inconsistency $=0.08 \le 0.1$, acceptable.

Sub-criteria of H4: h13 =0.263, h14= 0.312, h15=0.288, h16 =0.138. Inconsistency = $0.02 \le 0.1$, acceptable.

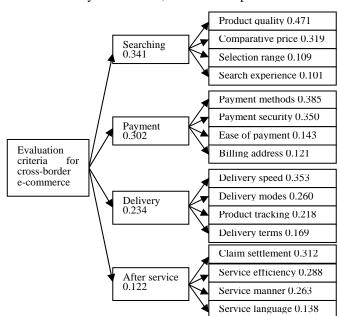


Figure 1. AHP results of evaluation factors' weights

4. CONLUSIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

Given the results of AHP analysis, the ranking of main criteria are selection (0.341), payment (0.302), delivery (0.234) and after service (0.122). This is readily understandable. As the original intention of Chinese consumers shopping overseas arises from the fact that domestic shops cannot meet their demands like price, quality, etc., the choice for more and better is the primary motivation of cross-border online shopping. Therefore, factors affecting searching and selecting websites and products turn out to be the most weighted factor in the evaluative system. Following that, payment is relative important for Chinese cross-border shoppers, because payment in overseas websites is much more complicate and risky than that of domestic. Over-complication of payment, low security situation as well as weak friendliness to Chinese payment tools often contribute to the failure of the transaction. Moreover, more and more websites provide direct delivery to China and third-party transshipment is also more and more convenient. That explains why it is less weighted. The comparatively low weight of after service is worth attention. As overseas complain and product return require higher input in communication and money, Chinese consumers would rather accept than claim if there is no obvious problem. This is the main reason why Chinese consumers pay less attention to after service problems.

In addition, it is interesting and reasoning that the ranking of 4 dimensions is consistent with the online shopping sequence. For many Chinese consumers, online shopping overseas is still new and their judgments are largely limited by their familiarity with the process. In general, only by completing the first several steps can they be allowed to move forward. While in this process, a host of consumers break off their transactions for various reasons, leading to the fact that consumers tend to be more familiar with the first two stages, searching and payment. That partly explains why interviewees tend to give more weights to the first two factors.

The sequence of searching sub-criteria' weights is Product Quality (0.471), Comparative Price (0.319), Selection Range (0.109), and Ease of Shopping(0.101). Purposefulness is the one characteristic of overseas online shoppers. Shoppers choose overseas websites mainly due to higher quality and lower price. Thus consumers are more concentrated on searching targeted products with relative low price than variety range of products or the ease felt at shopping. Therefore, quality and price are more weighed than other factors. Apart from that, because the most popular products on overseas websites are maternal and child products, cosmetics and clothes, which are directly related to health of consumers, online shoppers tend to require more on quality than price.

The sequence of four payment sub-criteria' weights show that diversity and safety are the most important factors considered for payment. Despite the fact that almost all cross-border shopping websites accept Chinese credit cards, the friendliness of Chinese credit card companies to abroad websites needs improvement for the frequently occurred order cancellation caused by money transfer failure and unsuccessful verification of cards. This makes consumers' desire for more payment methods available to choose, such as third-party payment, to improve payment experience and successful rate. At the same time, payment security is also largely valued as perceived risk seems higher in overseas money transfer and Chinese consumers always feel it harder to claim refund from overseas transactions. By contrast, ease of payment is not as highly valued as security due to the conflict between complexity of payment and payment security. Oversimplified payment procedures may make consumers worry about the security. Similarly, as consumers are willing to endure risks involved with faulty in billing address or using trans-shippers' address, they focus more on transaction successfulness than the accuracy of the billing information, thus the lower weight is given.

As for delivery sub-criteria, speed is the primary sub-criterion. Consumers are more concerned with how fast they can receive the expected goods. Mode of delivery comes at the second place and is weighed higher than mean value. Consumers tend to expect being offered with direct delivery compared with transshipment. Product tracking is comparatively less weighed but still at around mean value, revealing that its importance is slighted lower than the average in the eyes of consumers. That is to say Chinese consumers have a high level of tolerance on risks of unclearing about products' logistic situation. However the weight given to delivery term is more interesting. Firstly, indifference in delivery freight constitutes one of the reasons for the lower weight as most US websites tend to offer similar freight for different shipping time. Secondly, although websites differ in tax and customs duty, but we can assume that Chinese consumers can not perceive and understand the nuanced difference due to language barriers and lacking of professional knowledge. The professional descriptions and complex calculation methods lead consumers to avert their attention away from this factor.

Regarding to after service sub-criteria, Claim Settlement (0.312), Service Efficiency (0.288) and Service Manner (0.263) are more heavily weighed than Service Language (0.138). It is notable that due to time lag, evaluations on after service sub-criteria tend to be more impacted by afterward experience, word-of-mouth review than real-time shopping experience. Claim Settlement being given the most weight results from consumers' inclination to reduce risks involved in returns and exchanges of commodities. Service Efficiency comes second in place as consumers are not willing to wait one week for their request to be processed or two months for refund. The weight of service manner is a little lower but still higher than mean value, which shows that the influence of customer service's attitudes is significant but still limited. That partly stems from the fact that most overseas online shoppers have a certain level of English frequency to communicate and transact on their own and would rather not appeal to call center for assistant. By comparison, the provision of Chinese language service is fairly lower weighed, which shows that language assistance in Chinese is not as crucially important as other factors.

Due to limits in time and fund, this research is unable to apply the evaluation system to rate abroad websites to testify the criteria and weights. It is expected that research in the future can invite a panel of experts

to rate 100 overseas shopping websites based on the system, then a benchmark website can be identified and the value of the research can be further explored. In addition, to testify the rationale and accuracy of the weights assigned, top websites with highest score evaluated with our criteria and weights can be compared with their actual popular situation, measuring with websites' traffic or transaction volume. Whatever method might be adopted, it will add to the value of the research as long as the weights can be further testified and improved.

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