



# Research on the Mechanism of Employee Customer Orientation on Return Behavior Based on E-commerce Platforms: The Mediation Role of Logistics Service Quality

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**Abstract.** With the rapid development of e-commerce, online shopping has gradually become mainstream, making people's lives more convenient and efficient, but it is also accompanied by the emergence of new problems. For example, merchants may send the wrong goods, delivery may not arrive on time, and consumers may not receive good feedback from merchants when they need after-sales service, all of which can lead to a continuous increase in return rates and the occurrence of return behavior. Meanwhile, in the e-commerce environment, competition among enterprises is becoming increasingly fierce, and the return policy for online shopping is becoming more relaxed, such as the seven-day no-reason return policy, which makes consumers' desire to buy open, but it also increased the return rate and operating costs to a certain extent. However, good logistics service quality can eliminate consumers' intention of returning goods to a certain extent and effectively slow down consumers' return behavior. Therefore, On the basis of summarizing existing literature and combining with the current development situation of e-commerce enterprises, this study builds a relationship model of employee customer orientation, logistics service quality and consumer return behavior. The empirical analysis shows that: (1) employee-customer orientation has a significant impact on the quality of logistics service. The stronger the employee-customer orientation is, the higher the quality of logistics service is. (2) Employee-customer orientation has a significant impact on the quality of logistics service, and the stronger the employee-customer orientation is, the higher the quality of logistics service is. (3) The quality of logistics service has a significant impact on the return behavior of consumers, and the higher the quality of logistics service, the weaker the return behavior of consumers. (4) Logistics service quality plays an intermediary role in the relationship between employee customer orientation and consumer return behavior. This study is helpful for all e-commerce enterprises to better improve their service quality, improve customer satisfaction, so as to maintain competitive advantages in the fierce competition.

**Keywords:** E-commerce · customer orientation · return behavior · logistics service quality

## 1 Introduction

According to the 51st Statistical Report on the Development of Internet in China released by the China Internet Network Information Center, as of December 2022, the number of Internet users in China is 1.067 billion, an increase of 3.4% over the previous year, and the Internet penetration rate is 75.6%. Among them, 759 million urban netizens and 308 million rural netizens.

With the rapid development of the Internet, online shopping has gradually taken over the mainstream, and the e-commerce model is constantly maturing. According to the statistical data of complaints accepted by the China Consumers Association in the Analysis of Complaints Accepted by the National Consumer Association in 2022, the after-sales service problems accounted for 33.73% of the 1151912 consumer complaints accepted, an increase of 2.19% compared with the proportion of after-sales service complaints in 2021, and the complaint data of the service category showed that the number of complaints about Internet services ranked in the top three. Among specific service complaints, the number of operational internet complaints ranks first. From this, it can be seen that there is still a lot of room for improvement in operational internet services, and consumers have put forward higher requirements for service quality. Therefore, how to create value for consumers has become the core of competition among e-commerce enterprises. It is worth studying how e-commerce enterprises should optimize after-sales service and improve logistics service quality.

In the e-commerce environment, high return rates affect consumers' overall impression of e-commerce enterprises, and the high return phenomenon has led to sales difficulties for e-commerce enterprises. Compared to traditional shopping methods, online shopping cannot provide consumers with physical touch and on-site experience. They can only grasp the information and characteristics of products through the pictures, text, and videos published by merchants. In order to make them more beautiful, most of the pictures and videos are processed, which cannot truly restore the authenticity of the product. Moreover, some merchants exaggerate the effectiveness and quality of the product in order to achieve higher sales, this leads to consumers receiving products that are not within their expected effects. If consumers encounter problems after receiving the product and cannot find a solution from the merchant, it can lead to some consumers' return behavior, thereby increasing the sales cost of the merchant and reducing its operating profit.

This study analyzes the correlation between employee customer orientation, logistics service quality, and return behavior. On the one hand, it fills the gap in previous research that only analyzed from the perspective of merchants or consumers, and on the other hand, it enriches the content of service quality theory, providing certain reference for future research by scholars.

In addition, this study investigates the impact of employee customer orientation on consumer return behavior, starting from several logistics service quality evaluation indicators to help businesses identify problems in the return service process, and reduce return behavior by improving employee service attitude and return logistics service system. Not only is it beneficial for merchants to identify problems in the logistics

service process and improve service quality, but it also has practical significance for improving the e-commerce business environment and enhancing the social responsibility of enterprises.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Customer Orientation

The term ‘customer orientation’ was first proposed by Saxe and Weitz (1982) [1], and in recent years, exploration around customer orientation and its related theories has received increasing attention. Research has shown that most companies that adopt a customer-oriented approach can provide customers with a better experience.

Wang Jianzhong et al. (2015) [2] mentioned in their research that customer orientation is the ability to prioritize enhancing customer value within a company’s prescribed strategy, conducting research on consumer preferences and behaviors, continuously developing new products, and adopting special marketing methods to meet customer requirements. Jiao Wenyu (2021) [3] stated in his research that customer orientation refers to the ability of a company to focus on how to meet customer needs when setting goals. Deng Fanxing (2022) [4] believes in his study of the impact of customer orientation on service innovation in internet enterprises that customer orientation refers to enterprises standing on the customer’s side, actively understanding customer preferences, existing or potential customer needs from the market, and generating new services, thereby enhancing customer value and other trends. Based on the research results of the aforementioned scholars, this article believes that customer orientation is to communicate with customers with a good service attitude, including meeting their needs as much as possible, in order to improve customer satisfaction.

### 2.2 Return Behavior

Returning goods is accompanied by shopping and is a behavior of consumers to protect their legitimate rights and interests. Usually, a return is a promise made by a merchant to a consumer. After a period of time, when the relevant conditions are met, the purchased product can be returned in full or at a discounted price.

In terms of existing research, the academic community has not provided a clear distinction between returns and return behavior. Zhang Jiedi (2017) [5] treated return and refund behavior equally in her research, believing that return behavior is when a merchant promises to consumers that they can return the purchased goods to the merchant within a certain period of time after purchasing the goods and meet the relevant conditions. Kang and Johnson (2009) [6] argue that return behavior is a part of consumers’ post purchase behavior, which can be considered as the process of comparing the actual purchase results with pre purchase expectations. Consumers who are dissatisfied with the difference between the actual results and expectations return the product to the retailer. Zhang Shengliang (2016) [7] believes that return behavior refers to the behavior of consumers returning a product to the merchant after purchasing it for various reasons, but ultimately not consuming the product. Based on the research results of the aforementioned scholars,

this article believes that return behavior refers to the behavior of consumers returning goods to the merchant due to dissatisfaction with the product itself or the merchant's service after purchasing the goods.

### **2.3 Logistics Service Quality**

The "7RS" theoretical viewpoint proposed by Russ and Perrault (1974) [8] was the earliest to elaborate on the quality of logistics services. This theory believes that the purpose of logistics service quality is to maximize the value of goods and optimize consumer service experience, and to meet the personalized needs of consumers to the greatest extent. That is, in the process of serving customers, using appropriate methods to provide rational services to customers in designated places and times, and innovating value in the service process. Later, the focus of research shifted, with many scholars focusing more on the perception of consumer service experience, resulting in a change in the definition and interpretation of logistics service quality.

Foreign research groups Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry et al. (1985) [9] believe that service quality is the difference between customer expectations and the service they experience, and customer expectations are easily influenced by multiple factors. Xie Guangying (2016) [10] believes in his research that service quality refers to the comparative evaluation of customers' perceived and expected services. In his view, service quality is not only the result, but also the process of service delivery. Wang Qiang (2018) [11] believes in his research that logistics service quality refers to the service received when customers return goods on the platform due to the fact that the goods, they purchase do not meet the expected demand. Zhang Qi (2019) [12] believes that the definition of logistics service quality should be able to self-evaluate the services provided from the perspective of logistics enterprises, in order to improve the problems that arise in their transportation, distribution, and other links.

The SERVQUAL model is currently the most widely used service quality model, targeting logistics service customers. It evaluates the gap between customer experience and service quality expectations, reflecting people's attitude towards overall service quality. The service quality of this model is mainly evaluated by 22 indicators in five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. It can have a significant effect in measuring customer perceived satisfaction and more fully reflect customers' real experience and feelings in reverse logistics service quality.

### **2.4 Relationship Between Customer Orientation and Return Behavior**

Due to the information asymmetry of online shopping, there is a certain gap between the actual product situation and consumer demand. Merchants may send the wrong goods, delivery may not arrive on time, and consumers may not receive good feedback from merchants when they need after-sales service, all of which can lead to a continuous increase in return rates and the occurrence of return behavior. If a consumer returns a product when it does not meet their expectations, the service provider can provide effective advice and assistance from the consumer's perspective, and communicate with the consumer with a good service attitude, which can bring a good feeling to the consumer and to some extent affect their judgment on whether to continue the return behavior.

Liu Xiaoyu et al. (2021) [13] found through research that emotions in employee customer interaction are very important, and the service status of employees can affect their service decisions and consumer decision-making behavior. Therefore, in the process of employees serving consumers, good service attitudes can help consumers have positive emotions and make new decisions. In the process of consumers making new judgments, there is a possibility of canceling the return behavior. Zhang Chen hui (2021) [14] stated in his research that consumers value service attitudes and other shopping experiences during the service process, and providing differentiated services to different consumers can have an impact on their purchasing decisions. Fang Yuan et al. (2021) [15] confirmed in his research that consumers' perceived quality of service has a significant positive impact on their decision-making behavior. Therefore, this study suggests that the stronger the customer orientation of employees in e-commerce enterprises, the more consumers will feel the sincerity and respect of the merchant, resulting in a better sense of experience and discouraging the idea of returns. Therefore, this study proposes hypothesis 1:

**H1:** Employee customer orientation has a significant impact on consumer return behavior. The stronger employee customer orientation, the weaker consumer return behavior.

## 2.5 Relationship Between Customer Orientation and Logistics Service Quality

In the process of serving consumers, enterprise employees have a good service attitude and can consider consumer needs more, which can bring better service experience to consumers and improve service quality. Wells et al. (2011) [16] believe that when consumers engage in online shopping, their behavior is easily influenced by the quality of services provided by merchants. For example, the uncertainty of service personnel attitudes, return execution time, and the economic and time cost losses caused by return logistics to consumers themselves can all lead to negative emotional attitudes towards merchants during the return process, thereby affecting the relationship between the two parties. Sun Shanling (2016) [17] believes in her research that customer needs are becoming increasingly unpredictable, and in order to achieve customer orientation, it is necessary to continuously improve service quality to meet customer needs. Therefore, this study proposes hypothesis 2:

**H2:** Employee customer orientation has a significant impact on the quality of logistics services. The stronger the employee customer orientation, the higher the quality of logistics services.

## 2.6 Relationship Between Logistics Service Quality and Return Behavior

With the continuous optimization and renovation of the e-commerce market, the legitimate rights and interests of online shopping consumers are effectively protected. When the purchased products have problems such as package damage or delivery delays, consumers have the right to request returns, which will also lead to increasingly common return behavior. Nowadays, consumers are more concerned about whether they are satisfied with the products and services they receive. When consumers find that the purchased goods cannot meet their needs and need to return them, good logistics service quality can make consumers change their minds not to return the goods, or leave a good impression

on them, improving their likelihood of repurchase. Yin Yue (2017) [18] analyzed the relationship between return service quality and customer satisfaction, customer complaints, and repurchase intention in his research by analyzing return service and consumer post purchase behavior, and determined the impact of various elements of return service quality on post purchase behavior. Wang Qian (2016) [19] stated in her research that the return behavior of online shopping is becoming increasingly serious, and businesses are investing more resources in logistics return services. She attributes return responsibility to intermediaries and distinguishes the differences in the effectiveness of online return services, indicating that the service attitude of businesses greatly affects consumers' return behavior. Therefore, this study proposes hypothesis 3:

**H3:** The quality of logistics service has a significant impact on consumer return behavior, with higher logistics service quality leading to weaker consumer return behavior.

## 2.7 The Mediating Role of Logistics Service Quality in the Relationship Between Employee Customer Orientation and Return Behavior

In the process of consumers receiving services, their emotions are easily influenced by employee service attitudes. Yang Qiang et al. (2014) [20] found in their research that service quality has a positive and positive impact on consumers' emotions, thus having a certain impact on their behavior. Zhou Pengcheng (2021) [21] stated in his study that emotions play a mediating role in service quality and consumer behavioral intention. Therefore, the service attitude of employees will affect the decision-making behavior of consumers, and the good service attitude of employees is closely related to whether they can bring good service quality to consumers. Whether employees use a good attitude in serving consumers will affect their behavior displayed in front of consumers, thereby affecting the quality of service received by consumers. Due to the positive impact of good logistics service quality on consumer return behavior, and good employee service attitude also affects the quality of logistics service. Therefore, the stronger the customer orientation of employees, the higher the quality of their logistics services, which will weaken consumers' return awareness and eliminate their return intention. Therefore, this study proposes hypothesis 4:

**H4:** The quality of logistics services plays a mediating role in the relationship between employee customer orientation and consumer return behavior.

Our review of the literature is built around the model shown in Fig. 1.



**Fig. 1.** Proposed conceptual model.

### 3 Methodology

The research object of this study is mainly consumers who have recently returned goods on internet e-commerce platforms. They will recall and fill out the questionnaire based on their feelings about a recent online shopping return. This study focuses on the “Questionnaire Star” online platform to collect and organize data.

In order to ensure the credibility and effectiveness of the questionnaire, the same device (including computer, mobile phone, tablet, etc.) can only fill out one questionnaire in this survey. If the answers have obvious regularity or the answer time is too short, it will be considered invalid and the questionnaire will be removed. A total of 422 questionnaires were collected in this survey, and a total of 369 valid questionnaires were ultimately collected, with a recovery rate of 87.4%.

The following are the regression analysis results between the assumed variables. Table 1 shows the regression analysis results of employee customer orientation on return behavior. Table 2 shows the regression analysis results of employee customer orientation on logistics service quality. Table 3 shows the regression analysis results of logistics service quality on consumer return behavior. Table 4 shows the regression analysis results of the mediating effect of logistics service quality.

The summary of the four hypothesis validation results proposed in this study is shown in Table 5.

### 4 Conclusions

According to the research results of this article, when dealing with consumer returns, businesses should pay attention to the service attitude of employees, pay attention to the quality of return logistics services, and provide effective suggestions and assistance for consumer needs. Due to the inherent uncertainties and risks of online consumption, providing effective assistance to customers can strengthen the establishment of consumer trust, and consumer returns do not directly sever their relationship with the enterprise. On the contrary, the performance of merchants in the return process is also an important way to improve consumer satisfaction.

**Table 1.** The regression analysis results of employee customer orientation on return behavior(N = 369)

	Non standardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	Significance	VIF	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F
	B	standard error							
Constant	4.037	0.374	Beta	10.797	< 0.001	0	0.493	0.489	192.571
Customer Orientation	0.478	0.049	0.593	9.772	< 0.001	1			

Dependent variable: Logistics Service Quality; D-W Value: 1.953



**Table 2.** The regression analysis results of employee customer orientation on logistics service quality (N = 369)

	Non standardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	Significance	VIF	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F
	B	standard error							
Constant	3.578	0.377	Beta	9.480	< 0.001	0	0.434	0.432	119.029
Customer Orientation	0.544	0.050	0.534	10.910	< 0.001	1			

Dependent variable: Logistics Service Quality; D-W Value: 1.923

**Table 3.** The regression analysis results of logistics service quality on consumer return behavior (N = 369)

	Non standardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	Significance	VIF	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F
	B	Standard error							
Constant	1.971	0.426		4.631	< 0.003		0.586	0.575	86.910
Communication Quality	0.159	0.057	0.169	2.79	< 0.001	2.332			
Informativeness	0.215	0.059	0.223	3.677	< 0.004	2.037			
Quality of return processing	0.126	0.063	0.123	1.996	< 0.001	2.038			
Convenience	0.084	0.056	0.089	1.495	< 0.001	2.087			
Empathy	0.171	0.059	0.177	2.912	< 0.003	2.024			

Dependent variable: Return Behavior; D-W value: 1.979

**Table 4.** The regression analysis results of the mediating effect of logistics service quality (N = 369)

Variable	Model 1: Logistics Service Quality		Model 2: Return Behavior		Model 3: Return Behavior (Joining Intermediaries)	
	BETA	Sig.	BETA	Sig.	BETA	Sig.
Customer Orientation	0.534	< 0.001	0.593	< 0.001	0.380	< 0.001

**Table 5.** Hypothesis verification results

Number	Hypothesis test results
Hypothesis 1	Valid
Hypothesis 2	Valid
Hypothesis 3	Valid
Hypothesis 4	Partial mediation

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