

Research on Consumer Dispute Resolution on E-commerce Platforms

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Abstract

Original Research Article

With the development of the internet and changes in consumer shopping preferences, e-commerce has rapidly replaced traditional consumption methods due to its convenience, speed, wide selection, and cost-effectiveness. B2C e-commerce is booming, injecting new vitality into the economy. However, the virtual and open nature of e-commerce transactions has led to increasing information asymmetry between consumers and merchants, resulting in frequent consumer disputes, which not only harm consumer rights but also affect the reputation of platforms and merchants. Traditional dispute resolution mechanisms are difficult to adapt to the characteristics of consumer disputes on e-commerce platforms. Therefore, exploring efficient, convenient, and low-cost consumer dispute resolution mechanisms for e-commerce platforms has become an urgent need. This paper aims to study the consumer dispute resolution mechanisms of e-commerce platforms to provide references for improving these mechanisms and to promote the healthy development of the e-commerce industry.

Keywords: E-Commerce, E-Commerce Platform, Consumer Disputes, Critical Incident Technique.

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1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

With the rapid development of the internet and changes in consumer shopping preferences, e-commerce, as a business model emerging from the internet, has quickly replaced traditional consumption methods due to its convenience, speed, wide selection, and high cost-effectiveness, becoming the first choice for consumers. Consumers can browse various products online, create wish lists, add items to their shopping carts, and complete purchases at any time and place. In the context of the rapid rise of the internet, many offline businesses have also expanded to the internet, enabling them to reach more customers and increase their sales. B2C (Business to Consumer) e-commerce has thus flourished, injecting new vitality into the economy. It not only has a large transaction scale and user base, but its transaction scale and user numbers are also growing year by year.

However, due to the virtual, open, and dispersed nature of e-commerce transactions, the problem of information asymmetry between consumers and merchants has become increasingly prominent—consumer rights such as the right to know, the right to

choose, and the right to fair transactions are easily violated, leading to consumer disputes. These disputes not only damage consumers' legitimate rights but also negatively impact the reputation and economic development of e-commerce platforms and merchants. Traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, such as litigation and arbitration, are difficult to adapt to the fast, small-scale, and diverse nature of e-commerce consumer disputes due to their cumbersome procedures, high costs, and lengthy duration.

The healthy development of e-commerce platforms depends on a good consumption environment. If merchants mishandle consumer complaints, it can lead to the loss of existing and potential customers and negatively impact their reputation and image. Therefore, exploring efficient, convenient, and low-cost consumer dispute resolution mechanisms has become an urgent issue in both theory and practice. This study aims to improve the efficiency and quality of e-commerce consumer dispute resolution, protect consumers' legitimate rights, and enhance the reputation and competitiveness of e-commerce platforms and merchants, thereby promoting the healthy development of the e-commerce industry.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

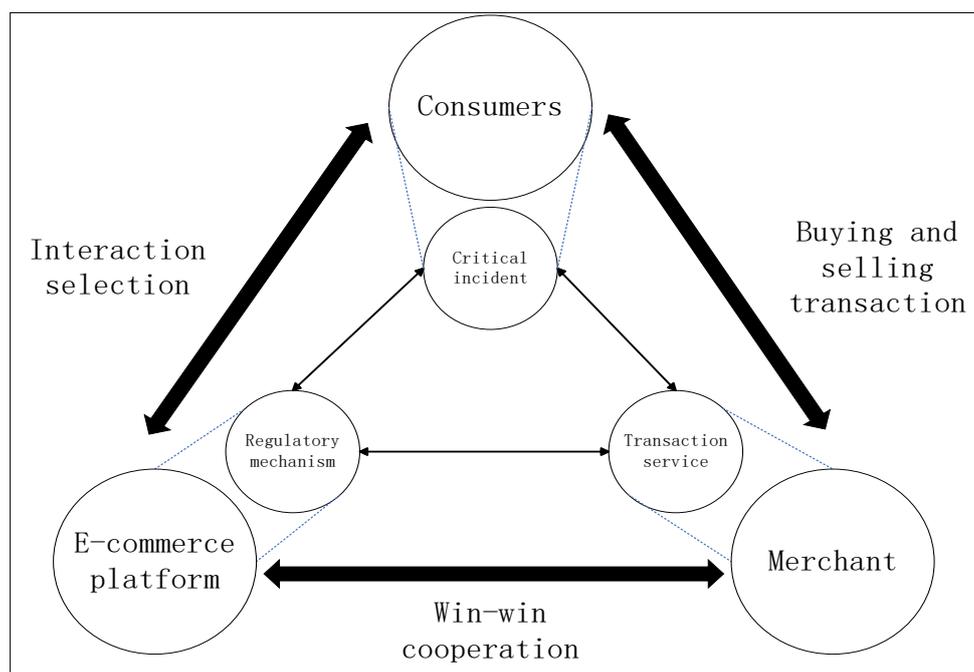


Figure 1: Interactive relationship diagram of consumer disputes

In the context of sustainable development, the general description of global sustainable development is the interconnection between environmental, economic, and social sustainability (Al-Gasawneh, J.A., Anuar, M.M., & Dacko-Pikiewicz, Z., *et al.*, 2021) [1]. Given the rapidly developing technology and competitive environment, service quality is considered key to the success and survival of all types of merchants (Hadi, Aslam & Amir, 2019) [2]. An e-commerce platform/website/merchant should meet consumers' information needs by providing high-quality information, such as timely and accurate product and service information, to help consumers make choices (Thabang, E.M., 2021) [3]. Research shows that consumers compare e-commerce applications/websites rather than actual companies (Sarli, R., Fadrul, F., & Yusrizal, Y., *et al.*, 2022) [4]. Due to the convenience of online shopping, consumers can easily compare products and prices between different e-commerce platforms and merchants, intensifying competition among merchants and increasing the pressure to provide better products and services for consumers (Ayush, T., Shubhendu, G., Anirban, B., *et al.*, 2023) [5]. Previous studies have confirmed that establishing a good relationship between consumers and suppliers requires strong trust and commitment to maintain the continuity of the relationship (Wei, K., Li, Y., & Zha, Y., *et al.*, 2019) [6]. Consumers' perceptions of merchants can be influenced by products, prices, logistics, or services (Tanaporn, H., Khaled, M.A., & Taqwq, H., *et al.*, 2022) [7]. Any slight misstep in these processes can lead to consumer disappointment and disputes. Proper dispute resolution can provide merchants with an opportunity not only to correct problems but also to turn them into satisfactory

surprises (Istanbulluoglu, D., 2017) [8]. However, many e-commerce consumers still feel disappointed with online transactions and simply give up without taking further action, as in the case of female product consumers in Pekanbaru (Sommaliaguatina, D. & Fatma, Y., 2019) [9]. Consumers considering further action on disappointing e-commerce transactions need to weigh many factors: the cost of litigation is higher than the loss of the product, and consumers do not want complicated legal procedures (Irene, F.L., Siti, H., & Reka, D., 2021) [10].

In summary, every step of online shopping affects consumers' emotions, influencing their decisions. Therefore, how to handle e-commerce consumer disputes more efficiently, conveniently, and orderly to satisfy consumers is an urgent issue. This paper analyzes current e-commerce consumer dispute cases to provide conclusions and recommendations for promoting the healthy development of the e-commerce industry.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The Critical Incidents Technique (CIT) is an analytical technique used to analyze the key factors of performance in various environments. It can objectively and comprehensively explore individuals' behaviors and perceptions of specific events and can target context-specific influencing factors. It was first proposed by Flanagan in 1954, mainly collecting clear, brief, and real-life incidents [11]. The term 'critical' refers to events that result in positive or negative impacts on the overall event objective.

Due to its flexibility and practicality, the Critical Incidents Technique has been widely used by scholars in various research fields domestically and internationally, including: using the Critical Incidents Technique to analyze patients' views on community pharmacy service quality (Ingrid, K., Jovana, M., Tamara C., *et al.*, 2022) [12]. Australian, Irish, and Swedish women's views on the factors that help them breastfeed for six months: an exploratory design using the Critical Incidents Technique (Yvonne, L.H., Ingrid, B., Ingegerd, H., *et al.*, 2016) [13]. How do HR managers understand their work? A study on changing the meaning of work using the Critical Incidents Technique (Klaudia, S. and Henriett, P., 2024) [14]. An exploratory study using the Critical Incidents Technique to adjust the situation of negative emotions (Fuad, F., 2022) [15]. Health professionals' views on domestic violence and disclosure issues: a case study using the Critical Incidents Technique (Julie, T., Caroline, B., Thilo, K., *et al.*, 2013) [16]. Negative school experiences of Millennial South Korean medical students: a qualitative study using the Critical Incidents Technique (HyeRin, R., So, J.Y., Kwi, H.P., *et al.*, 2020) [17]. In summary, the Critical Incidents Technique has been successfully used in various fields over the past 50 years, demonstrating its maturity and stability (Butterfield, L.D., Borgen, W.A., Amundson, N.E., *et al.*, 2005) [18]. Therefore, this study adopts the Critical Incidents Technique to gain an in-depth understanding of consumers' satisfaction and future purchase intentions when shopping on e-commerce platforms.

The Critical Incidents Technique used in this study is a qualitative research survey method. It systematically covers possible dispute situations, handling methods, satisfaction, and suggestions consumers may encounter when shopping on e-commerce platforms. It collects consumers' critical satisfaction and dissatisfaction incidents for subsequent induction and analysis.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

(a) Basic Data

The questionnaire was released on online channels on October 24, 2014, and completed collection on October 27, 2024, with a total of 108 questionnaires collected, of which 10 were invalid, resulting in 98 valid satisfaction and dissatisfaction incidents. Flanagan particularly noted in the Critical Incidents Technique literature that if the activity can be easily defined, only 50 to 100 incidents are needed for analysis; for more complex activities, thousands of incidents may be required. Since the subjects and activity attributes of this study are straightforward and clear, the sample size meets the requirements (Flanagan, 1954) [11]. Based on the questionnaire responses, critical satisfaction incidents were categorized into five categories: communication efficiency, customer service attitude, rights protection, platform supervision, and return/exchange mechanism. Critical dissatisfaction

incidents were also divided into five categories: merchant attitude, after-sales service, product quality, marketing integrity, and compensation mechanism.

The gender ratio of the respondents is 71.43% female and 28.57% male. The age group of 30 and below accounts for the highest percentage at 61.22%; the 31-50 age group accounts for 30.62%. This indicates that the primary consumer group on e-commerce platforms is young women and middle-aged groups. The number of respondents with a bachelor's or associate degree is as high as 88.78%, indicating that the overall educational level of e-commerce platform customers is relatively high. Full-time students and working professionals are closely matched, accounting for 45.92% and 44.9%, respectively, showing that the customer group of e-commerce platforms includes a large number of students and professionals. The average monthly income distribution of respondents shows a significant concentration, with 50% of respondents having a monthly income in the 0-3000 yuan range, indicating that this income level dominates the sample. Additionally, 31.63% of respondents have an income between 3001-6000 yuan, totaling 81.63% of respondents with an average monthly income below 6000 yuan, suggesting that most respondents have relatively tight economic conditions. The average monthly income significantly affects consumers' spending power and purchasing decisions.

(b) Reliability and Validity Testing

For the specific classification of the questionnaire, this study invited three senior, professional experts in the e-commerce field with extensive experience to conduct the classification. They are renowned scholars in the e-commerce field, senior management personnel of e-commerce platforms, and representatives of consumer rights protection organizations. These experts provided comprehensive, professional, and accurate guidance on the classification of the questionnaire from academic, practical, and consumer protection perspectives, ensuring the scientific and practical nature of the questionnaire. The reliability of the classification in the Critical Incidents Technique refers to the consistency and stability of the classifiers under the same conditions, with individual classification consistency expected to be greater than 0.8. Therefore, to ensure the accuracy of the classification, the three classifiers conducted the classification again two weeks after the initial classification. The individual consistency of this classification remained greater than 0.8, indicating a considerable degree of reliability in these incident classifications.

The formula for verifying the consistency among the three classifiers is as follows:

$$R = \frac{(N \times A)}{1 + [(N-1) \times A]} \quad (1)$$

$$A = \frac{\frac{2M_{12}}{n_1+n_2} + \frac{2M_{23}}{n_2+n_3} + \frac{2M_{13}}{n_1+n_3}}{N} \quad (2)$$

Where, R = Reliability

N = Number of classifiers

A = Average Interjudge Agreement

M = Number of samples classified similarly by the classifiers (e.g., M12 is the number of samples classified similarly by the first and second classifiers)

n = Number of samples classified by each classifier (e.g., n1 is the number of samples classified by the first classifier)

Table 1: Consistency of Classifiers for Satisfactory Incidents

	Classifier One	Classifier Two	Classifier Three
Classifier One	84		
Classifier Two	83	86	
Classifier Three	81	81	86

Table 2: Consistency of Classifiers for Unsatisfactory Incidents

	Classifier One	Classifier Two	Classifier Three
Classifier One	82		
Classifier Two	80	80	
Classifier Three	81	82	90

Table 3: Classification Reliability and Validity

Classification	Average Interjudge Agreement (A)	Reliability (R)
Satisfactory	0.965	0.988
Unsatisfactory	0.957	0.985

The consistency of individual classifiers, average interjudge agreement, and reliability all exceed 0.8, indicating a high level of consistency among the three classifiers.

Validity refers to the extent to which the measurement tool accurately measures what it claims to measure. The questions in this questionnaire are closely related to consumer disputes on e-commerce platforms and are highly relevant to the goals of this study, demonstrating high face validity. Since the average interjudge agreement and reliability of the classifiers are both above 0.8, this study has good internal validity. Therefore, the classification results of this questionnaire are logical, in-depth, and content-valid.

(c) Classification Results

The questionnaire divided the critical incident questions into five categories, asking about satisfactory/unsatisfactory incidents, willingness to repurchase after such incidents, and how merchants should handle unsatisfactory situations to achieve satisfaction and willingness to repurchase. By collecting consumer feedback from different ages, genders, educational backgrounds, and occupations, the key factors affecting consumers' repurchase decisions were analyzed, providing data support for resolving consumer disputes on e-commerce platforms. The specific classification names and details of satisfactory and unsatisfactory incidents are as follows:

Table 4: Classification Names and Details of Satisfactory Incidents

Satisfactory Incident Classification	Details
Communication Efficiency	Timeliness of response, problem-solving speed
Merchant Attitude	Service and response attitude
Rights Protection	Whether shipping insurance is provided, whether compensation is given, etc.
Platform Supervision	Involvement of relevant e-commerce platform
Return/Exchange Mechanism	Return, exchange, reshipment, (partial) refund, etc.

Table 5: Classification Names and Details of Unsatisfactory Incidents

Unsatisfactory Incident Classification	Details
Merchant Attitude	Response attitude
After-Sales Service	Whether the consumer's problem was solved, whether their service needs were met
Product Quality	The inherent quality of the product
Marketing Integrity	Whether the product matches the description and images, whether there was any deception or misleading information
Compensation Mechanism	Compensation such as red envelopes, coupons, etc.

Table 6: Summary of Satisfactory Incident Types in This Study

Five Categories	Satisfactory						Total	
	Classifier One		Classifier Two		Classifier Three		Average Count	%
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%		
Communication Efficiency	16	16.33%	16	16.33%	12	12.25%	15	15.31%
Merchant Attitude	12	12.25%	9	9.18%	7	7.14%	9	9.18%
Rights Protection	7	7.14%	7	7.14%	9	9.18%	8	8.16%
Platform Supervision	7	7.14%	6	6.12%	5	5.1%	6	6.12%
Return/Exchange Mechanism	56	57.14%	60	61.23%	65	66.33%	60	61.23%
Total	98	100%	98	100%	98	100%	98	100%

Table 7: Ranking of Satisfactory Incident Classifications

Five Categories	Average Count	%	Rank
Return/Exchange Mechanism	60	61.23%	1
Communication Efficiency	15	15.31%	2
Merchant Attitude	9	9.18%	3
Rights Protection	8	8.16%	4
Platform Supervision	6	6.12%	5

From Tables 6 and 7, it can be concluded that among the 98 satisfactory incidents, the average count for the return/exchange mechanism is the highest, with 60 incidents, accounting for 61.23%. Communication efficiency ranks second, with an average count of 15 incidents, accounting for 15.31%. Merchant attitude

ranks third, with an average count of 9 incidents, accounting for 9.18%. Rights protection ranks fourth, with an average count of 8 incidents, accounting for 8.16%. Lastly, platform supervision has the lowest average count, with 6 incidents, accounting for 6.12%.

Table 8: Summary of Unsatisfactory Incident Types in This Study

Five Categories	Unsatisfactory						Total	
	Classifier One		Classifier Two		Classifier Three		Average Count	%
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%		
Merchant Attitude	31	31.63%	28	28.56%	19	19.39%	26	26.52%
After-Sales Service	34	34.69%	38	38.78%	42	42.86%	38	38.78%
Product Quality	13	13.27%	15	15.31%	14	14.29%	14	14.29%
Marketing Integrity	17	17.35%	14	14.29%	21	21.43%	17	17.35%
Compensation Mechanism	3	3.06%	3	3.06%	2	2.03%	3	3.06%
Total	98	100%	98	100%	98	100%	98	100%

Table 9: Ranking of Unsatisfactory Incident Classifications

Five Categories	Average Count	%	Rank
After-Sales Service	38	38.78%	1
Merchant Attitude	26	26.52%	2
Marketing Integrity	17	17.35%	3
Product Quality	14	14.29%	4
Compensation Mechanism	3	3.06%	5

From Tables 8 and 9, it can be concluded that among the 98 unsatisfactory incidents, the average count for after-sales service is the highest, with 38 incidents, accounting for 38.78%. Merchant attitude ranks second, with an average count of 26 incidents, accounting for 26.52%. Marketing integrity ranks third, with an average

count of 17 incidents, accounting for 17.35%. Product quality ranks fourth, with an average count of 14 incidents, accounting for 14.29%. Lastly, the compensation mechanism has the lowest average count, with 3 incidents, accounting for 3.06%.

Table 10: Specific Cases of Satisfactory Incidents

Category	Satisfactory Incident Case 1	Satisfactory Incident Case 2
Communication Efficiency	The merchant promptly called me to discuss after reporting the product issue.	The merchant handled the damaged goods promptly and gave me a satisfactory response.
Merchant Attitude	The product had quality issues, and the merchant sincerely admitted their mistake and humbly accepted my reasonable suggestions.	I bought a piece of clothing on Taobao. After washing and wearing it once, it got deformed. The merchant was very polite and asked me to return it.
Rights Protection	I paid a deposit for a pre-ordered item, but the store canceled the order by mistake. They refunded my deposit and additionally paid a penalty.	I bought a sofa set online, and upon delivery, I found it damaged. The merchant communicated promptly and compensated me 500 yuan.
Platform Supervision	When buying things on Pinduoduo, the platform will step in to coordinate if there are any quality issues reported by the consumer, showing that e-commerce platforms are becoming more perfect.	JD.com compensated me with a no-threshold voucher.
Return/Exchange Mechanism	During the pandemic, I bought an electric skateboard online but never had a chance to use it. After the return/exchange period expired, I found it couldn't charge. The merchant agreed to exchange it after I communicated with them.	I bought a piece of clothing and discovered it was damaged after seven days. Although I had not worn it and had taken it to a non-receipt location, the merchant agreed to cover the shipping cost for the exchange after negotiation.

For the specific cases of satisfactory incidents:

- **Communication Efficiency:**

As long as the merchant promptly responds to consumers and provides a solution quickly, consumers are likely to be satisfied.

- **Merchant Attitude:**

If the merchant sincerely admits their mistakes, responds politely, and humbly accepts consumers' reasonable suggestions, consumers are likely to feel satisfied.

- **Rights Protection:**

In case of disputes, if the merchant proactively compensates the consumer with some monetary compensation, consumers are likely to be satisfied.

- **Platform Supervision:**

When e-commerce platforms step in to mediate disputes between consumers and merchants promptly and compensate with no-threshold vouchers, consumers are likely to be satisfied.

- **Return/Exchange Mechanism:**

As long as merchants are willing to accept reasonable return/exchange requests from consumers and cover shipping costs, consumers are likely to be satisfied.

Table 11: Specific Cases of Unsatisfactory Incidents

Category	Unsatisfactory Incident Case 1	Unsatisfactory Incident Case 2
Merchant Attitude	The merchant did not ship on time despite my two reminders and kept making excuses with a poor attitude. Although they promised to ship, they never did. As an 88VIP member, Taobao fined them three times the amount, but my subsequent plans were affected by the delay, which made me very angry.	Ordered two identical but different-colored clothes from the same store, but they only sent one. When asked, the customer service just gave perfunctory answers without explaining the missing item or providing a solution, which made me very angry and confused.
After-Sales Service	Bought an item online that I couldn't use. The merchant's teaching methods were not timely, and they did not provide a solution to the problem.	Bought a new clip that broke. I wanted a replacement or refund, but the customer service told me to glue it myself and did not accept my compensation request!
Product Quality	Bought a woolen sweater on Taobao last year. It shrunk severely after washing, becoming unwearable. The merchant claimed it was due to improper washing, but the quality was too poor to shrink that much from a normal wash.	Purchased a custom stainless steel sink set, but the faucet was of poor quality, leaking repeatedly despite replacements, and the problem was never resolved.
Marketing Integrity	Paid a deposit for a pre-ordered item but could not pay the balance or receive the item after the payment deadline. The merchant did not notify me about the balance payment, and there was no compensation, resulting in the loss of my deposit.	The product description was unclear. Discovered it was second-hand after buying and it broke after one use. When trying to return it, the merchant insisted on repairs without mentioning extra charges beforehand, then charged me after repairs and provided no compensation, effectively defrauding me.
Compensation Mechanism	The merchant shipped the wrong items twice, and the shipments were slow. When requesting faster delivery for the third replacement, they refused, and when asked for compensation for my wasted time, they also refused.	Bought a suitcase that arrived damaged. The merchant asked me to return it for replacement, but the suitcase was too large, and the shipping insurance covered only 9 yuan, requiring me to pay an additional 19 yuan.

For the specific cases of unsatisfactory incidents:

- **Merchant Attitude:**

If the merchant has a poor attitude, shirks responsibility, makes excuses, and handles consumers' issues perfunctorily, consumers will feel dissatisfied.

- **After-Sales Service:**

If the merchant does not provide solutions to consumers' problems or does not accept consumers' requests for returns or refunds, consumers will feel dissatisfied.

- **Product Quality:** If the product quality is poor and affects consumers' usage experience, consumers will feel dissatisfied.

- **Marketing Integrity:**

If the merchant does not inform consumers in advance about specific costs and causes financial losses to consumers, they will feel dissatisfied.

- **Compensation Mechanism:**

If the merchant's issues lead to consumers' rights and finances being damaged, consumers will feel dissatisfied.

Additionally, the questionnaire included open-ended questions asking respondents what kind of handling they would find satisfactory and lead to repeat purchases when they experience unsatisfactory incidents. The results show that consumers generally hope that merchants actively and promptly take responsibility and provide timely and effective solutions when problems arise. Consumers also expect merchants to offer some compensation, such as red envelopes or coupons, to make up for the losses they suffered due to consumer disputes. When merchants can meet these expectations, consumers are more likely to feel satisfied and willing to repurchase.

5. CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of specific cases of satisfactory and unsatisfactory incidents, this study further reveals the key factors affecting consumer satisfaction. The study suggests that e-commerce platforms and merchants should focus on the following aspects in handling consumer disputes:

(a) Establishing a Sound Return/Exchange Mechanism

Merchants should develop clear and easily understandable return/exchange policies and display them prominently on the product detail pages to ensure consumers are fully informed before making a purchase. Besides optimizing the return/exchange process by reducing unnecessary steps and approval stages to improve efficiency, it's also crucial to ensure the security of consumers' personal information and property during the return/exchange process, providing full rights

protection for consumers throughout their shopping experience.

(b) Improving Communication Efficiency

Merchants can set up dedicated customer service teams to respond promptly to consumer queries and provide effective solutions. In addition to traditional phone and email communication, they can also offer online customer service and social media channels to give consumers more options. Regular training should also be conducted for customer service personnel to enhance their professionalism and service awareness, ensuring they can provide timely and accurate solutions.

(c) Optimizing Merchant Attitude

E-commerce platforms should guide merchants to adopt a customer-centric service philosophy, making consumer satisfaction a key business objective. Offering coupons and other incentives can attract and encourage consumers to evaluate merchant services, providing feedback and suggestions to platforms and merchants. The evaluation results should be used as an important basis for assessing merchants.

(d) Strengthening Platform Supervision

E-commerce platforms should implement strict regulatory systems to standardize and restrain merchant behavior. Utilizing big data and AI technologies, platforms can monitor and analyze merchants' operational data and service backgrounds in real-time, promptly identifying and addressing potential issues to ensure compliance with relevant laws, regulations, and platform rules. Additionally, providing convenient complaint and report channels for consumers and promptly investigating and handling consumer complaints are essential for protecting consumer rights and ensuring the active role of e-commerce platforms in resolving consumer disputes.

(e) Enhancing Compensation Mechanisms

Both e-commerce platforms and merchants should develop reasonable compensation standards based on the nature and severity of disputes, ensuring consumers receive fair and reasonable compensation. Besides traditional cash red envelope compensation, they can also offer coupons, points, and gifts to meet diverse consumer needs and provide reasonable compensation measures. To ensure effective implementation of compensation measures, e-commerce platforms should issue relevant regulations to prevent merchants from delaying or refusing to fulfill compensation obligations.

The results of this study offer certain suggestions for enhancing the ability of e-commerce platforms and merchants to handle consumer disputes and improve consumer satisfaction. They also provide valuable insights and references for further research and improvement of consumer dispute resolution mechanisms on e-commerce platforms. In the current challenging economic environment, e-commerce

platforms and merchants should leverage these advantages while continuing to strengthen and improve consumer dispute resolution mechanisms to offer consumers a more high-quality, efficient, and convenient service experience.

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