

Research Article

External Stimuli, User Experience, and B2C E-commerce Customer Satisfaction: Theoretical Evolution, Localization Characteristics, and Future Prospects

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Abstract

With the continuous increase in global internet penetration, B2C e-commerce has become a core component of global business activities. Customer satisfaction, as a key indicator for measuring the competitiveness of e-commerce platforms, has always been a focus of academic research and corporate practice due to its influence mechanism and improvement path. This paper adopts a systematic literature review approach following the PRISMA framework, selecting high-quality empirical studies published between 2014 and 2025. It systematically reviews the theoretical evolution of the relationship between external stimuli, user experience, and customer satisfaction in B2C e-commerce, constructs an integrated theoretical analysis framework, preliminarily analyzes the localization characteristics of South Asian and Southeast Asian regions, and looks forward to future research directions. The study finds that: at the theoretical level, the relationship has evolved from the application of single theories (TRA, TPB) to the construction of integrated models (UTAUT, multi-dimensional indicator system), with the dimensions of external stimuli becoming increasingly rich, and the mediating role of user experience being widely verified. Regarding localization characteristics, significant differences exist in the influence weight of external stimuli, core user experience demands, and key drivers of satisfaction in regions such as Pakistan, Thailand, India, and Nepal. This is closely related to local cultural backgrounds, economic development levels, and the degree of technology penetration. Future research should focus on cross-cultural comparisons, the specific application mechanisms of emerging technologies, and the adaptability of specific product categories. The findings of this paper can provide theoretical reference for B2C e-commerce companies to formulate localized operation strategies, and also lay the foundation for subsequent academic research.

Keywords

B2C e-commerce, External stimuli, User experience, Customer satisfaction, Theoretical evolution, Localization characteristics

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

The fast growth of internet technology has led to the world-wide e-commerce development. In 2021, internet usage was registered by 4.66 billion people around the world with 92.6 percent of them being mobile phone users; however, the largest share of internet users is represented by Asia (50.3 percent) (Miao et al., 2021). It has led to the rapid expansion of B2C e-commerce with estimates showing that total revenue across all online marketplace platforms will reach \$4.8 trillion in 2021. The regional markets have different features: the share of the population in Thailand that purchased goods online increased by 58% during the coronavirus outbreak; in January 2022, the number of Indian internet users stood at 658 million, and the e-commerce sector was growing at a quick pace (Likhitha, 2022); and although Nepal began using B2C e-commerce at a later stage, the local platforms are starting to be considered a choice of consumers.

In contrast to the conventional brick-and-mortar retail setting, where customers can engage with products, online shoppers cannot. The buying behavior of these consumers and their satisfaction depends significantly on the external factors used by the platform (e.g. the website design, the manner of presenting information, and service guarantees) as well as the total user experience (Miao et al., 2021; Mitchev and Nuangjamnong, 2021). There are still drastic disparities across the regions regarding how consumers perceive external stimuli and what they expect out of the user experience because of differing cultural history, consumption style, and financial status (Sharma, 2021; Hamza and Saidalavi, 2014).

1.2. Significance of the Research

1.2.1. Theoretical Significance

The current available work tends to deal with individual countries or areas in general without a thorough overview of the theoretical development and systematic comparative study of cross-regional localization peculiarities (Pires et al., 2025; Miao et al., 2021). Most studies either apply a single theoretical model to a specific context or focus on isolated variables, resulting in a fragmented understanding of the complex relationships between external stimuli, user experience, and customer satisfaction. The present paper addresses this gap by

systematically tracing the theoretical evolution of this research field, synthesizing an integrated analytical framework, and comparing the research results across different regions. This not only provides methodological support for cross-cultural research but also helps to unify the scattered literature on the topic.

1.2.2. Practical Significance

The article examines the features of localization of the regions including Pakistan, Thailand, India and Nepal, and the article explains the main external factors and requirements of user experience that are the priorities of consumers in every region.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Literature Sources

This study conducted a systematic literature review following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. The literature search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between January 2014 and March 2025.

The search keywords used were: (“external stimuli” OR “environmental stimuli”) AND (“user experience” OR “customer experience”) AND (“customer satisfaction” OR “consumer satisfaction”) AND (“B2C e-commerce” OR “online retail” OR “electronic commerce”).

The inclusion criteria were: (1) empirical studies using quantitative methods; (2) focusing explicitly on the B2C e-commerce context; (3) investigating the relationships between at least two of the three core constructs: external stimuli, user experience, and customer satisfaction; (4) providing clear descriptions of research methods, measurement scales, and key findings.

The exclusion criteria were: (1) review articles, conceptual papers, case studies, and conference proceedings; (2) studies focusing on B2B, C2C, or O2O e-commerce models; (3) studies not written in English; (4) studies with incomplete or unreliable data.

The initial search identified 287 potentially relevant articles. After removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts, 47 articles remained for full-text evaluation. The relatively small number of included studies is due to the strict selection criteria applied to ensure the quality and relevance of the literature. Although the sample size is limited, the included studies cover the main countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia and use representative research methods, providing a valid basis for preliminary cross-regional comparison.

2.2. Analytical Dimensions and Research Process

This study constructs a four-dimensional analytical framework: “Theoretical basis—Research variables—Research results—Localization characteristics”.

Theoretical dimensions: Read through the main theories used in the literature (TRA, TPB, UTAUT, etc.) and trace the development and evolution of these theories in the B2C e-commerce customer satisfaction research field.

Dimensions of research variables: Extract and categorize the dimensions of external stimuli, measurement indicators of user experience, and operational definitions of customer satisfaction used in the included studies.

Research results dimensions: Synthesize the main findings of the included studies, focusing on the relationships between variables and the mediating/moderating effects identified.

Localization characteristics dimensions: Compare and contrast the research results across different regions, identify the core characteristics of each region, and analyze the underlying causes of these differences.

3. Research Results

3.1. Theoretical Evolution: From Single Theory to Integrated Model

3.1.1. Evolution of the Theoretical Foundation

The conceptual basis of B2C e-commerce customer satisfaction studies has developed from single-theory applications to multiple-theory amalgamations. Initial studies based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) were primarily concerned with how consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions relate (Miao et al., 2021). TRA suggests that consumer behavior is affected by subjective norms, attitudes, and behavioral intentions; however, it can only be used concerning controllable behavior and makes the assumption of perfect rationality (Ajzen, 1991, as cited in Miao et al., 2021). TPB incorporates perceived behavioral control as a variable, predicting online buying behavior and satisfaction in a more holistic manner (Miao et al., 2021).

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) is an integration of eight models, such as TPB and TAM, and includes factors such as performance expectation and effort expectation, making it more appropriate for the complicated e-commerce environment (Miao et al., 2021).

Over the past few years, studies have focused on combining various theories to create more comprehensive frameworks. For example: Pires et al. (2025) synthesized measurements such as Customer Effort Score (CES), Customer Experience (CX), and Customer Satisfaction

(CSAT), forming a chain model of external stimulus-user experience-satisfaction-behavioral outcome; Miao et al. (2021) merged TRA, TPB, and UTAUT to develop a conceptual framework consisting of 20 hypotheses, which include direct, mediating, and moderating effects, making the theory more explanatory and predictive in practice.

Based on the systematic review of these theoretical developments, this study proposes an integrated theoretical framework for B2C e-commerce customer satisfaction. This framework takes “external stimuli” as the antecedent variable, “user experience” as the mediating variable, “customer satisfaction” as the outcome variable, and “behavioral intention (repurchase intention, word-of-mouth)” as the final consequence. It further divides external stimuli into four dimensions: platform design, information quality, service quality, and security assurance, and divides user experience into three dimensions: cognitive experience, emotional experience, and functional experience. This framework advances existing theories by integrating multiple theoretical perspectives, clarifying the multi-dimensional nature of core constructs, and revealing the complete chain of effects from external stimuli to behavioral outcomes.

3.1.2. Evolution of Research Variables

(1) Enrichment of external stimulus dimensions

Exterior stimulus, as an antecedent, has grown beyond initial site architecture and quality of the information (Miao et al., 2021; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003, as referenced in Miao et al., 2021) into four broad groups, which are platform design (visual appeal, ease of navigation, among others) (Mitchev and Nuangjamnong, 2021; Pires et al., 2025); information (accuracy and completeness of product/service information) (Miao et al., 2021); service (speed of delivery, rate at which customer service responds to customers) (Miao et al., 2021; Sharma, 2021); and security (payment security, data protection, and fairness in pricing) (Mitchev and Nuangjamnong, 2021; Miao et al., 2021). Researchers in various areas choose the dimensions according to their specific features. To illustrate, the researches in Thailand highlight the quality of user interface, information quality and perceived privacy (Mitchev and Nuangjamnong, 2021), whereas the researches in India underline convenience, price and scope of products available (Hamza & Saidalavi, 2014; AlHawary and AlSmeran, 2017).

(2) Refinement of user experience measurement

The concept of user experience has developed over time as an independent mediating variable into a more sophisticated measurement, which is multi-dimensional rather than single-process experience. Pires et al. (2025) measured overall positivity, emotional comfort, and hedonicity; Mio et al. (2021) measured it based on cognitive and emotional factors including satisfaction, trust and perceived value; Hamza and Saidalavi (2014) concentrated on

functional aspects like shopping convenience and information access effectiveness (Agag and Eid, 2020, as cited in Pires et al, 2025).

(3) Clarification of the mechanism influencing customer satisfaction

The main mechanism of how external stimuli contribute to user experience as an indirect factor of customer satisfaction is being clarified by research. The majority of the studies have confirmed the mediating role of user experience; e.g., Pires et al. (2025) discovered that CES impacts CSAT via CX that further influences the Customer Loyalty Index (CLI) and the Net Promoter Score (NPS); Miao et al. (2021) has also verified that user experience is positive both by website design and information quality, whereas the effects of delivery services is insignificant. However, moderating influences are beginning to be examined: e.g., it was reported that in Miao et al. (2021), previous online experience moderates the connection between satisfaction, trust, and repurchase intention, whereas a study conducted in Thailand showed that the level of user interface quality was more influential to satisfaction in the context of the pandemic situation (Mitchev and Nuangjamnong, 2021).

3.2. Localization Characteristics: Cross-Regional Differences and Their Causes

The included studies cover four main countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia: Pakistan (3 studies), Thailand (2 studies), India (2 studies), and Nepal (1 study), with the remaining 3 studies being cross-regional. All studies adopted quantitative research methods, with 7 using structural equation modeling (SEM), 3 using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), and 1 using linear regression analysis. The sample sizes ranged from 200 to 500, and the respondents were mainly young urban consumers aged 18-35.

3.2.1. Regional differences in the external stimulus dimension

Miao et al. (2021) have demonstrated that the design of websites and the quality of information play a very important role in the level of customer satisfaction whereas the direct effect of courier services is insignificant due to the poor development of local logistics systems; security and privacy are considered to be central to the issue of trust because customers are extremely concerned with the safety of their data.

The study by Mitchev and Nuangjamnong (2021) in Thailand revealed that the quality of the user interface, quality of the information as well as the perception of privacy have a significant positive contribution to both satisfaction and loyalty, whereas customer service and perceived security have no significant contribution.

Hamza and Saidalavi (2014) noted that convenience, price competition and variety are some important aspects of influencing satisfaction as is associated with the features of Indian

customers being cost-conscious and having an acute need to purchase various goods; Likhitha (2022), in line with the TAM model, highlighted that the quality of user interface, quality of information influences satisfaction via mediating trust.

The report by Sharma (2021) demonstrates that punctual deliveries and the quality of products, as well as the integrity of packaging, are driving factors toward satisfaction whereas excessive delivery charges and lack of prompt delivery of goods are among the causes of dissatisfaction, which is indicative of the poor quality of logistic services offered in Nepal.

It is worth noting that there are some inconsistencies in the findings across studies. For example, while logistics services were found to have an insignificant effect on satisfaction in Pakistan, they were identified as a key driver in Nepal. This discrepancy can be attributed to the different stages of e-commerce development in the two countries: in Pakistan, where e-commerce has developed slightly longer, consumers have adapted to the generally poor logistics services and have lower expectations; whereas in Nepal, where e-commerce is still in its infancy, the reliability of delivery services is a critical factor that determines whether consumers will continue to shop online.

3.2.2. Regional Differences in User Experience Requirements

The Pakistani customers are much more likely to pay attention to the low effort and security of the shopping process, they greatly need website usability and payment security (Miao et al., 2021).

It is important to Thai consumers to consider emotional experience and interface aesthetics, where visual attractiveness and navigability of platform design play an influential role in experience evaluation (Mitchev and Nuangjamnong, 2021).

Functional experience is a preferred type of experience by Indian consumers where shopping facilities, efficiency of information access and product diversity are central features of the experience (Hamza and Saidalavi, 2014; Likhitha, 2022).

Nepalese customers concentrate on simple service experiences where delivery efficiency and product quality form the most important considerations in rating them (Sharma, 2021).

3.2.3. Regional differences in satisfaction drivers

Satisfaction in Pakistan is mainly based on website design, information quality, as well as trust level and past online experience will strengthen the effect of satisfaction on the willingness to repurchase (Miao et al., 2021).

Satisfaction in Thailand is immediately influenced by the level of user interface, quality of information as well as perception of privacy, whereas satisfaction has a strong positive influence on loyalty (Mitchev and Nuangjamnong, 2021).

India: Satisfaction through positive experience is improved by convenience, price and choice of product that will promote word-of-mouth marketing (Hamza and Saidalavi, 2014).

In Nepal: 63 percent of customers are very satisfied with online shopping owing to the promptness of delivery, quality of packaging and products delivered but dissatisfaction is caused by the lack of timely delivery, high prices of deliveries and substandard products offered (Sharma, 2021).

4. Discussion

4.1. The Core Logic of Theoretical Evolution

The conceptual history of B2C e-commerce customer satisfaction studies can be viewed as an incremental adjustment to the complexity of e-commerce contexts and the variety in consumer behaviour types. Their transformation into combined systems indicates that investigation has shifted its focus on one attitude and behavior interaction to the systematic consideration of the interaction processes of various factors. Enhancement of the external stimulus dimensions is a direct consequence of the increase in e-commerce service scenarios-as platform capabilities extend to more than merely making transactions but cover the entire series of events of design-information-service-guarantee, studies dimensions are also enhanced. The popularity of the mediating effect of experience by users supports the logic of the core process of stimulus - experience - satisfaction, offering a sound basis of theoretical model design.

The introduction of integrated models (e.g., the UTAUT extension and the CES-CX-CSAT chain model) has addressed the issue of inadequate explanatory strength of individual theories and is more consistent with the multi-dimensional and cross stage nature of services in e-commerce. An example can be found in the work by Pires et al. (2025), who incorporated both transactional indicators (CES) and experiential indicators (CX) indicators in their model that pays attention to the efficiency of the process and the emotional experience and covers entirely the cognitive and emotional processes of the consumer decision-making while shopping, and it is a reference to further studies.

4.2. Analysis of the Causes of Localization Differences

The economic development stage: The logistics infrastructure in countries like Pakistan and Nepal is poorly developed leading to the delivery service having very little influence on customer satisfaction (Miao et al., 2021; Sharma, 2021), however, in Thailand and India, the e-commerce infrastructure is fairly developed, and customers are more concerned with the higher-level needs in terms of interface design and quality of information provided.

The cultural context includes that Thai customers are highly emotional about how they are feeling during their experience and require a lot regarding the interface aesthetics and privacy security (Mitchev and Nuangjamnong, 2021). The customers of India are affected by collectivism culture and the demand of price sensitivity and variety of choices is high among them (Hamza and Saidalavi, 2014).

The acceptance of technology: Internet and e-commerce technologies were adopted in Pakistan and Nepal more slowly and customers in these countries prefer primary services (i.e. delivery and the quality of the products) (Miao et al., 2021; Sharma, 2021). However, in Thailand and India consumers are digitally literate and they expect more functionality and better user experience.

The nature of e-commerce market competition: E-commerce markets in both Thailand and India are very competitive and platforms should try to win over consumers by optimizing their interfaces and improving data (Mitchev and Nuangjamnong, 2021; Likhitha, 2022). Conversely, the e-commerce industry has yet a long way to go in Nepal and the satisfaction of the customer with primary services remains an important competitive advantage (Sharma, 2021).

4.3. Reflections on the Limitations of the Research

This study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, this study only included 11 empirical articles, and the sample size is relatively small. The included studies are mainly concentrated in four countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia, and the coverage of other regions is insufficient. Therefore, the findings regarding “localization characteristics” are preliminary, and caution should be exercised when generalizing them to other regions or the entire nation level. Second, most of the included studies adopted cross-sectional research designs, which can only capture the relationships between variables at a specific point in time and cannot reveal their dynamic changes over time. Third, there are differences in the measurement indicators and research methods used in different studies, which may introduce some heterogeneity and affect the comparability of the results. Finally, the majority of the respondents in the included studies were young urban consumers, and the representation of rural consumers and older age groups is limited.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Summary of Research Findings

This study systematically reviewed the theoretical evolution of the relationship between external stimuli, user experience, and customer satisfaction in B2C e-commerce and analyzed

the preliminary localization characteristics of South Asian and Southeast Asian regions. The main findings are as follows:

First, the theoretical development of this field has undergone a process from single theory application to integrated model construction. Early studies mainly applied TRA and TPB to explain consumer behavior, then UTAUT became widely used due to its stronger explanatory power, and recent studies have tended to integrate multiple theories to build more comprehensive frameworks. The dimensions of external stimuli have been continuously enriched, forming four main categories: platform design, information quality, service quality, and security assurance. The mediating role of user experience has been widely confirmed, and its measurement has developed from a single dimension to multiple dimensions including cognitive, emotional, and functional aspects.(Biumoh et al., 2020)

Second, there are significant regional differences in the influence weight of external stimuli, core user experience demands, and key drivers of customer satisfaction. These differences are not accidental but are the result of the combined effects of economic development level, cultural background, technology acceptance, and market competition pattern. Understanding these differences is crucial for e-commerce companies to implement localized operation strategies.

Third, based on the systematic review of existing literature, this study constructed an integrated theoretical framework of “external stimuli-user experience-customer satisfaction-behavioral outcomes”. This framework clarifies the multi-dimensional nature of core constructs and their interrelationships, advancing the development of existing theories and providing a unified analytical basis for future research.(AlHawary & AlSmeran, 2017)

5.2. Future Research Prospects

5.2.1. Cross-Cultural Comparative Research

Future research should expand the sample coverage to include more countries and regions from different continents, conducting more comprehensive cross-cultural comparative studies. In particular, the role of specific cultural dimensions (such as individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance) in the relationship between external stimuli, user experience, and satisfaction should be quantitatively examined to reveal the deeper cultural mechanisms behind regional differences.

5.2.2. Impact of Emerging Technologies

Future research should conduct in-depth analysis of the specific application mechanisms of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain in e-commerce and their impacts on customer satisfaction.

For artificial intelligence, research can explore how AI-driven personalized recommendation systems act as a new type of external stimulus to affect user experience. For example, personalized recommendations based on machine learning algorithms can improve information filtering efficiency and reduce customer effort, thereby enhancing cognitive experience; AI-powered virtual shopping assistants can provide real-time and personalized customer service, improving emotional experience. In addition, AI can also be used for dynamic pricing and demand forecasting, helping platforms optimize resource allocation and improve overall service quality.

For blockchain technology, research can focus on its applications in supply chain transparency and payment security. Blockchain can provide immutable records of product origin and circulation, enhancing consumers' trust in product quality and authenticity. In terms of payment, blockchain-based decentralized payment systems can reduce transaction costs, improve payment speed, and enhance payment security, thereby increasing consumers' sense of security and satisfaction.

5.2.3. Product Category Specific Research

The impact of external stimuli on user experience and satisfaction may vary significantly across different product categories. Future research should conduct comparative studies across different product categories (including physical products, service products, and digital products) to identify the specific external stimuli and user experience dimensions that are most important for each category. This will help e-commerce companies develop more targeted strategies for different product lines.

5.2.4. Longitudinal Dynamic Research

Most existing studies are cross-sectional, which cannot capture the dynamic changes in consumer behavior over time. Future research should adopt longitudinal research designs to track the changes in consumer perceptions and behaviors over an extended period. This will help to understand how external environmental changes (such as technological innovations, economic fluctuations, and public health events) affect the relationships between variables and provide more dynamic and forward-looking insights.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Consent for publication

All authors have given their consent.

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