

# Study on Service Recovery Quality of Vipshop based on Perceived Justice Theory

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## Abstract

Based on the perceived justice theory, this study takes consumers who have returned products on Vipshop as the research object to explore the impact of service recovery quality on positive post-purchase behavior, incorporating consumer positive emotion as a mediating variable and platform policy leniency as an external variable. The findings reveal that procedural, interactional, and outcome justice in service recovery all stimulate consumers' positive emotions, which in turn significantly enhance repurchase and recommendation intentions. Therefore, platforms should establish convenient after-sales and priority compensation mechanisms, customer service communications need to be empathetic, and coupons, personalized replies, and lenient recovery policies should be provided to reduce consumption barriers and strengthen trust and loyalty.

## Keywords

Perceived Justice Theory; Service Recovery Quality; Consumer Emotion; Post-Purchase Behavior.

## 1. Introduction

With the continuous development of e-commerce, various e-commerce platforms have greatly enriched people's daily shopping methods. According to CNNIC data from December 2025, online shopping users in China already account for 83.2% of all internet users. Behind this high usage rate, a large number of online product returns are common; return behavior has become a key link affecting consumer experience and platform reputation. A poor return experience may lead consumers to post negative comments on social media, while service recovery that exceeds expectations can stimulate consumers' positive emotions and increase the likelihood of positive post-purchase behavior. Existing research mostly focuses on the cognitive impact of service recovery on consumers, paying less attention to the key psychological mechanism of "positive emotion" and how it drives consumers to engage in post-purchase behavior beneficial to platform reputation. Based on perceived justice theory, this paper constructs a research model, takes the leniency of the platform's return recovery policy as an external variable, and explores whether it affects consumers' positive emotions. At the same time, consumer positive emotion is used as a mediating variable to test whether it plays a mediating role in the path from service recovery quality to consumers' post-purchase behavior. This research can enrich the application of perceived justice theory in the context of e-commerce returns and also provide theoretical guidance for Vipshop to optimize its service recovery strategies.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Relationship between Perceived Justice Theory and Service Recovery Quality

Perceived justice theory originated from social psychology's equity theory, first proposed by Adams. In the context of this study, perceived justice refers to consumers' perception of fairness regarding the service recovery quality of the platform and merchants after experiencing a return service on Vipshop, measured across three dimensions: time cost, communication experience, and compensation received. Based on perceived justice theory, service recovery quality can be operationalized into three dimensions: outcome justice-type recovery, procedural justice-type recovery, and interactional justice-type recovery; consumers' evaluation of service recovery quality essentially reflects their perception of fairness in these three aspects [1]. On this basis, perceived justice further stimulates consumers' positive emotions, ultimately enhancing post-recovery satisfaction and repurchase intention [2].

### 2.2. Relationship between Service Recovery Quality and Consumers' Positive Post-purchase Behavior

In the e-commerce return scenario, service recovery is closely related to consumers' positive post-purchase behavior. Service recovery can positively influence consumers' repurchase intention and word-of-mouth communication intention through the three dimensions of outcome justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice, with perceived justice playing a mediating role [1]. Owusu et al. (2024) also confirmed in the context of e-commerce service failure that the quality of service recovery policies can significantly enhance consumers' repurchase intention [3]. Lee et al. (2024) further found in a study of consumers under a collectivist culture that service recovery quality has a significant positive impact on post-recovery satisfaction and repurchase intention [4]. This paper delves into the mechanism by which service recovery quality affects consumers' positive post-purchase behavior in the context of returns on Vipshop, providing empirical evidence for e-commerce platforms to optimize return service recovery strategies.

### 2.3. Relationship between Platform Return Service Recovery Policies and Consumer Positive Emotions

During the return process, consumers continuously receive feedback from the platform regarding their return requests; thus, the platform's return service recovery policies also influence consumers' emotional experience. When the platform's return policy reaches a certain level of leniency—for example, a longer return window compared to other platforms or additional subsidies for return shipping fees—consumers feel comfortable and relaxed when shopping. Conversely, if the platform's return policy terms are harsh and procedures complicated, consumers may feel anxious and dissatisfied [5]. Return recovery measures with high policy leniency not only enhance consumers' purchase intention but also help strengthen their emotional trust in the platform and repurchase intention, and this behavioral manifestation is precisely due to the influence of consumers' positive emotions [6][7]. Based on previous research, this paper deeply explores how the leniency of return policies directly and independently affects consumers' emotional experience, providing empirical evidence for Vipshop to optimize its return system.

### 2.4. Relationship between Consumer Positive Emotions and Consumers' Positive Post-purchase Behavior

Consumer emotions generated during the return process further influence subsequent behavioral decisions; therefore, a close relationship exists between consumer emotions and positive post-purchase behavior. This paper divides consumers' positive post-purchase

behavior after a return into two dimensions: repurchase behavior and positive word-of-mouth recommendation. Positive emotions aroused in consumers can prompt purchase actions, reflecting the driving effect of emotions on post-purchase behavior [8]. Emotions such as enthusiasm and pleasure experienced during online shopping can generate a sense of well-being, which positively affects purchase frequency and positive word-of-mouth communication [9]. Heydari et al. (2025) found that consumers' hedonic attitudes enhance their willingness to spread word-of-mouth and repurchase [10]. In the specific context of service recovery, Qiu Huanhuan found that consumer emotions serve as a conduit from service recovery to behavioral intentions [1]. Li and Shao (2024) also confirmed from the perspective of reviewers' emotions that emotional tendencies affect consumers' purchase intentions through the mediating roles of trust and empathy [11]. Therefore, this paper uses consumer positive emotion as a mediating variable to reveal the transmission mechanism between return service recovery and consumers' post-purchase behavior.

### **3. Research Hypotheses and Model**

#### **3.1. Research Hypotheses**

##### **3.1.1. Relationship between Service Recovery Quality and Consumer Positive Emotions**

When a service failure occurs, if a company responds positively, it often helps stimulate customers' positive attitudes and thereby enhance repurchase intention. Hence, service recovery after a service failure is crucial. Improvements in the three dimensions of procedural, interactional, and outcome justice can significantly enhance consumers' positive emotions such as satisfaction and trust [12]. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H1: In a service recovery context, procedural justice-type recovery by merchants positively affects consumers' positive emotions.

H2: In a service recovery context, interactional justice-type recovery by merchants positively affects consumers' positive emotions.

H3: In a service recovery context, outcome justice-type recovery by merchants positively affects consumers' positive emotions.

##### **3.1.2. Relationship between Platform Return Recovery Policy Leniency and Consumer Positive Emotions**

There is a significant psychological mechanism linking the leniency of a platform's return recovery policy and consumers' emotional states. A lenient return policy can improve consumers' psychological expectations through the dual pathways of enhancing perceived quality and reducing perceived risk, thereby bringing positive emotional experiences to consumers [13]. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H4: Platform return recovery policy leniency has a positive effect on positive emotions.

##### **3.1.3. Relationship between Consumer Positive Emotions and Post-purchase Behavior**

Different return services can differentially affect consumer emotions, which in turn influence subsequent purchase decisions. In the online shopping context, it has been found that service recovery-related factors affect consumers' post-purchase behavior through psychological mechanisms, suggesting that positive emotions may drive repurchase and word-of-mouth recommendation [14]. Moreover, in the mechanism influencing consumers' repurchase intention, push and pull factors positively affect repurchase intention through the mediating path of customer satisfaction [15]. Based on the above findings, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H5: Consumer positive emotions positively affect repurchase behavior.

H6: Consumer positive emotions positively affect consumers’ positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

### 3.1.4. Mediating Role of Consumer Positive Emotions between Service Recovery Quality and Post-purchase Behavior

Emotion can be defined as an individual’s spontaneous internal psychological response triggered by specific stimuli; this immediate psychological state significantly influences subsequent behavioral tendencies. Through Zhu Yanqing’s (2024) research, it was found that assurance, responsiveness, and fairness of service recovery all have positive effects on consumers’ pleasure emotions. At the same time, consumers’ pleasure emotions significantly and positively affect consumers’ post-purchase behavior [13]. Based on the above findings, this study takes consumer positive emotion as a mediating variable and proposes the following hypothesis.

H7: Service recovery quality affects consumers’ post-purchase behavior through positive emotions.

## 3.2. Research Model

In summary, using perceived justice theory as the research framework, with procedural justice-type recovery, interactional justice-type recovery, outcome justice-type recovery, and platform return recovery policy leniency as independent variables, consumer positive emotion as a mediating variable, and consumer repurchase behavior and positive word-of-mouth recommendation as dependent variables, a research model of the factors influencing service recovery quality on Vipshop is constructed, as shown in Figure 1.

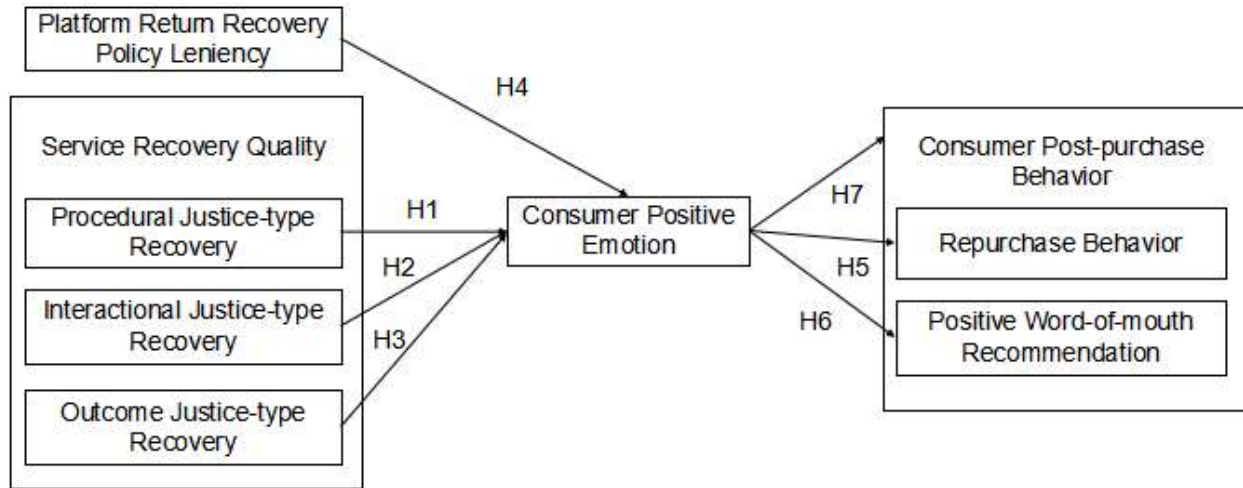


Figure 1. Hypothesized Model

## 4. Research Methods

### 4.1. Questionnaire Design

This study selected seven variables: procedural justice-type recovery, interactional justice-type recovery, and outcome justice-type recovery in the context of returns on Vipshop, as well as the platform’s return service recovery policy leniency, consumer positive emotion, consumer repurchase intention, and positive word-of-mouth recommendation. The measurement items were derived from mature scales and adapted to the Vipshop platform, and later revised based on pre-survey results. The Likert 5-point scoring method was used for this scale.

## 4.2. Data Collection

A total of 680 questionnaires were distributed via online platforms (QQ and WeChat), and the respondents were mainly consumers who had made online purchases on Vipshop and had return experiences. Invalid questionnaires (those completed in less than 50 seconds or with excessively high repetition of adjacent options) were excluded, resulting in 653 valid questionnaires, with an effective rate of 96%.

## 5. Data Statistics and Analysis

### 5.1. Reliability and Validity Tests

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0. The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficients for all variables were above 0.7, indicating high internal consistency. The scale has good reliability and meets the standards for subsequent empirical research. Moreover, the standardized factor loadings of all measurement items exceeded 0.6, and the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) reached the standards of above 0.7 and 0.5, respectively, indicating that the scale has good convergent validity.

Regarding discriminant validity, as shown in Table 1, the square root of the AVE for each variable is higher than its correlation coefficients with other variables, meeting the Fornell-Larcker criterion and validating good discriminant validity among the variables. Furthermore, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the discriminant validity of the overall model. As shown in Table 2, all fit indices reached good standards, further confirming that the latent variables in the questionnaire are clearly distinguishable.

**Table 1.** Correlation Analysis

	Mean	S.D.	Procedural Justice-type recovery	Interactional Justice-type recovery	Outcome Justice-type recovery	Policy Leniency	Positive Emotion	Repurchase Behavior	Positive WOM
Procedural Justice-type recovery	3.908	0.953	1						
Interactional Justice-type recovery	3.820	0.973	.896**	1					
Outcome Justice-type recovery	3.779	0.992	.855**	.872**	1				
Policy Leniency	3.922	0.950	.876**	.853**	.847**	1			
Positive Emotion	3.772	0.987	.832**	.815**	.851**	.829**	1		
Repurchase Behavior	3.824	0.954	.824**	.799**	.800**	.837**	.828**	1	
Positive WOM	3.893	0.973	.817**	.801**	.792**	.842**	.821**	.892**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 2.** Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Structural Equation Model	$X^2$	df	$X^2/df$	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
One-factor model	1958.149	350	5.595	0.914	0.907	0.084
Full model	1112.913	332	3.352	0.958	0.953	0.060



confidence interval of [0.4839, 0.6241]. The 95% confidence interval for the mediating effect of positive emotion is [0.2264, 0.3960], indicating that positive emotion plays a significant mediating role in the relationship.

**Table 4.** Effect Table

	Effect	Se	95% Confidence Interval		Effect Size
			LLCI	ULCI	
Total effect	0.8710	0.0198	0.0000	0.8321	
Direct effect	0.5540	0.0357	0.0000	0.4839	0.5540
Mediating effect	0.3170	0.0440	0.2264	0.3960	0.3170

## 6. Analysis of Research Results

### 6.1. Hypothesis Testing and Research Analysis

From the perspective of Vipshop consumers, this study analyzed the influence of return service recovery measures of the Vipshop platform and its merchants on user behaviors. All research hypotheses were supported, as detailed in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Hypothesis Content	Result
H1	In a service recovery context, procedural justice-type recovery by merchants positively affects consumers' positive emotions.	Supported
H2	In a service recovery context, interactional justice-type recovery by merchants positively affects consumers' positive emotions.	Supported
H3	In a service recovery context, outcome justice-type recovery by merchants positively affects consumers' positive emotions.	Supported
H4	Platform return recovery policy leniency has a positive effect on positive emotions.	Supported
H5	Consumer positive emotions positively affect repurchase behavior.	Supported
H6	Consumers' positive emotions positively affect consumers' positive word-of-mouth recommendations.	Supported
H7	Service recovery quality affects consumers' post-purchase behavior through positive emotions.	Supported

### 6.2. Hypothesis Testing and Research Analysis

The study found that all three dimensions of service recovery quality have a positive effect on consumers' positive emotions, with outcome justice having the most significant effect. Procedural justice (operational convenience) reduces time costs, while interactional justice (respect and empathy) enhances consumer comfort. Positive emotions strongly drive post-purchase behavior, significantly predicting repurchase intention and word-of-mouth recommendation intention. Mediation tests show that positive emotion mediates the relationship between service recovery quality and post-purchase behavior; service recovery quality indirectly drives positive post-purchase behavior by improving consumer emotions.

## 7. Recommendations

Consumers are most concerned about procedural convenience, interpersonal respect, and substantive compensation during returns. Platforms should improve service recovery quality across these three dimensions. Place prominent manual service access points on the app

homepage and return pages; when keywords such as “defective” or “wrong item” are detected, automatically transfer to a human agent and respond within five minutes to reduce consumer frustration caused by complex procedures. Avoid standardized template replies in customer service; use empathetic dialogues so that consumers feel genuine respect and turn to a cooperative attitude. Establish a priority compensation pool for high-frequency return scenarios; after consumers upload valid evidence, issue refunds without waiting for the return shipment, and provide no-threshold or discount coupons to stimulate positive emotions through substantive compensation, forming a virtuous repurchase cycle.

Consumer positive emotions are the mediating bridge between service recovery and positive post-purchase behavior. Platforms should guide consumers during the critical window after emotions have been soothed. After priority refunds or compensation, push limited-time coupons and recommend products matching consumer needs through algorithms to enhance repurchase intent. For consumers who showed reasonableness during returns or gave positive reviews, offer priority shipping or low-cost exchange benefits during promotions to increase user stickiness. Avoid cold star ratings in post-sale evaluation sections; instead use humanized questions like “Feeling better now?” to evoke memories of high-quality service attitudes, prompting spontaneous word-of-mouth dissemination.

The leniency of platform return policies significantly affects consumer emotions; sustained lenient policies are recommended. Extend the no-reason return period from seven to fifteen days for core categories, lowering psychological barriers to purchase decisions and enhancing purchase confidence. Provide return shipping subsidies or free doorstep pickup services through check-in activities, transforming returns from troublesome disputes into easy experiences, maintaining high positive emotions throughout the consumer journey, thereby increasing repurchase and positive recommendation intentions.

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