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Analysis of Factors Influencing Customer's Online Purchase of Fresh Food in Chengdu, China

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates factors influencing consumers' online purchasing behavior for fresh food in Chengdu, China. Grounded in signaling theory, uncertainty management theory, expectation-confirmation theory, and the SERVPERF framework, it identifies seven key variables: food quality, customer support, delivery, packaging, image, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intention. **Research design, data, and methodology:** The research engaged 500 frequent online fresh food shoppers in Chengdu's central urban areas using purposive, quota, convenience, and referral sampling. A questionnaire-based survey ensured data collection, with content validity assessed through Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) and reliability evaluated via Cronbach's Alpha. Descriptive analysis summarized demographic data, while skewness and kurtosis tests confirmed data normality. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) validated the measurement model, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) tested the structural model fit and hypotheses. **Results:** Results revealed that food quality, customer support, delivery, packaging, image, and customer satisfaction significantly influence behavioral intention. The study validated all seven hypotheses, demonstrating that the theoretical model effectively explains consumers' preferences for using online platforms to purchase fresh food. **Conclusions:** These findings contribute valuable insights for e-commerce platforms and retailers aiming to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty in the online fresh food sector.

Keywords: Food Quality, Customer Support, Image, Customer Satisfaction, Behavioral Intention

JEL Classification Code: E44, F31, F37, G15

1. Introduction

In recent years, e-commerce has witnessed a significant surge, prompting more consumers to opt for online platforms when purchasing fresh produce. This transition disrupts conventional shopping habits and brings about novel challenges and prospects in aspects like quality assurance, supply chain management, and consumer support within the fresh food sector. Technological advancements have notably propelled the evolution of China's e-commerce industry, as highlighted by Yue (2017). According to the 2023 China E-commerce Market Data Report, the country's e-commerce market has expanded considerably, reaching a market value of 50.57 trillion yuan in 2023—a 6.31% increase from the previous year's 47.57 trillion yuan. These figures highlight the robustness of China's e-commerce market despite the global economic uncertainties.

Fresh food, an essential component of daily life, is characterized by frequent consumption, substantial purchase volumes, and rapid turnover, making it a cornerstone of the retail market. This category encompasses raw or minimally processed items such as vegetables, fruits, meats, poultry, eggs, dairy products, seafood, prepared meals, and dry goods prone to spoilage at room temperature. These perishable products have a short shelf life and are sensitive to temperature and humidity. Consequently, their storage and transportation require strict cold chain logistics to maintain low temperatures and ensure freshness and safety throughout the supply chain.

Through advanced information network technologies, fresh e-commerce facilitates the direct trading of perishable goods, including vegetables, fruits, seafood, and fresh meat. By 2023, China's online fresh food shopping user base had expanded to 513 million, marking an 11.52% rise from the

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previous year. The share of fresh food in the broader e-commerce sector has steadily increased yearly, becoming a crucial component of the digital commerce ecosystem. As shown in Figure 1, the market value of China's fresh food e-commerce sector reached 642.76 billion yuan in 2023, reflecting a 16.7% growth compared to the prior year (IiMedia, n.d.). This expansion is largely driven by enhanced internet penetration, improved living standards, and superior service quality provided by e-commerce platforms.

Despite the rapid growth of online fresh food platforms in China, especially in urban areas like Chengdu, limited research has examined the specific factors influencing consumer behavior in this segment. Most existing studies focus on general e-commerce or non-perishable goods, lacking attention to fresh food's unique attributes such as perishability, packaging, and delivery concerns. There is also a gap in studies that integrate multiple theoretical perspectives—such as signaling theory, uncertainty management, expectation-confirmation theory, and the SERVPERF framework—to comprehensively understand consumer expectations and satisfaction in this context.

This study aims to fill that gap by identifying and analyzing key factors—food quality, customer support, delivery, packaging, image, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intention—that influence online fresh food purchasing behavior in Chengdu. The findings offer valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners by validating an integrated model and providing practical recommendations to improve customer satisfaction and promote continued use of online platforms for fresh food purchases.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Food Quality

Food quality can be defined as integrating various attributes or characteristics crucial in determining how acceptable a product is to its consumers (Gould, 1977). Maintaining high food quality is essential in the food industry, and ensuring this excellence is vital for building and sustaining consumer trust (Jacob et al., 2024). From the viewpoint of consumers, food quality is evaluated based on four main aspects: sensory features like taste and appearance, nutritional content, convenience, and production methods (Grunert et al., 1996). The concept of "quality" also includes the regulations and standards governing the processing techniques used for each food item on the market (Alexandru, 2010). For consumers, quality means meeting their criteria, such as ensuring nutritional adequacy, guaranteeing food security through reliable product access, ensuring food safety by preventing harmful substances, and satisfying subjective preferences (Alexandru, 2010).

Consumers prioritize food quality, especially in China, where food safety has consistently been a primary concern (Wang et al., 2019). In recent years, online shoppers have shown increased attention to the safety and quality of food products (Zheng et al., 2020). Ensuring superior food quality is crucial for consumer demand (Yu et al., 2020). Given that fresh food items are perishable, there is a significant risk of receiving substandard products when purchasing online, making returns and exchanges more challenging (Ramus & Nielsen, 2005). The key strategy for fresh e-commerce involves integrating rigorous quality control with exceptional customer service (Kara et al., 2022).

H1: Food quality has a significant influence on satisfaction.

2.2 Customer Support

Customer support, product support, after-sales service, technical aid, or simply support plays a crucial role for manufacturers (Goffin, 1999). It allows customers to obtain company service-related information via web-based real-time platforms such as live chat, online customer service portals, and social media sites. Furthermore, human service representatives can offer assistance through these channels (Turel & Connelly, 2013). Customer support involves all efforts to ensure that products remain usable without interruption throughout their entire lifecycle for end-users (Loomba, 1998). This includes various services like installation, operation guidance, maintenance, user training, and telephone support (Yee et al., 2010). The concept of "customer support" also involves considering customer needs comprehensively during the design phase (Lele, 1986) and developing cost-effective, easily maintainable products using supportive design methods (Goffin, 1998). Additionally, it includes efficiently providing logistics support through suitable channels.

The importance of post-purchase customer support surpasses that of the website interface (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003). Research has demonstrated that offering superior customer support can boost intentions to repurchase and reduce negative feedback from customers (Meuter et al., 2000; Reibstein, 2002). In online food shopping, consumers prioritize quick responses and appreciate interacting with attentive customer service representatives who efficiently handle their concerns and resolve issues promptly (Ramus & Nielsen, 2005). Effective customer support is crucial in enhancing customer satisfaction, directly influencing repurchase intentions (Singh & Soderlund, 2020). E-commerce companies must provide consistent support throughout the customer journey, recognizing that completing a transaction is not the end of the service process. On the contrary, if after-sales support is subpar or less effective than pre-purchase assistance, overall customer

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satisfaction may be compromised (Oliver & Bearden, 1985; Park et al., 2012).

H2: Customer support has a significant influence on satisfaction.

2.3 Delivery

The concept of delivery involves the transportation of freshly prepared meals from eateries to residential addresses through digital platforms (Fikar et al., 2018). It includes moving goods from their source to the intended location (Handoyo, 2021). Delivery services provided by restaurants aim to enrich customer lifestyles by allowing them to receive their orders at home after placing them (Arianna & Riccardo, 2021). These services are crafted to ensure the efficient and timely transport of products bought online to the final recipients (Lim et al., 2018). By leveraging platforms, delivery creates a seamless link between suppliers and consumers, significantly boosting convenience and effectiveness (Stevens, 2019).

Food integrity and freshness during transit rely on effective packaging solutions (Zheng et al., 2020). Consistently prompt and trustworthy delivery services significantly boost customer satisfaction and foster lasting loyalty (Cao et al., 2018; Jain et al., 2017; Park et al., 2012; Reibstein, 2002;). Since fresh food demands stringent delivery standards, a highly dependable delivery mechanism becomes indispensable for online food procurement (Yu et al., 2020). Consumers aim to streamline their time and effort by opting for online food purchases, making precise and timely deliveries crucial (Singh & (Singh & Soderlund, 2020). Inaccurate or late deliveries can frustrate customers, potentially diminishing their inclination toward online shopping (Liu et al., 2008).

H3: Delivery has a significant influence on satisfaction.

2.4 Packaging

Packaging is essential in the food processing industry for efficiently containing, protecting, and preserving products while aligning with consumer expectations. Packaging performs multiple roles, including maintaining product integrity, providing necessary information, and enabling smooth transportation (Singh et al., 2012). It communicates between producers and consumers (Rundh, 2005; Silayoi & Speece, 2007). Traditionally, packaging has been divided into four key functions: protection, communication, convenience, and containment (Paine, 1991). Ensuring food safety, maintaining quality, and reducing waste are critical aspects of packaging's importance (Li et al., 2023). Food packaging primarily aims to shield products from external factors and damage, ensure secure enclosure, and supply consumers with detailed ingredient and nutritional data (Coles, 2003).

Online shoppers have expressed concerns about insufficient packaging and its effects on food safety and quality (Ramus & Nielsen, 2005). It is commonly recognized that packaging serves several key functions, including containment, preservation, communication, and enhancing convenience (Robertson, 2013). In online shopping, packaging is vital because it shapes consumers' perceptions of their purchases, significantly affecting customer satisfaction and the likelihood of repurchasing. This influence is especially pronounced in the food sector, where consumers place a high importance on how packaging impacts product quality (Zheng et al., 2020). Effective packaging is essential for maintaining the freshness of food items, directly influencing consumers' decisions to buy again (Yu et al., 2020). Packaging also plays an indispensable role in preserving the nutritional content of processed foods, ensuring their safety during transportation from production sites to consumers, and maintaining their overall quality at the point of consumption (De Meuse et al., 2009).

H4: Packaging has a significant influence on satisfaction.

2.5 Image

Dowling (1986) describes the image as “the set of symbols through which an object is identified and by which individuals communicate, recall, and form associations with it.” Martineau (1958) characterized “image” as a blend of practical features and psychological traits within the consumer’s mental structure. Dichter (1985) views the image as the overall impression of a company. Alvesson (1998) explains that a company’s image can be “an integrated and succinct portrayal of the company as perceived by a particular segment of its external stakeholders.” Ind (1997) defines corporate image as the aggregated perception of an organization by its public, shaped by integrating all received communications. Boulding (1956) conceptualized corporate image as an organizational concept that includes functional and emotional aspects (Kennedy, 1977a, 1977b).

According to Srivastava and Sharma (2013), a company’s image will likely create a halo effect that influences customer evaluations. Consumers tend to have more positive perceptions of highly visible companies compared to those with lower visibility, and this favorable sentiment can mitigate negative experiences in online shopping (Estelami et al., 2004; Grewal et al., 1998; Jin et al., 2008). Specifically, a strong corporate image in online fresh food retail can significantly enhance merchants’ credibility and positively impact customers repurchase intentions (Yu et al., 2020). In today’s competitive business environment, establishing a clear market presence and cultivating a unique corporate identity is essential for success (Young & Salamon, 2002). Research also indicates a positive correlation between

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product image and consumer purchase intentions (Seo et al., 2020).

H5: Image has a significant influence on satisfaction.

H6: Image has a significant influence on behavioral intention.

2.6 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction reflects the emotional reaction stemming from an individual's overall interaction with a particular company, ranging from positive to negative (Atulkar & Kesari, 2017). This sentiment develops through several stages: setting initial expectations, experiencing the actual service or product, and comparing these two aspects (Oliver & Bearden, 1985). Customer satisfaction is a vital business focus that significantly impacts customer behavior and future intentions (He & Song, 2009). Essentially, "customer satisfaction" refers to how customers assess the performance of a company, its products, or services (Johnson & Fornell, 1991). A clear indicator of customer satisfaction is the tendency for customers to engage in repeat purchases (Sharma & Lambert, 1990).

The research highlights that a positive online customer experience following a purchase significantly influences the intention to repurchase by boosting customer satisfaction (Cao et al., 2018). Interactions between customers and companies after the purchase substantially impact satisfaction more than before the purchase (Park et al., 2012). Numerous studies have consistently shown strong links among brand reputation, customer satisfaction, and consumer behavior intentions (Gounaris & Stathakopoulos, 2004). There is also evidence that the quality of a company's products or services correlates positively with customer satisfaction (Anderson et al., 1994). Achieving customer satisfaction, which involves meeting or surpassing customer expectations and needs, forms the foundation of any effective business strategy (Gómez et al., 2004).

H7: Customer satisfaction has a significant influence on behavioral intention.

2.7 Behavioral Intention

Behavioral intentions are self-directed guidelines that steer the execution of specific actions or achieve desired results (Triandis, 1980). These intentions are commonly evaluated by gauging agreement with statements like "I plan to participate in X." Developing a behavioral or goal-oriented intention marks the end of contemplation about intended actions. It indicates the degree of commitment or effort an individual is prepared to invest to achieve their objectives (Ajzen, 1991). The concept of "behavioral intention" encompasses an individual's predisposition to act or a customer's likelihood of continuing engagement with a system over time (Brown & Venkatesh, 2005). Additionally, it can be seen as a form of purchase intent that is a predictive measure of future buying behavior (Lau & David, 2019). In essence, behavioral intention reflects an individual's resolve to undertake a specific action, such as purchasing (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Familiarity with a brand tends to bolster consumer confidence and positively shape their perception of the product, enhancing satisfaction and fostering intentions for future engagement (Ho et al., 2011). Variations influence changes in customer purchasing behavior concerning food in disposable income and evolving lifestyle trends (Al-Ali et al., 2015; Prasad & Aryasri, 2011; Zameer & Mukherjee, 2011). Consumer purchasing patterns differ based on the product category, with fresh food purchases often exhibiting habitual tendencies (Kujala & Johnson, 1993; Solomon et al., 2012). Literature on consumer behavior highlights that customers exhibit varying price sensitivity, as demonstrated by differential thresholds (Michael et al., 1999; Nagaraja & Girish, 2016). Evaluating behavioral intentions involves assessing positive word-of-mouth recommendations, willingness to recommend, and plans for future repurchases (Othman, 2013).

3. Research Methods and Materials

3.1 Research Framework

This conceptual framework builds upon prior research models, integrating insights from three key theoretical studies. Qin and Prybutok (2010) developed a model to evaluate factors influencing customer satisfaction within China's fast-food sector, emphasizing service quality, food quality, and perceived value. Seo et al. (2020) explored how the image and reputation of imported fresh fruits affect customer satisfaction and buying intentions. Kara et al. (2022) examined the role of delivery services, customer support, and packaging in shaping consumers' experiences with online fresh food purchases.

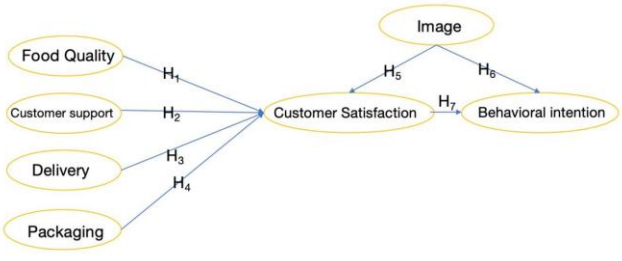

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

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H1: Food quality has a significant influence on satisfaction.
H2: Customer support has a significant influence on satisfaction.
H3: Delivery has a significant influence on satisfaction.
H4: Packaging has a significant influence on satisfaction.
H5: Image has a significant influence on satisfaction.
H6: Image has a significant influence on behavioral intention.
H7: Customer satisfaction has a significant influence on behavioral intention.

3.2 Research Methodology

This study aims to explore consumers' behavioral intentions in Chengdu, with a particular emphasis on their online purchasing of fresh food. The theoretical framework considers multiple factors, including food quality, customer service, delivery efficiency, packaging standards, brand reputation, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intention. These elements significantly impact consumers' preferences for buying fresh food online.

This research engaged a cohort of 500 residents from Chengdu's main urban district in China, all with prior experience purchasing fresh produce online. The sampling techniques encompass purposive, quota, convenience, and snowball sampling. To ensure content validity, the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method was applied based on expert reviews, while data reliability was evaluated through a pilot study with 50 participants. IOC results passed at 0.67, and Cronbach's alpha results were accepted at over 0.7. A structured questionnaire, which included screening questions, measurement items, and demographic information, was administered to the 500 respondents for data collection.

Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze demographic characteristics and assess data normality. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to verify convergent and discriminant validity and evaluate goodness-of-fit indices. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was utilized to test significant relationships and hypotheses. The study adopted a quantitative approach, focusing on urban consumers in Chengdu, China, with a sample size of 500 individuals. Questionnaires served as the primary tool for data collection, with measures taken to ensure the instrument's reliability and validity. IOC was used to assess content validity, and a pilot study involving 50 participants was conducted to validate the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha was employed to measure data reliability.

Through a multi-stage sampling process, 500 respondents were selected from Chengdu's central urban area. Data were gathered, and the measurement model was validated using CFA. SEM was applied to test the structural model, investigating the relationships among the seven variables outlined in the theoretical framework.

3.3 Population and Sample Size

Considering Chengdu's prominent position in e-commerce among Western Chinese cities, this study targets consumers within the urban areas of Chengdu who purchase fresh food via e-commerce platforms at least once or twice weekly. This focus ensures a highly representative and inclusive sample, aiming to understand their purchasing behaviors better. For the analysis, researchers chose 500 individuals from Chengdu's main urban area as an ideal sample size for applying structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques, thereby ensuring the robustness and reliability of the statistical findings.

3.4 Sampling Technique

The researchers utilized non-probability and purposive sampling techniques, focusing on Chengdu's main urban area, which consists of five districts. They then applied quota sampling to identify consumers who have experience purchasing fresh food online and engage in online shopping at least once or twice weekly. Lastly, they distributed questionnaires online and offline using convenience sampling methods.

Table 1: Sample Units and Sample Size

Four Main Subjects	Total population of Chengdu	Proportional Sample Size
Jinniu District	1,288,300	99
Jinjiang District	919,400	71
Wuhou District	1,910,000	147
Chenghua District	1,412,100	108
Qingyang District	973,000	75
Total	**6,502,800**	**500**

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Information

The demographic profile targeted 500 participants, which is detailed in Table 2. Male respondents constituted 34.4%, while female respondents comprised 65.6%. The largest proportion of respondents (46.2%) fell within the 30-39 age bracket, followed by those below 30 (28.4%), those aged 40-49 (24.4%), and those aged 50 and above (1%). Regarding occupation, participants were distributed as follows: enterprise employees (52.4%), government department and institution employees (25.8%), freelance workers (17.4%), and students (4.4%). Educational background data revealed that the majority held a bachelor's degree (78.4%), followed by master's degree holders (13.4%), individuals with a junior college degree or below (5.6%), and those with a doctorate

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(2.6%). Income levels varied, with RMB6,001-10,000 per month reported by 48.2% of respondents, RMB10,000 or more per month reported by 47.6%, and RMB3,001-6,000 per month reported by 4.2%. Finally, in terms of weekly online shopping frequency for fresh food, the majority purchased items three to four times per week (59.4%), followed by one to two times per week (26%), five to six times per week (8.6%), and more than six times per week (6%).

Table 2: Demographic Profile

Demographic Profile (n=500)		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	172	34.4%
	Female	328	65.6%
Age	Under the age of 30	142	28.4%
	30 to 39 years old	231	46.2%
	40 to 49 years old	122	24.4%
	50 years of age or older	5	1%
Occupation	Students	22	4.4%
	Staff of the enterprise	262	52.4%
	Staff of government departments and institutions	129	25.8%
	Freelance	87	17.4%
Education	Junior college or below	28	5.6%
	Bachelor's degree	392	78.4%
	Master's degree	67	13.4%
	Doctorate's degree	13	2.6%
Income	3,000 yuan and below	22	4.4%
	3001-6000 yuan	24	4.8%
	6001-10000 yuan	241	48.2%
	More than 10000 yuan	213	42.6%
Frequency of purchase	1-2times	130	26%
	3-4 times	297	59.4%
	5-6 times	43	8.6%
	more than 6 times	30	6%

4.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Once the initial factors are established, confirmatory methods seek to precisely match the empirical data with the hypothesized factor structure within the dataset, thereby validating the appropriateness of the predefined factor model. Results from confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and discriminant validity tests show that all items corresponding to each variable in this study are statistically significant. The robustness of individual item factor loadings provides insight into both the advantages and constraints in evaluating model fit, with a factor loading greater than 0.30 and a p-value less than 0.05 indicating statistical significance. Furthermore, Table 3 demonstrates structural reliability that exceeds the critical threshold of 0.7, and the average variance extracted is above the guideline value of 0.5 set by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Notably, all estimated values are statistically significant.

Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Result, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variables	Source of Questionnaire (Measurement Indicator)	No. of Item	Cronbach's Alpha	Factors Loading	CR	AVE
Food Quality (FD)	Jacob et al. (2024)	4	0.715	0.550-0.777	0.726	0.404
Customer support (CUS)	Turel and Connelly (2013)	5	0.774	0.560-0.713	0.776	0.411
Delivery (DEL)	Fikar et al. (2018)	4	0.762	0.637-0.688	0.764	0.448
Packaging (PAC)	Singh et al. (2012)	3	0.713	0.602-0.775	0.719	0.463
Image (IMA)	Dowling (1986)	4	0.732	0.610-0.695	0.737	0.413
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	Atulkar and Kesari (2017)	3	0.802	0.620-0.870	0.798	0.573
Behavioral intention (BI)	Ajzen (1991)	4	0.849	0.669-0.875	0.851	0.591

The square root of the average variance extracted indicates that all correlation values surpass those corresponding to the respective variable, as shown in Table 4. Furthermore, various indices such as CMIN/DF, GFI, AGFI, NFI, CFI, TLI, and RMSEA are employed to evaluate the model fit during CFA testing.

Table 4: Goodness of Fit for Measurement Model

Fit Index	Acceptable Criteria	Statistical Values
CMIN/df	<5.00 (Al-Mamary & Shamsuddin, 2015; Awang, 2012)	2.158
GFI	≥ 0.85 (Sica & Ghisi, 2007)	0.906
AGFI	≥0.80 (Sica & Ghisi, 2007)	0.883
NFI	≥0.80 (Wu & Wang, 2006)	0.859
CFI	≥ 0.80 (Bentler, 1990)	0.918
TLI	≥ 0.90 (Hair et al., 2006)	0.905
RMSEA	< 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999)	0.048
Model Summary		**Acceptable Model Fit**

Remark: CMIN/DF = the ratio of the chi-square value to degree of freedom, GFI = goodness-of-fit index, AGFI = adjusted goodness-of-fit index, NFI = normalized fit index, CFI = comparative fit index, TLI = Tucker Lewis index, and RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation

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Based on the values presented in Table 5, which exceed acceptable thresholds, convergent and discriminant validity have been confirmed. These findings establish convergent and discriminant validity and support the measurement model, thereby validating the subsequent structural model estimation.

Table 5: Discriminant Validity

	FD	CUS	DEL	PAC	IMA	CS	BI
FD	**0.636**						
CUS	0.190	**0.641**					
DEL	0.017	0.059	**0.669**				
PAC	0.140	0.109	0.037	**0.680**			
IMA	0.114	0.191	0.115	0.136	**0.643**		
CS	0.144	0.398	0.199	0.200	0.339	**0.757**	
BI	0.095	0.400	0.091	0.170	0.45	0.597	**0.769**

Note: The diagonally listed value is the AVE square roots of the variables
Source: Created by the author.

4.3 Structural Equation Model (SEM)

To assess the causal relationships among variables in the proposed model while accounting for potential measurement errors in structural coefficients, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is utilized (Hair et al., 2010). The evaluation of SEM's goodness-of-fit indices is detailed in Table 6. According to Greenspoon and Saklofske (1998), the Chi-square/degrees-of-freedom (CMIN/DF) ratio should ideally be no more than 5, while the Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) should exceed 0.85, and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) should exceed 0.8.

After conducting SEM analyses and refining the model with AMOS version 26, the resulting fit indices demonstrated satisfactory alignment: CMIN/DF = 2.313, GFI = 0.895, Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI) = 0.874, Normed Fit Index (NFI) = 0.842, CFI = 0.903, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.893, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.051. These metrics fall within the acceptable ranges outlined in Table 6, indicating a well-fitting model.

Table 6: Goodness of Fit for Structural Model

Fit Index	Acceptable Criteria	Statistical Values
CMIN/df	<5.00 (Al-Mamary & Shamsuddin, 2015; Awang, 2012)	2.313
GFI	≥ 0.85 (Sica & Ghisi, 2007)	0.895
AGFI	≥0.80 (Sica & Ghisi, 2007)	0.874
NFI	≥0.80 (Wu & Wang, 2006)	0.842
CFI	≥ 0.80 (Bentler, 1990)	0.903
TLI	≥ 0.90 (Hair et al., 2006)	0.893
RMSEA	< 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999)	0.051
Model Summary		**Acceptable Model Fit**

Remark: CMIN/DF = the ratio of the chi-square value to degree of freedom, GFI = goodness-of-fit index, AGFI = adjusted goodness-of-fit index, NFI = normalized fit index, CFI = comparative fit index, TLI = Tucker Lewis index, and RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation

4.4 Research Hypothesis Testing Result

The research model assesses the significance of each variable by examining regression coefficients and the R-squared value. As shown in Table 7, all hypotheses are supported at a significance level of p = 0.05. Among these, customer satisfaction has the most pronounced effect on behavioral intention, with a coefficient of 0.667. Further analysis reveals that customer support significantly influences customer satisfaction (β = 0.448), while image also impacts satisfaction (β = 0.315) and behavioral intention (β = 0.236). The model effectively captures the variations in behavioral intentions, as detailed in Table 7.

Table 7: Hypothesis Results of the Structural Equation Modeling

Hypothesis	(β)	t-value	Result
H1: FD→CS	0.054	1.093	Not Supported
H2: CUS→CS	0.448	8.167*	Supported
H3: DEL→CS	0.174	3.458*	Supported
H4: PAC→CS	0.152	2.987*	Supported
H5: IMA→CS	0.315	5.761*	Supported
H6: IMA→BI	0.236	4.896*	Supported
H7: CS→BI	0.667	13.223*	Supported

Note: * p<0.05
Source: Created by the author

The results summarized in Table 7 can be elaborated as follows. H2 indicates that customer support is a crucial factor influencing customer satisfaction, with a standardized coefficient of 0.448. This suggests that assisting users, such as guidance and interaction regarding products or services, substantially affects their satisfaction levels (Ekechi et al., 2024). Specifically, effective customer support significantly contributes to enhancing customer satisfaction. H3 asserts that delivery efficiency notably impacts customer satisfaction, with a standardized coefficient of 0.174. This finding aligns with Dündar and Öztürk (2020) argument that the promptness and convenience of delivering products from businesses to consumers via e-commerce platforms play a critical role in shaping customer satisfaction. H4 highlights that packaging quality significantly influences customer satisfaction, evidenced by a standardized coefficient 0.152. These findings support Oliver (1980) research, which posits that Packaging acts as a sensory interface for food products. Consumers have specific expectations regarding food packaging, and meeting these expectations can enhance their satisfaction. H5 suggests that brand image substantially affects customer satisfaction, as indicated by a standardized coefficient of 0.315. This underscores the importance of a positive brand image in fostering higher levels of customer

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satisfaction.

The findings presented in Table 6 can be further refined as follows: H2 has demonstrated that customer support is a pivotal determinant of customer satisfaction, with its coefficient having a standard value of 0.448. Customer support, including user guidance and interaction with products or services, significantly impacts user satisfaction (Ekechi et al., 2024). Specifically, customer support plays a significant role in shaping customer satisfaction. H3 posits that Delivery significantly impacts customer Satisfaction, yielding a standard coefficient value of 0.174. It substantiates Dündar and Öztürk (2020) contention that the timeliness and convenience of product delivery from enterprises to consumers through e-commerce platforms significantly influence customer satisfaction. H4 suggests that Packaging significantly affects customer satisfaction, resulting in a standard coefficient value of 0.152. The findings also corroborate Oliver's (1980) research, which suggests that Packaging serves as the sensory input for food. Consumers hold specific expectations for food packaging. H5 proposes that Image substantially impacts customer Satisfaction, reflected by the standard coefficient value of 0.315.

The research findings indicated that Image positively impacts customer satisfaction, a conclusion corroborated by prior empirical studies (Anwar et al., 2019). Hypothesis H6 posits that Image significantly affects customer behavioral intention, as evidenced by a standardized coefficient 0.236. This viewpoint is reinforced by Okazaki and Taylor (2013), who emphasized the critical role of a positive image in enhancing customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the standardized coefficient for the influence of customer satisfaction on behavioral intention is 0.667, which aligns with Hypothesis H7 and underscores its substantial impact. This outcome is consistent with the work of Cronin and Taylor (1992), who found that higher satisfaction levels increase consumers' likelihood to reuse the service and promote it through positive word-of-mouth.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

This research investigates the substantial influence of online consumer fresh food purchases in Chengdu's five primary urban districts. Grounded in a set of hypotheses, the study delves into various dimensions, including food quality, customer support, delivery, packaging, image, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intention. A survey was designed and administered to individuals residing in Chengdu's main urban areas who shop online for fresh food every week, typically once or twice weekly. By analyzing the collected data, this paper aims to uncover the key determinants of customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions related to online fresh food purchases in Chengdu. To evaluate the validity and reliability of the proposed conceptual framework, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was employed. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was also utilized to analyze the factors impacting customer satisfaction and purchasing behavior.

The key insights from the study can be summarized as follows: Customer satisfaction, serving as a mediating factor, has the most substantial impact on behavioral intentions. This finding is particularly significant for boosting consumer behavioral intentions in the fresh e-commerce sector. It highlights the importance of ensuring food freshness, providing robust online customer support, facilitating timely and secure deliveries, managing consumer expectations positively, fostering favorable emotions and trust, and encouraging repeat purchases and word-of-mouth communication. All these factors collectively contribute to enhancing brand loyalty and image. These conclusions are corroborated by the analysis conducted by Cronin and Taylor (1992).

In online shopping, effective customer support is pivotal in influencing customer satisfaction. Its main goal is to enhance and optimize the online purchasing experience related to products and services (Ekechi et al., 2024). Customer support can address various concerns by offering swift responses and efficient problem resolution. For example, it can help consumers make well-informed decisions when choosing fresh food online, alleviating their worries about the quality of perishable items. Additionally, personalized services bolster consumer confidence in the transaction process, improving the shopping experience. Positive and effective interactions within the customer support framework can also foster long-term relationships, which is crucial for sustainable business growth in the competitive e-commerce environment.

Innovative and original content, including promotional videos, textual information, and images shared online, can profoundly influence consumers' perceptions of a brand's hedonic and utilitarian qualities (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). Consumers tend to prioritize products with a positive image, which significantly enhances their satisfaction. Research has demonstrated that brand image strongly affects consumer behavior intentions, a finding supported by Okazaki and Taylor (2013) and Kara et al. (2022). Recent studies indicate that consumers are skeptical toward e-commerce platforms and place significant importance on the consistency between the images merchants provide and the products received. When purchasing fresh food online, consumers rely heavily on advertising, promotional materials, reviews, and visual representations to form their behavioral intentions. Thus, the validated model in this study is anticipated to offer valuable guidance to fresh food companies in cultivating a positive

image and fostering favorable consumer behavior intentions.

In online fresh food purchases, the delivery process significantly influences customer satisfaction and must be conducted promptly and securely. Efficient and dependable delivery services enhance customer satisfaction and build loyalty (Jain et al., 2017). Conversely, factors such as packaging and food quality have less pronounced effects. Firstly, packaging plays a crucial role in preserving the freshness of perishable items (Oliver, 1980). Fresh food companies understand that maintaining high-quality products is essential for their competitive advantage. This awareness drives them to continuously improve product quality and develop better preservation packaging to attract consumers. At the same time, consumers generally expect consistent quality and reliable packaging from the fresh food they purchase. Secondly, the wide variety of fresh produce allows consumers to choose based on personal preferences. For instance, consumers in Chengdu, China, demonstrate high confidence in the packaging and quality of fresh food products. While timely and secure delivery is critical, the importance of packaging and consistent food quality should not be overlooked, as they contribute to consumer trust and satisfaction.

5.2 Recommendation

The study revealed that in Chengdu's five primary urban districts, the key factors affecting consumers' satisfaction with online fresh food shopping, in order of importance, are customer support, image, delivery, packaging, and food quality. Therefore, it is advised that fresh food e-commerce companies focus on improving these areas to boost customer satisfaction and influence behavioral intention.

To enhance customer support during the online purchase of fresh food, it is essential to reinforce training programs for service personnel. These programs should focus on improving customer interaction skills, expanding their professional knowledge, enhancing problem-solving capabilities, and familiarizing them with after-sales processes such as return and exchange policies. This approach facilitates swift response mechanisms and ongoing follow-up procedures while safeguarding customer privacy. Incorporating artificial intelligence (AI) into customer support has revolutionized the field (Adebukola et al., 2022; Soni et al., 2019). Consequently, leveraging AI rationally by creating an online knowledge base and a comprehensive FAQ section can provide efficient, personalized, and multifaceted assistance. Moreover, prominent and high-quality product packaging and continuous improvements in fresh food quality are critical factors that significantly influence consumer satisfaction.

Both theoretical insights and practical considerations highlight the critical need for e-commerce managers and related staff to recognize the importance of customer support, brand image, and delivery efficiency in influencing customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Mai & Cuong, 2021). Effective customer support significantly improves the consumer experience, fostering a positive and lasting impression of the product. As a result, customers are more likely to express higher satisfaction and exhibit favorable behavioral intentions. Consequently, managers should focus on strengthening the customer support system, specifically for online fresh food purchases, to enhance the overall shopping experience and increase consumer confidence in product quality. This can be accomplished through strategic marketing efforts, detailed product descriptions, targeted promotional materials, and visual performance assessments, such as customer testimonials and reviews on product usage.

Customer satisfaction is significantly influenced by the precise and timely delivery of purchased products (Iyer et al., 2004; YuSheng & Ibrahim, 2019). Enhancing cold storage infrastructure, refining cold chain logistics, and ensuring efficient logistics operations are essential to achieve this. Firstly, continuous advancements in the technology and equipment used in cold chain logistics can drive greater efficiency and intelligence. Additionally, implementing collaborative distribution models can help lower operational costs. Secondly, optimizing the distribution area and routes, particularly emphasizing the "last mile," is critical. Exploring innovative methods such as crowdsourced logistics for final-mile delivery and establishing smart fresh produce pickup stations are promising strategies to consider.

The study's outcomes provide valuable insights for fresh e-commerce businesses and associated professionals to boost customer satisfaction and behavioral intent. This, in turn, enhances consumers' attraction to fresh food products, helping expand the customer base and improve profitability.

5.3 Limitation and Further Study

This study has made initial strides in theoretical and practical explorations but acknowledges certain limitations. First, the research focuses exclusively on fresh food consumers in Chengdu, China, which restricts its applicability to other regions and sectors, such as offline supermarkets and farmers' markets. Different regions, industries, or countries might yield varied analytical results. Second, the current study only investigates the relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioral intention by analyzing factors like food quality, customer service, delivery, packaging, and brand image. Future studies should consider incorporating elements such as brand trustworthiness, perceived value customer loyalty, and overall brand experience. Moreover, future research should explore how the digital economy influences fresh e-commerce and its effects on customer satisfaction.

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