

Research on the reform of teaching content and methods for the 'online store customer service' course aimed at the ASEAN market in cross-border e-commerce

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Abstract: With the implementation of visa exemption policies for China by ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, cross-border e-commerce in Guangxi, oriented towards the ASEAN market, has developed rapidly. This is particularly evident in the increased demand for customer service talents in online stores engaged in cross-border e-commerce. In this context, the reform of the 'Online Store Customer Service' course assumes significant importance. This paper delves into the e-commerce environment, cultural differences, and consumer habits of ASEAN, identifying shortcomings in the existing course structure. Addressing these shortcomings, the paper proposes a series of practical and feasible reform measures aimed at enhancing the practicality and internationalization of the course. These reforms are designed to cultivate professional customer service personnel who can effectively communicate in a cross-cultural context. Finally, the study discusses the practical implications of this research and outlines future research directions.

Key words: ASEAN market; cross-border e-commerce; online store customer service; course reform; teaching methods

1 Introduction

As economic globalization continued to develop, cross-border e-commerce emerged as a new and fast growing way of doing business that connected companies located in different countries and regions. In the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) market, cross-border e-commerce was yet another example of a business model that was both disruptive and had high growth potential. The ASEAN region was a large, diverse, and underserved market with about 700 million people [1]. Recent research has shown that the ASEAN e-commerce market is exploding, attracting interest from global e-commerce companies and stimulating the emergence of a service sector in the industry, of which online store customer service is one example.

Online customer service was a critical component of cross-border online shopping. Customer service not only facilitated communication and trust between company and consumer, but also impacted consumers' shopping experiences and a seller's reputation in a largely multicultural environment [2]. In making purchase decisions especially for less-experienced cross-border shoppers, the quality of customer service and the ease of effective communication were

paramount contributing factors [3]. In creating an enabling environment for cross-border e-commerce, the competitive advantage of those sellers with excellent customer service was evident. However, the supply of capable workers, with appropriate 'curriculum' knowledge and skills to support the cross-border shopper, was lagging behind [4]. The gap between what global references could be sourced online and what was available domestically in terms of 'on-the-ground' service was another complexity that many SMEs were grappling with. And yet most business programs 'curricula' did not sufficiently recognize the unique needs of local industries. Particularly in tertiary education programs that focused on 'online customer service', many of the existing Asia-region academic programs did not fully address the requirements of the ASEAN marketplace [5]. The consequence was a dual disadvantage: the dearth of cross-border e-commerce worker education and the less competitive position of ASEAN-based companies in being a seller.

Therefore, the purpose of this research was to investigate and propose changes to the teaching content and methods of the existing "Online Customer Service" course so that it could better cater to the ASEAN market's unique needs. The intended output was to provide guidelines and a framework to other online cross-border commerce education providers who might want to revise their programs to meet the unique needs of the ASEAN e-commerce market. The objectives of the research were threefold: (1) To analyze the current ASEAN online customer service environment, and to derive the market-specific skills and knowledge that online customer service providers would need; (2) To perform a diagnosis of the current 'Online Customer Service' course on existing-line, and to identify the areas where the content and instruction might be deficient for meeting the needs of ASEAN cross-border e-commerce companies; (3) To provide recommendations on how to improve the content, instruction techniques, and assessment methods for the 'Online Customer Service' course, so that it would be more suitable for its intended learners, who are online customer service providers for ASEAN cross-border e-commerce companies.

2 Analysis of the ASEAN market environment

2.1 Market characteristics

As depicted in Figure 1, the ASEAN market included eleven countries and economies: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Timor-Leste. With a population of about 700 million people, it was a sizable and fast-growing market. This market is characterized by rapid economic growth and diversity. The uniqueness of the ASEAN market lies in its diverse cultures, languages, and consumer habits. Firstly, the region encompasses various religious beliefs, ethnic cultures, and languages. Secondly, the multicultural background poses challenges to the operation of cross-border e-commerce, especially online store customer service, necessitating consideration of different language supports and cultural sensitivities.

In terms of consumer habits, ASEAN consumers are increasingly inclined towards online shopping, especially the younger generation, who have high expectations for product quality, price, and shopping experience. Additionally, social media and mobile payments play a significant role in the ASEAN market, influencing consumer shopping decisions and behaviors.



Figure 1. Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

2.2 E-commerce development status

According to the "2023 Southeast Asia Digital Economy Report", the digital economy in the ASEAN region is expected to achieve a revenue of \$100 billion in 2023, with a compound annual growth rate of 27% since 2021, 1.7 times faster than the Gross Merchandise Value (GMV). E-commerce, tourism, transportation, and media have contributed \$70 billion in revenue. As shown in Figure 2, the e-commerce sector in the ASEAN market has shown significant growth in recent years, with the internet economy of ASEAN expected to see substantial growth in the coming years.

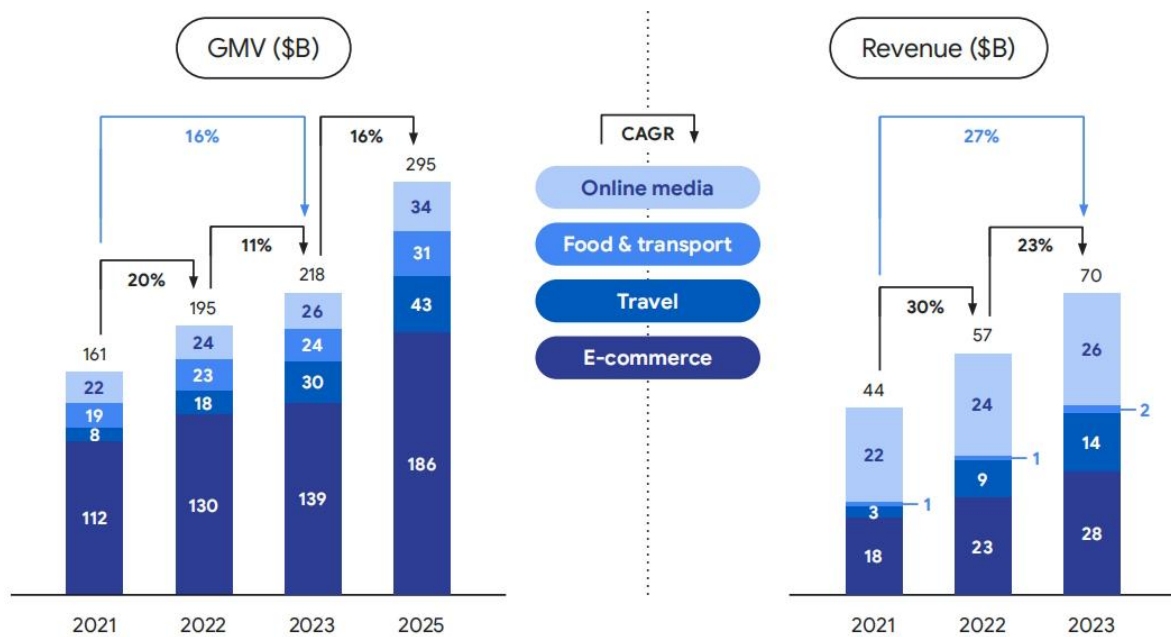


Figure 2. Growth of the e-commerce economy in the ASEAN digital economy (Source: "2023 Southeast Asia Digital Economy Report", 2023).

Despite this, the ASEAN market still faces challenges in the e-commerce sector. Firstly, the logistics and distribution systems in many ASEAN countries are still underdeveloped, affecting the efficiency of e-commerce and consumer experience. Secondly, the diversity of the ASEAN market requires companies to consider different languages and cultural differences in marketing and customer service. Thirdly, the Internet regulations and e-commerce policies vary across the

ASEAN region, presenting another significant consideration for cross-border e-commerce. This requires cross-border e-commerce enterprises to navigate complex legal frameworks across different countries, ensuring their operations comply with each country's regulations and standards.

3 Analysis and reform suggestions for the 'Online Store Customer Service' course targeting the ASEAN market

3.1 Current status analysis of the course

Through research, it was found that most 'Online Store Customer Service' courses adopt a traditional teaching model combined with simulated scenario training. The main contents include customer service communication skills, basic e-commerce operational procedures, and handling customer complaints. There is a lack of case teaching involving cross-border aspects, which shows limitations when addressing the dynamic e-commerce market, especially the ASEAN market needs, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Limitation analysis of the teaching methods in the 'Online Store Customer Service' course

Issue	Description
Insufficient cultural adaptation	The course content lacks in-depth exploration of the diverse cultures, religious customs, and language differences in ASEAN, failing to adequately prepare students for effective communication and service in a cross-cultural environment.
Lack of practical operational experience	The course is heavily theoretical and lacks practical operations and real-life situational simulations, preventing students from sufficiently practicing and mastering the skills needed to handle complex customer service scenarios.
Absence of technological applications	The current course does not cover technological applications essential for modern e-commerce, such as the use of artificial intelligence in customer service, big data analysis, and CRM (Customer Relationship Management) systems.

4 Current status analysis of the course

Given the limitations in the teaching content and methods of the current 'Online Store Customer Service' course, as well as the specific needs of the ASEAN market, this paper proposes the following five reform suggestions. These are aimed at enhancing the practicality, relevance, and interactivity of the course, thereby better cultivating professional online store customer service personnel who can adapt to a multicultural environment.

First, strengthen cultural adaptation education

The course should include modules on the cultures, business customs, and languages of ASEAN countries; enhance students' understanding and adaptation to ASEAN cultures through organized case studies, cultural seminars, and interactive simulation exercises; and design customer service scenarios with regional characteristics for practical simulation, to improve students' cross-cultural communication skills.

Second, intensify practical training and case analysis

The course should combine real-world customer service situations and cases using interactive teaching methods such as role-playing, group discussions, and situational simulations. This will enhance students' practical operational skills and enable them to better apply theoretical knowledge in real work. In addition, during the practical training phase, through actual operation of cross-border e-commerce online stores, students' abilities in practical application, problem analysis, and problem solving can be improved.

Third, integrate the latest e-commerce technology teaching

The course should be continuously updated to include the latest e-commerce technologies, such as artificial

intelligence customer service systems, multi-channel customer service platforms, and customer relationship management (CRM) systems, ensuring that students master the industry's cutting-edge knowledge and skills, preparing them for future career development.

Fourth, enhance language training

Incorporate training in English and major ASEAN languages into the course to improve students' multilingual communication abilities. This will assist students in performing customer service work better in a multicultural environment, enhancing service quality and efficiency.

Fifth, offer international exchange and internship opportunities

Collaborate with e-commerce enterprises in ASEAN countries to provide students with opportunities for international exchange and internships. This will allow students to experience business practices in different cultural backgrounds firsthand, broaden their international perspectives, and lay a solid foundation for their future careers.

5 Conclusion

This paper addresses the deficiencies of the 'Online Store Customer Service' course in adapting to the multicultural environment and specific business needs of the ASEAN market, and puts forth targeted reform suggestions. This provides a new perspective for education and practice in the field of cross-border e-commerce. For educational institutions, the results of the study highlight the importance of innovative teaching methods, especially when addressing the challenges of multicultural markets. Simultaneously, this research is also significant for the cross-border e-commerce industry, offering new insights into the training of customer service personnel, emphasizing the importance of cross-cultural communication abilities and technical skills. For future research directions, it is suggested to further explore customer service strategies under different cultural backgrounds and the potential applications of emerging technologies in enhancing service efficiency and customer experience.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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