

Enhancing E-commerce complaint management with digitalization for sustainable economic growth and SDGs 8 alignment: A case study from Indonesia

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Abstract

E-commerce in Indonesia has grown exponentially over the past decade, fueled by the digital transformation accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this growth is promising, many of the platforms have exposed the flaws in their complaint-handling mechanisms. Often these issues become common because the processes used to resolve them are inadequate. When their complaints are rejected because there is insufficient evidence, buyers may feel alienated and when sellers accept false claims without robust verification, they risk financial loss. Therefore, this study examines the core problems of e-commerce platforms, including cases where both buyers and sellers suffer because of inefficient dispute resolution mechanisms. The solution proposed is to leverage mandatory video documentation during the packing process and make use of proprietary logistics services. These measures can be used by platforms to fill critical gaps, build trust and create a more level playing field for all stakeholders. These solutions align with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by enhancing operational efficiency and fairness in e-commerce, which in turn supports economic growth and fosters inclusive business practices.

Keywords

E-commerce, customer service, complaints, seller protection, technological innovation, dispute resolution, SDG

Introduction

Trends of e-commerce

The Indonesian e-commerce industry rapidly grew from infancy to being a mainstay of the national economy (Zeng et al., 2023). In the last decade, its evolution has been driven by technological advances, internet penetration, and change in consumer preferences (Ompusunggu and Simbolonh, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst, spurring unparalleled adoption of online platforms as physical constraints forced consumers to rely on digital solutions to buy their essentials and to manage their day to day activities (Hendricks and Mwapwele, 2024). It was not a temporary reaction to a global crisis but a major change that has been kept in the post pandemic period, which changes consumer behavior and market dynamics (Anvari and Norouzi, 2016). The fact that Indonesia's e-commerce boom fits perfectly with Society 5.0, which is a time when technology enhances human life through convenience,

efficiency and connection, is no surprise (Badawi et al., 2024). In Society 5.0, we intuitively see a world where digital tools are not only helping society, but making society even more accessible, inclusive and available to more people (Hasin et al., 2021). These principles describe Indonesia's e-commerce landscape, which functions as a hub connecting millions of buyers and sellers from across wide distances and fragmented market segments (Wijaya, 2023).

Indonesia is the fourth largest country in the world by population and its domestic market is its base to become the world's largest e-commerce giant (Zahoor et al., 2023). By

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2023, the sector had added a contribution of \$62 billion to the national GDP, roughly 5% of the country's total economic output (Damuri, 2023). It has put Indonesia among the world's top e-commerce markets, behind only China, the United States and India. The growth trajectory in the sector is equally impressive at a CAGR of 15% in the next 5 years (Guven, 2020). This growth rate is more than what regional peers are experiencing, and it makes Indonesia the number one player in Southeast Asia's burgeoning digital economy (Yu et al., 2023). All of these contribute to the growth of such something as they include government's initiative to increase digital infrastructure, widespread smartphone usage, and a youth, tech savvy population that is willing to welcome the dealer of online commerce (Salah and Ayyash, 2024). Additionally, with the rising of the importance of international investments and partnerships in the industry, local platforms could penetrate in new market areas and deepen their technological vision. With sophisticated algorithms, personalized marketing strategies and logistical networks ready for even the most remote part of Indonesian archipelago, today's e-commerce platforms in Indonesia use what would seem sophisticated ideas (Zhang et al., 2021).

This has been a rapid expansion and there has been a challenge. Despite technological and logistical advance matching demands of the consumer, other operational areas have failed to keep pace (Bai et al., 2022). The biggest problem is with the domain of customer service and dispute resolution. As e-commerce platforms are middlemen between buyers and sellers, the mission of these e-commerce platforms is to ensure that both sides get a fair and acceptable outcome (Miquel-Romero et al., 2020). But the mechanism to handle the buyer complaints is not as good as these expectations, resulting in loss of trust and satisfaction in the ecosystem. The types of complaints frequently encountered are diverse: This includes incorrect items shipped, damaged and expired goods; products that do not match descriptions or don't even arrive (Chawla and Kumar, 2022). However, while these are universally common issues within an e-commerce organization across the world, the challenge in Indonesia is exacerbated by the sheer magnitude of transaction and the disparity of sophistication between the buyers, the sellers and the third-party logistics provider. There are severe consequences for missteps in dealing with these complaints. When complaints aren't handled well, or when fraudulent claims aren't appropriately screened, sellers lose money and their reputation. Yet if buyers start to become disillusioned after legitimate grievances are ignored and they lose trust in online shopping altogether (Helmy et al., 2024).

In this case study, we are looking in depth to the problem of e-commerce complaints management in Indonesia. It provides a demonstration of the operational and systemic holes that exacerbate these problems and suggests creative solutions to improve transparency, accountability, and

fairness. It is important to note that this study focuses on the fact that complaint resolution is an important touch point in the buyer seller relationship, and that this is an important part that helps maintain the health and sustainability of the e-commerce ecosystem. In this exploration we aim to provide actionable insights for e-commerce managers, policymakers, and other stakeholders who aim to enhance customer experience and operational efficiency in the digital age. This research aligns with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by promoting a fairer, more efficient complaint resolution process that contributes to the sustainable growth of Indonesia's e-commerce sector, fostering a stable environment for all stakeholders.

Background of the case study

As e-commerce platforms bridge the gap between buyers and sellers, they take on a significant responsibility: to make sure disputes are resolved fairly and quickly. But the sector's rapid growth has outstripped the development of robust complaint-handling frameworks. This has resulted in many recurring issues. The problem is that buyers often complain about getting products that do not match what they ordered, are damaged, or are different than what they were told would be delivered (Berraies and Hamouda, 2019). However, sellers could face deceptive complaints from buyers, who provide fake information to seek refunds. The breakdown of trust usually occurs because both parties feel inadequately supported by the platform (Widyanto et al., 2022).

Marketing and customer relationship management has extensively studied consumer complaints (Jung and Shegai, 2023). Most of the times, dissatisfied customers complain due to unmet expectations and demand redress or resolution (Vaculčíková et al., 2020). Past research confirms the importance of timely addressing complaints to improve customer loyalty and reduce the cost of obtaining new customers (Davicik et al., 2021). The internet has changed the way we behave as complainants, with consumers being able to post their complaints on public forums, blogs and complaint sites (Hoang et al., 2021). Research demonstrates that electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has a significant impact on a brand perception, even deterring customers from interacting with negative reviewed businesses (Golovokva et al., 2019). Especially, e-commerce platforms are subject to special troubles because their reliance on digital interfaces and logistical networks. Defective products, delayed delivery, lack of customer support are most common issues (Błoński, 2023). Content analysis helps us to understand these grievances and helps us to address consumer pain points more effectively (Efrata et al., 2019).

Consider a typical scenario: A different situation arises when a buyer files a complaint that the item they received doesn't match the listing. They have to submit an unboxing

video so the buyer knows they are being truthful. And while the video might not be the seller's actual shipment, buyers have been known to swap items to make false claims. If there is no sufficient proof from the seller's side, then the platform has to be on side of the buyer and it might cost the seller heavily. Sometimes, however, there are cases where genuine buyer complaints fail to address because often there is insufficient evidence or procedural lapse. If an item is received damaged or wrong the person it was delivered to may not have the documentation that the platform demands. This leads to rejection of the buyer as a complaint, and the buyer gets frustrated and alienated.

These recurring issues highlight a critical gap in the complaint-handling process: and a lack of robust tools to actually verify fairness and transparency. Simply put, platforms that mediate disputes rely on CS teams to be their backbone, yet these teams don't always have the resources or evidence to make well informed decisions. The objectives of this case study are:

1. Explore the common issues faced by e-commerce platforms in handling buyer and seller complaints, focusing on fairness, transparency, and operational efficiency.
2. Analyze the consequences of unresolved complaints on buyers, sellers, and e-commerce platforms, including financial losses, reputational risks, and decreased trust.
3. Investigate the proposed solutions, such as mandatory video documentation during packing and proprietary logistics services, and their potential to address current challenges.
4. Discuss how technological tools, such as video recording and AI-assisted dispute analysis, can improve accountability and streamline complaint resolution.
5. Develop actionable strategies for e-commerce platforms to implement the proposed solutions effectively, ensuring stakeholder compliance and maximizing benefits.

A flawed system and its far-reaching consequences

If the online complaint management systems are not sufficient, they have implications to all stakeholders involved in an online transaction which are very long lasting (Figure 1). But for sellers, buyers' complaints resolved or handled poorly or left unresolved can poison the well for that platform. This erosion of trust is not an inconvenience; it's a fundamental change in the way buyers relate to the platform. Repeated negative experience over time has pushed buyers to try other marketplaces, switch to

competitor who are offering a better seamless and reliable customer experience. Apart from diminishing the platform user base, it also limits the platform's ability to grow and hold market dominance.

Similarly, an inefficient complaint resolution process poses the same problem for sellers. Fraudulent complaints by buyers, who use the system to obtain refunds or replacements, unfairly, results in direct financial losses for sellers. There's more to this loss than just the dollar value of the products themselves: It could also involve the actual time and energy spent resolving disputes. Moreover, the loss of reputational value due to yield to disputants may deprive them from attracting further engagement from buyers with the seller. However, this tarnished reputation will follow sellers away from the platform totally as they look for more seller friendly environments, or alternate distribution channels. So sellers leave, means the platform cannot offer such a huge number of products, and/or more dissatisfied users.

The effects of bad complaint management reach the platform itself. Prolonged resolution processes put strain on internal resources, and they resort to deploying customer service teams, legal advisors and personnel that can handle dispute resolution. The high overhead costs due to these operational inefficiencies reduce the platform's profitability. However, platforms are at risk of financial lawsuits, penalties, or fines mostly due to a shortage of regulatory bodies taking them as financial institutions, who deem that their complaint-handling mechanisms are discriminatory and/or not adequate enough to be done by them. Unresolved disputes can damage the platform's reputation as well tarnishing the trust of existing users and keep new ones away. Regardless of whether it's via a social media rant or a more formal consumer protection campaign, negative publicity further compounds these problems into a snowball effect that damages that brand equity.

The platform itself is not spared by ineffective complaint management. Resolution processes that are prolonged operationally strain internal resources and are driven by the need to deploy customer service teams, legal advisors and dispute resolution personnel. These operational inefficiencies, which end up being more overhead costs, are reducing the profitability of the platform, and platforms will be financially liable to lawsuits, penalties, fines, etc., based on what the regulatory bodies discover about the intelligence of the complaint-handling mechanism. Agreeable disputes are also bad, because they destroy the reputation of the platform, and make current users and new ones lose trust. This negative publicity, whether it's the social media rant or the formal consumer protection campaign, makes these issues worse and worse and worse and the snowball effect erodes brand equity.

Sometimes, the extreme discontent between buyers and sellers can reach a point of public censure that really hurts a

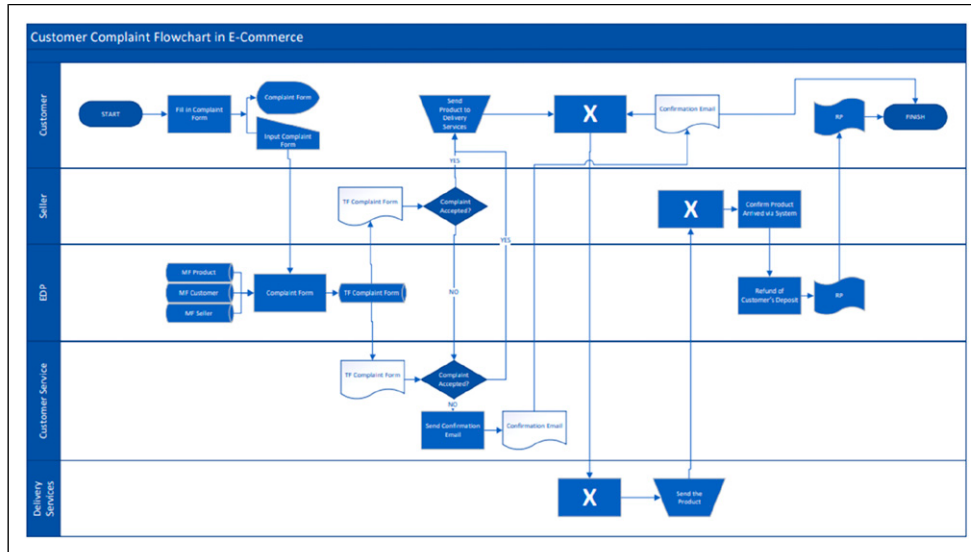


Figure 1. Customer complaint flowchart in e-commerce.

platform's image. Viral social media, news articles or blogs telling of incomplete or unsolved dispute reflects the platform as unreliable and unfriendly to consumers. Not only do these perceptions discourage potential users but they also attract regulators' scrutiny, netting audits, fines, and even lawsuits. Worst case, platforms can lose a boycott or an entire mass migration of users that puts them out of business in the long run. As a systemic issue, ineffective complaint management is far more than an operational problem; it is a threat to the platform's ecosystem. To address these challenges an overall solution, which balances buyers' protection, sellers' support, and efficient logistics coordination, is required to be provided to all stakeholders resulting in a fair and reliable purchasing experience.

The proposed solutions

To overcome these challenges, e-commerce platforms need necessary innovations in transparency, accountability and efficiency. This study proposes two key measures: video documentation of the packing process that is mandatory and the integration of proprietary logistics services.

Mandatory video documentation

The solution that has the most promise is to make sellers document their packing process through video recording. It is to make sure that people check the condition, and the contents of the package, before it is shipped. The implementation would involve a simple yet effective workflow: Sellers have to upload a video of item being packed before generating a shipping label. This video will also be one in which is clear to see the item, its condition, and

sealing the package. The seller would be able to print the shipping label and make delivery once the video is uploaded.

In case of disputes, the recorded video would be made available on the server, and used as evidence. Let's say if the buyer files a complaint that the received item doesn't match the listing, the CS team at the platform can do a comparison of the buyer's unboxing video with the seller's packing video. This is a definite basis for settling disputes fairly. This approach has a lot of benefits. Since both buyers and sellers gain a layer of protection against fraudulent claims and buyers are assured that their complaints will be evaluated transparently, it will still bring a great deal of transparency to sellers' cart management, especially with regards to returns. In turn, platforms get a more efficient dispute resolution process, and less stress on CS teams and less operational cost.

Proprietary logistics services

Another critical part of the proposed solution is integration of proprietary logistics services. Platforms can also improve their delivery networks by managing their own. Platforms can keep full end to end control over package handling through proprietary services. It decreases the chance of delays, damage or loss that are common problems with third-party vendors. Platforms can also build further advanced tracking technologies like IoT enabled sensors to monitor package conditions in real time. This combination of proprietary logistics and mandatory video documentation makes for a perfect and trustworthy ecosystem. Buyers are sure of a controlled and reliable delivery and sellers are accountable for their shipment.

These measures are expected to deliver significant benefits for all stakeholders in the implementation. Complaints of buyers will be addressed transparently and fairly and buyers will be satisfied. More participation by sellers will gain confidence as the platform can promise to safeguard their interests. For the platforms themselves, the solutions promise long-term gains in efficiency, trust, and reputation. With fewer disputes and faster resolutions, operational costs are likely to decrease. Furthermore, the enhanced user experience will strengthen customer loyalty, driving sustained growth in a competitive market.

Suggested assignment questions

1. What are the key challenges faced by e-commerce platforms in managing complaints between buyers and sellers? Provide examples from the case study to illustrate these issues.
2. How do ineffective dispute resolution processes affect the stakeholders involved—buyers, sellers, and the platform? Which stakeholder is impacted the most, and why?
3. Evaluate the feasibility of mandatory video documentation and proprietary logistics services as solutions to complaint management issues. What are the potential advantages and limitations of these measures?
4. If you were an e-commerce manager, how would you design a step-by-step implementation plan for integrating video documentation into the platform's operations? What challenges might arise, and how would you address them?
5. Beyond the proposed solutions, what other technological or operational innovations could e-commerce platforms adopt to improve trust, satisfaction, and efficiency in complaint management?

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Author contributions

Jessica Hermawan: Conceptualization, data curation, project administration, software, validation, visualization, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing.

Liliana Inggrit Wijaya: Formal analysis, funding acquisition, investigation, supervision, and writing—review and editing.

Andri Rianawati: Conceptualization, methodology, resources, software, validation, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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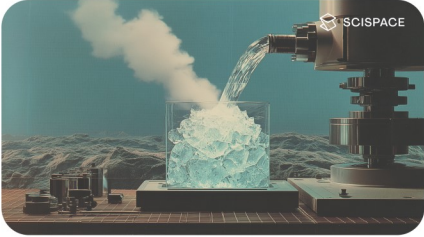
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PUBLICATION TYPE	ISSN	COVERAGE	INFORMATION
Journals	20438869	2014-2025	Homepage How to publish in this journal I.p.willcocks@lse.ac.uk
SCOPE			
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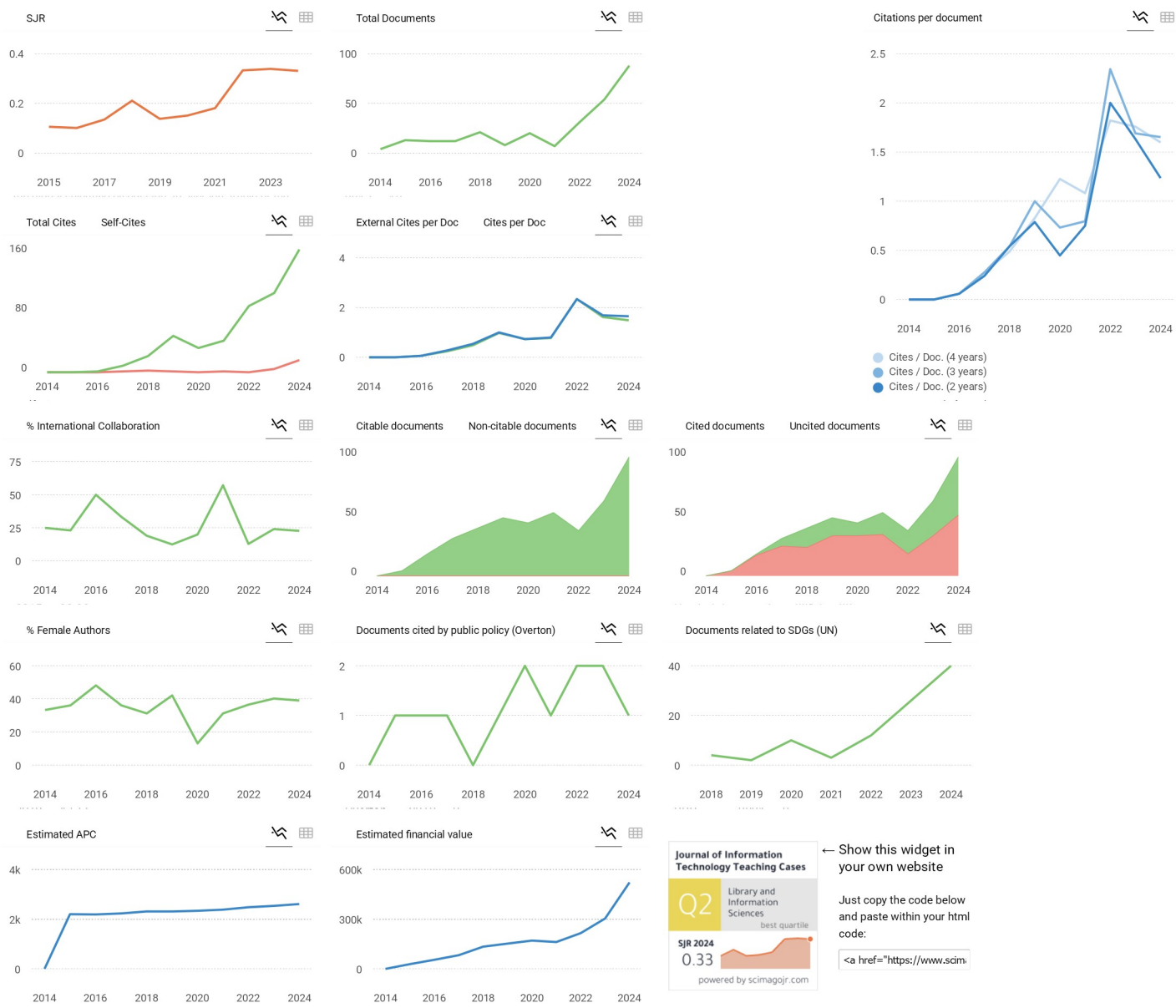


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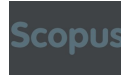
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