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Click, Buy, Repeat: Understanding the Success of B2C E-Commerce Platforms

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Abstract

B2C e-commerce platforms have transformed digital retail. This study investigates the factors behind their success and identifies research gaps for future inquiry. Adopting a theoretical review and inductive coding approach, it synthesizes findings from 187 academic publications to develop an explanatory framework. Three interrelated core themes emerged: platform capabilities, perceived trustworthiness/trust, and perceived enjoyment. The framework posits capabilities as foundational resources, trust as a mediator of engagement, and enjoyment as a behavioral driver and enabler of trust. Integrating resource-based, utilitarian, and hedonic perspectives, the model offers a basis for research on contextual influences, dynamic relationships, and constructs. For practitioners, the findings emphasize that enduring success depends not only on scale and efficiency, but on designing trusted and emotionally engaging user experiences that foster repeated use.

Keywords: B2C e-commerce platforms, success factors, theoretical review.

1. Introduction

Due to the high level of convenience offered by online shopping, e-commerce has expanded remarkably in recent years, a trend that is expected to continue. According to eMarketer (2025), global e-commerce sales totaled \$6.0 trillion in 2024 and are projected to reach \$7.9 trillion in 2028. Business-to-consumer (B2C) platforms played a decisive role in achieving this growth (Ratchford et al., 2022) and are today “[...] among the most common platforms in the e-commerce context” (Dai et al., 2022, p. 311). As digital multi-sided markets, they connect buyers and sellers, establish governance structures, and add value by streamlining transactions and enhancing convenience. B2C e-commerce platforms can be classified as transaction platforms, which differ from innovation platforms that focus on co-creation and technological development (Bonina et al., 2021). B2C

e-commerce platforms like Amazon and AliExpress have achieved dominant market positions over the course of decades, establishing sophisticated infrastructures and loyal customer bases (Rahman & Thelen, 2019; Y. Zhao et al., 2020). These incumbents are often viewed as near-monopolies in their respective markets and thus represent high barriers to entry for new players (Federal Trade Commission, 2024). Yet, despite this entrenched dominance, disruptive B2C e-commerce platforms, e.g., Temu, have achieved rapid global expansion in just a few years (Nim et al., 2024). Their success raises important questions about the mechanisms that drive platform competitiveness. Previous studies have neglected this perspective, despite an explicit call for research on digital platforms (de Reuver et al., 2018), leading to the first research question (RQ):

RQ1. How can the success of B2C e-commerce platforms be explained?

To address this question, the study derives a conceptualization of platform success factors. This framework serves as the basis for an abductive reasoning process that seeks to explain both the sustained success of established market leaders and the breakthrough trajectories of newer entrants. The second aim of the study is to identify areas within the current body of research that remain underexplored, thereby motivating further inquiry:

RQ2. Regarding the success of B2C e-commerce platforms, which areas require further research?

To contribute to these RQs, the study conducts a theoretical review, outlined in the following section.

2. Methodology

The goal of this study is to provide explanations for the success of B2C e-commerce platforms. For this purpose, Paré et al. (2015) suggest either a (1) theoretical or (2) realist review. Given the broad scope of the RQs, this study adopts a theoretical review. The characteristics of this review align closely

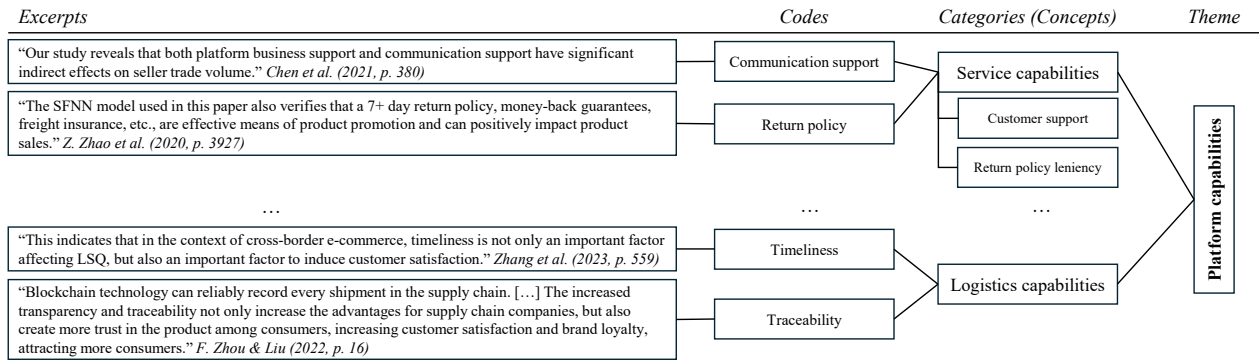


Figure 1. Results from the open, axial, and selective coding

with the inductive procedure proposed by Wolfswinkel et al. (2013), an approach that has gained traction in the information systems (IS) community (Roider & Widjaja, 2024).

To determine the scope of the review, inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined. Articles were included that (1) focus explicitly on B2C e-commerce platforms as the primary research subject, (2) examine success factors or impact variables, or (3) propose theories or frameworks related to the functioning of B2C e-commerce platforms. Papers were excluded that (1) are limited to Online-to-Offline, Consumer-to-Consumer, or Business-to-Business platforms or (2) focus on IT infrastructure or back-end.

Four databases were selected: (1) Association for Information Systems Electronic Library (AIS eLibrary), (2) Business Source Complete (BSC), (3) EconLit, and (4) Web of Science (WoS). AIS eLibrary represents the IS domain of the RQ, whereas BSC and EconLit reflect the economic dimension. WoS was chosen because it is considered among the leading interdisciplinary scientific databases (Zhu & Liu, 2020). The search terms covered three dimensions: the focus on (1) platforms, (2) e-commerce, and (3) empirical or conceptual publications. This led to the following search string: ("platform") AND ("e-commerce" OR "e-tailing" OR "digital commerce" OR "mobile commerce") AND (empiric* OR "case study" OR survey* OR interview* OR "experiment" OR "review").

The literature search was conducted in May and June 2024. To assess the initial sample, all retrieved references were transferred to a spreadsheet (see digital appendix). Duplicates, non-English articles, retracted studies, and papers not published in scientific journals or conference proceedings were omitted. To assess relevance, titles and abstracts were screened using the defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. A total of 14 articles had to be excluded because full texts were unavailable despite contacting the authors. For

the remaining 321 papers, full-text screening was conducted using the same criteria, resulting in 135 relevant publications. Those papers contained 4,529 references and were cited 1,950 times according to WoS. These were assessed using the same selection process as for the initial search (e.g., duplicates, title, abstract), which resulted in 32, resp. 20 additional relevant papers. Overall, 187 publications were included in the final sample (see digital appendix).

Data analysis was conducted based on the core principles of Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1998; Wolfswinkel et al., 2013). Accordingly, the relevant papers were read and coded to identify recurring patterns. Initially, open coding was performed with one or more codes assigned to each article and key excerpts highlighted. These open codes were then discussed, refined, and consolidated into a final list. During axial coding, the open codes were grouped into concepts and categories. In the final phase of selective coding, the categories were restructured to derive higher-order themes (see Figure 1). Over the course of several months, this process led to 16 concepts, 8 categories, and 3 themes. To reduce within-study bias, referring to the variability in how studies are coded, and expectancy bias, reflecting the influence of researchers' assumptions on results, several blind and parallel coding rounds were conducted. Coded excerpts and derived concepts, categories, and themes were continuously compared and challenged until a final structure was achieved. The findings are presented in the following section.

3. Findings

When investigating success factors, it is important to define what constitutes success. To accommodate diverse perspectives in the literature, this study adopts a deliberately broad approach. Accordingly, platform success encompasses any intended psychological, cognitive, or behavioral outcome, including user

attitudes, intentions, actual behavior, and the associated economic performance. During selective coding, three themes emerged that affect platform success, namely, (1) platform capabilities, (2) perceived trustworthiness/trust, and (3) perceived enjoyment.

3.1 Platform capabilities

Platform capabilities refer to the set of resources, features, and operational strengths through which a B2C e-commerce platform delivers value to its users. As such, they constitute the core of the platform's value proposition. Based on axial coding, four categories gradually emerged: (1) information systems capabilities, (2) electronic marketing capabilities, (3) service capabilities, and (4) logistics capabilities.

Information systems capabilities capture how platforms use data and technology to support decision-making, usability, and transaction efficiency. This category took shape as the literature revealed recurring attention to the ways platforms communicate, structure, and mediate information (e.g., Abbas et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2012; Sarkar et al., 2020). Through coding, four interrelated concepts surfaced: (1) information availability, (2) information credibility, (3) information technology, and (4) user interface.

Information availability describes the platform's role in providing timely, relevant, and accessible information that help consumers make sense of using a platform for online shopping or a specific product. The provision of up-to-date information has a known positive impact on the familiarity with a platform and consequently customer purchase behavior (e.g., Abbas et al., 2023; Hajli et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2012; Sarkar et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2023). Closely related is the notion of information credibility (e.g., Abbas et al., 2023; Jou et al., 2024; Shahbaz et al., 2020). During coding, it became evident that credibility is often enhanced through transparent product reviews, especially when both positive and negative feedback are made visible (e.g., Cai et al., 2023). In addition, clear and user-relevant recommendation mechanisms were repeatedly associated with credibility (e.g., Li et al., 2022). In the context of social commerce platforms, these features play a particularly influential role in shaping purchase behavior (e.g., Guo & Li, 2022). Another concept that gradually took form is information technology. This refers to the implementation of advanced technologies, which reportedly has a positive effect on a platform's success (e.g., Yusuf et al., 2018). Among the investigated technologies are augmented reality (AR) (e.g., Yim et al., 2017), artificial intelligence (AI) (e.g., Deng et al.,

2024), virtual tools (e.g., Trier et al., 2024), blockchain (e.g., F. Zhou & Liu, 2022), the Internet of Things (e.g., Yao et al., 2015), and multimedia tools (e.g., Xin Xu et al., 2008). Especially in live-streaming environments, these technologies support immersive shopping experiences and strengthen the connection between user and platform (e.g., X. Zhou & Lou, 2023). The concept user interface emerged from a consistent emphasis on platform usability and appeal. Authors repeatedly linked clean, intuitive design with user satisfaction and overall platform success (e.g., Jou et al., 2024; Sarkar et al., 2020). The extant literature provides evidence that exceptional web design will lead to a positive environment and, in fact, to higher customer satisfaction (e.g., Jou et al., 2024; Xian Yang et al., 2023). These positive influences can be achieved through design vividness (e.g., Yim et al., 2017), interface designs that focus on usability and functionality (e.g., Z. Huang & Benyoucef, 2017), and background color (e.g., Xian Yang et al., 2023). The use of pictures or thumbnails can also have a significant impact on the sales performance of a platform (e.g., Cremer & Ma, 2017).

Electronic marketing capabilities crystallized as literature frequently emphasized how platforms convey value, influence consumer perception, and stimulate action. Rather than being framed as traditional "marketing mix" elements, these capabilities emerged as concepts through which users interpret (1) perceived product value, (2) promotional competencies, and (3) price attractiveness.

Regarding perceived product value, the extant literature has highlighted the importance of product quality (e.g., Sanchez-Lloor & Chang, 2023) and product type (e.g., N. Huang et al., 2017). When marketing a product, consumers expect a suitable product description (e.g., Cai et al., 2023) and want to learn about the country of origin, particularly in cross-border e-commerce (e.g., Ni et al., 2020). Promotional competencies emerged as another relevant concept. Rather than focusing purely on advertising volume, the literature highlighted the platform's ability to build brand equity (e.g., Jou et al., 2024), foster reputational credibility (e.g., Ahmed et al., 2024), and leverage social media ecosystems (e.g., Geng et al., 2020; N. Huang et al., 2017). Several studies pointed to content-based promotion, influencer marketing, and live-streaming as impactful approaches. Moreover, live-streaming is known to have a high influence on customers (e.g., Miranda et al., 2024). Success in live-streaming commerce was often linked to characteristics such as streamer credibility, playfulness, and even physical attractiveness (e.g., Hossain et al., 2023; X. Zhou & Lou, 2023). The use of celebrities and emotionally engaging content

further amplified this effect (e.g., Miranda et al., 2024). In addition, some studies documented more controversial promotional practices – e.g., pressure cues or scarcity-based messaging – that influence perceived stress and acquisition value, thereby increasing purchase likelihood (e.g., Miranda et al., 2024). Concerning price attractiveness, various papers have shown the important role of discounts, which increase purchase intention and ultimately sales (e.g., Z. Zhao et al., 2020). Interestingly, this phenomenon is stronger with discount rates than with discount values (e.g., Z. Zhao et al., 2020).

Service capabilities took shape as the literature repeatedly emphasized the importance of how platforms support users before, during, and after a transaction (e.g., Abbas et al., 2023; Jahidul & Sunil, 2023; Sarkar et al., 2020; Z. Zhao et al., 2020). As coding progressed, three concepts began to coalesce: (1) customer support, (2) return policy leniency, and (3) platform safety.

Customer support refers to the platform's responsiveness, reliability, and flexibility in addressing consumer inquiries and concerns. Across the reviewed studies, user satisfaction was frequently tied to the presence of approachable service channels (e.g., Tan et al., 2019) as well as to the platform's ability to offer tailored, customer-friendly responses to user problems (e.g., Yusuf et al., 2018). The concept return policy leniency captures the extent to which a platform offers flexible and consumer-oriented return options, including generous return windows, low or no return fees, and simplified procedures (e.g., Jahidul & Sunil, 2023). Across the reviewed studies, return policy leniency surfaced repeatedly as a factor influencing consumer behavior, particularly in product categories associated with higher uncertainty, such as apparel or electronics (e.g., Xu et al., 2020; Z. Zhao et al., 2020). The literature suggests that lenient return policies positively impact sales by lowering perceived risk and increasing purchase intention (e.g., Jahidul & Sunil, 2023; Z. Zhao et al., 2020). Consumers interpret customer-friendly return conditions as a sign of platform reliability, which contributes to long-term loyalty (e.g., Sanchez-Loor & Chang, 2023). At the same time, more lenient policies will lead to higher return rates. This creates operational challenges that platforms must address by developing efficient systems for managing customer returns. Complementing this, a third concept emerged: platform safety. It reflects the mechanisms that platforms use to build consumer confidence (e.g., Sanchez-Loor & Chang, 2023; Z. Zhao et al., 2020). Throughout the dataset, money-back guarantees and freight insurances were consistently linked to increased purchase intention and sales (e.g., Xu et al.,

2020; Z. Zhao et al., 2020). It also includes the systematic screening of platform merchants (e.g., Sanchez-Loor & Chang, 2023). Moreover, the option to choose among multiple secure payment methods, e.g., credit cards or platform-specific wallets, was framed as a requirement for user participation, particularly in cross-border or mobile commerce (e.g., Liu, 2022).

Logistics capabilities emerged under the theme of platform capabilities, which refers to the platform's ability to ensure that the right products reach the right customers at the right time and place in the right condition, in a manner that is efficient (e.g., Zhang et al., 2024). Coding led to the development of three concepts: (1) product availability, (2) fulfillment speed, and (3) fulfillment reliability.

One recurring pattern was product availability. Consumers expect that advertised products can be delivered without delay or substitution, and platforms that ensure availability tend to enjoy higher levels of loyalty (e.g., Ahmed et al., 2024). Another capability identified in the literature was fulfillment speed. Fast delivery was identified as a critical driver of customer satisfaction. The importance of delivery speed is even higher in competitive markets where expectations are shaped by industry leaders such as Amazon (e.g., Ahmed et al., 2024). Closely related to speed is fulfillment reliability. However, compared to the other concepts, the number of studies that provide evidence is rather limited. Some studies emphasized that transparent tracking services contribute to customer satisfaction (e.g., F. Zhou & Liu, 2022). Together, these findings suggest that while logistics capabilities may appear operational on the surface, they hold substantial strategic value.

3.2 Perceived trustworthiness/trust

The second theme that emerged from the data concerns perceived trustworthiness or trust – terms that are often used interchangeably in the literature (e.g., Abbas et al., 2023). This theme reflects a user's confidence in the platform's ability to fulfill its promises reliably, securely, and transparently. Trust has long been recognized as a critical factor in e-commerce adoption and two recent meta-analyses have synthesized its antecedents and consequences in the context of e-commerce platforms (Sarkar et al., 2020; Soleimani, 2022). The data analysis confirms many of the factors mentioned in the studies, which were summarized in two categories as part of the axial coding. These are: (1) perceived privacy and (2) perceived transaction risk. Both capture how users cognitively and emotionally respond to uncertainties in digital commerce environments.

Perceived privacy refers to users' expectations regarding the safety and ethical handling of their personal data. This includes not only how platforms collect and store information such as names and addresses, but also how they communicate their data practices and security standards. As intermediaries between buyers and sellers, platforms depend on the users' willingness to share sensitive information – something that can be undermined if privacy concerns are not properly addressed. The literature revealed that technological safeguards, such as encryption, SSL certificates, extended authentication protocols, and trust seals, are commonly used to enhance the perception of privacy protection (e.g., Mensah, 2022). These mechanisms were linked to increased willingness to transact and reduced reluctance to engage with new or unfamiliar sellers.

Perceived transaction risk captures the user's subjective assessment of potential negative consequences related to placing an order (Guo et al., 2021). This includes fears that the product may not meet expectations, concerns over the integrity of the payment process, and uncertainty about consumer rights following the transaction (e.g., Mou et al., 2017). The constant comparison across studies showed that the salience of perceived risk was especially high in cross-border e-commerce or when dealing with less familiar sellers. Multiple contributions emphasized that high transaction risk undermines trust and leads to abandonment of the purchase process – even when other factors are favorable (e.g., Ju Qin et al., 2019; Sarkar et al., 2020).

3.3 Perceived enjoyment

The third theme that emerged from the analysis is perceived enjoyment, referring to the extent to which using an e-commerce platform evokes pleasure, entertainment, or emotional satisfaction beyond the utilitarian value of the transaction. Unlike the more functional or risk-oriented nature of the previous two themes, enjoyment reflects the hedonic dimension of e-commerce and its ability to foster voluntary engagement. Throughout the coding process, enjoyment appeared as a factor that reinforces platform use, shapes positive attitudes, and increases the likelihood of both initial and repeated purchases (e.g., Lin et al., 2023). Two categories gradually took shape through iterative coding: (1) interactivity and (2) gamification. Each represents a different way in which platforms create emotionally engaging user experiences, while also reinforcing core behaviors such as browsing, clicking, and purchasing.

Interactivity emerged as a central driver of enjoyment. It captures the platform's ability to support

real-time, reciprocal communication between users and other actors, whether other consumers, sellers, or content creators (e.g., Hossain et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2023; Mensah, 2022). Three concepts surfaced during coding: (1) consumer-to-consumer engagement, (2) consumer-to-platform or seller engagement, and (3) social presence.

Consumer-to-consumer engagement captures how peer interactions shape the user experience and influence perceptions of the platform. This includes mechanisms such as reviews, ratings, and word of mouth, which allow users to share their evaluations of products and services. These forms of peer communication reduce uncertainty and enhance the overall enjoyment of the shopping process (e.g., Xue Yang, 2021). Beyond individual reviews, broader formats such as discussion forums, chat rooms, or fan communities further support emotional involvement and a sense of belonging (e.g., Geng et al., 2020). The associated social dynamics contribute to a more engaging shopping environment, turning a rather isolated activity into a socially meaningful experience.

Engagement between consumers and the platform, sellers, or streamers was especially prominent in studies on live-streaming commerce. Here, enjoyment is often tied to the immediacy and entertainment value of the interaction. In that context, “swift guanxi”, a special interpersonal relationship between a consumer and a streamer, which contains mutual favors that bring benefits for both parties, emerged as a recurring pattern (e.g., Hossain et al., 2023). This form of engagement has also been linked to emotional attachment and user stickiness, particularly when streamers offer a mix of informational content and entertainment (e.g., Jiao et al., 2024). Beyond live-streaming, the literature showed that timely responses via chat tools or interactive elements also contribute to user satisfaction (e.g., Lv et al., 2018).

The third concept, social presence, represents the user's perception of others being virtually co-present in the shopping environment. This includes perceived presence of other customers, sellers, or platform staff, and contributes to feelings of empathy, connection, and interest (e.g., Shahbaz et al., 2020). The analysis revealed that social presence enhances enjoyment and positively influences shopping behavior in social and live-streaming e-commerce (e.g., Yin et al., 2023). Studies emphasized that the quality of the communication medium – especially its synchronicity and richness – affects how vividly social presence is experienced (e.g., Friedrich et al., 2016). Two-way communication tools, such as live chats, were shown to increase user curiosity, concentration, and flow (e.g., Patanasiri & Krairit, 2018).

Gamification emerged from recurring discussions on how playful design elements can increase users' hedonic and utilitarian motivations. The reviewed studies highlighted various gamified features, including progress bars, badges, virtual rewards, bonus points, social invitations, and connections to external social networks (e.g., Mominzada et al., 2022). Such elements were often embedded into checkout processes, reward systems, or loyalty programs, and were shown to heighten engagement and platform stickiness. Gamification was found to be effective across both desktop and mobile environments (e.g., Bouzaabia et al., 2024), suggesting that it functions as a cross-channel strategy to enhance the overall shopping experience.

4. Discussion

The conducted analysis revealed three themes that collectively shape the success of B2C e-commerce platforms. Each theme emerged inductively through the constant comparison of empirical or conceptual findings.

First, *platform capabilities* reflect the operational and strategic resources through which a platform delivers value to users. Rather than viewing these capabilities as static features, the analysis reveals them to be dynamic levers that shape customer expectations and influence key behavioral outcomes such as purchase intention and retention (e.g., Abbas et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2012; Xu et al., 2023; Z. Zhao et al., 2020). Second, *perceived trustworthiness/trust* is an evaluative judgment shaped by users' perceptions of control, security, and institutional reliability. It determines whether users are willing to engage with the platform in the first place, particularly in situations of risk or uncertainty (e.g., Qin et al., 2019; Sarkar et al., 2020). Over time, trust functions as a stabilizing mechanism that strengthens the platform-user relationship, reduces churn, and amplifies the effectiveness of other platform strategies (e.g., Mensah, 2022; Mou et al., 2017). In this sense, trust serves both as a gatekeeper for entry and as a reinforcer of sustained engagement. Third, *perceived enjoyment*, in contrast, reflects the experiential and affective quality of platform usage. By a playful environment, platforms can turn transactions into immersive, emotionally engaging experiences, which increases immediate engagement, session duration, and likelihood of impulsive or affect-driven purchases (e.g., Bouzaabia et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2023; Mominzada et al., 2022). A pleasurable experience can prime consumers to explore more deeply, interact more frequently, and respond more positively to

promotions or recommendations that support long-term user loyalty (e.g., Yin et al., 2023).

4.1 What do we know?

Taken together, the three themes offer a starting point for theory building. Platform capabilities clearly function as independent variables that enable and enhance platform success. This is supported by a wide range of findings that link specific capabilities to behavioral and performance outcomes. For example, the availability of credible product information (e.g., Xu et al., 2023), AR (e.g., Yim et al., 2017), AI (e.g., Deng et al., 2024), effective customer support (e.g., Abbas et al., 2023), and fast and reliable logistics (e.g., Ahmed et al., 2024) have been shown to directly affect consumer engagement, purchase intention, and actual purchase behavior. Together, these findings affirm that platform capabilities represent the operational foundation upon which platform success is built, directly shaping user experiences and reinforcing behavioral outcomes.

With regard to perceived trustworthiness/trust, the literature strongly supports its function as a mediator. Several platform capabilities, such as information availability (e.g., Hajli et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2023), user interface appeal (e.g., Jou et al., 2024; Sarkar et al., 2020), and customer support quality (e.g., Abbas et al., 2023) have been shown to foster trust. Trust, in turn, enhances purchase intention, customer satisfaction, and repeat engagement by enabling users to overcome hesitation and commit to transactions. In sum, these findings suggest that trust mediates the relationship between platform capabilities and success by acting as the psychological mechanism through which operational strengths are perceived as reliable and worth engaging with.

Concerning perceived enjoyment, the vast majority of the reviewed literature treats it as an independent variable that directly influences behavioral outcomes. Features such as interactive environments (e.g., Hossain et al., 2023; Jiao et al., 2024; Lv et al., 2018) or gamified design elements (e.g., Bouzaabia et al., 2024; Mominzada et al., 2022) enhance users' affective experience of the platform. It can thus be concluded that perceived enjoyment functions as a direct driver of platform success, operating alongside platform capabilities to shape both immediate and sustained user behavior.

Moreover, several studies indicate that perceived enjoyment also has an indirect effect on platform success by enhancing trust. Engaging platform experiences can lead to more favorable emotional appraisals of the platform as a whole intention (e.g., Hajli et al., 2017; Hossain et al., 2023; Lin et al.,

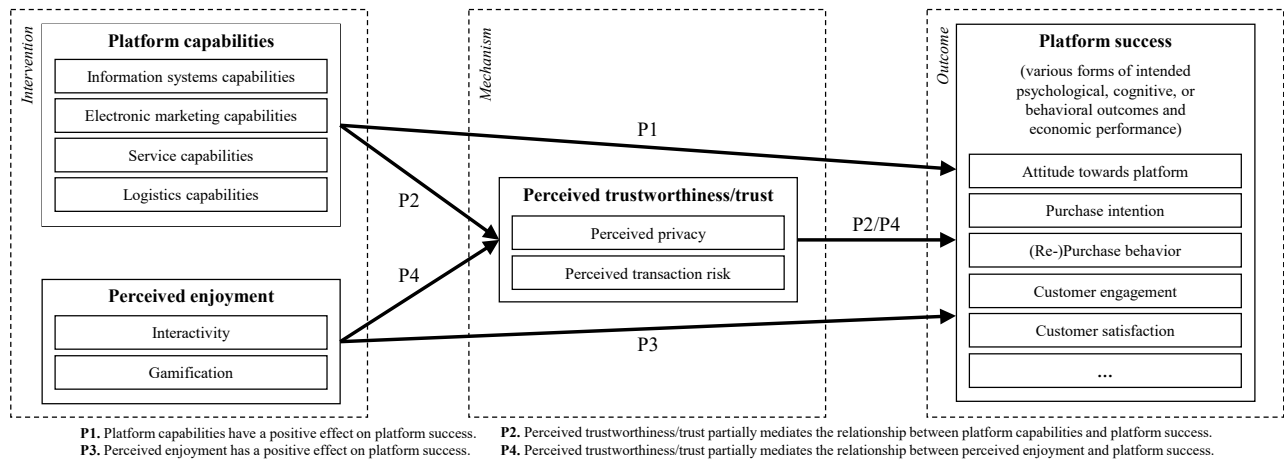


Figure 2. Conceptualization of a B2C e-commerce platform's success.

2023). These positive experiences foster a sense of familiarity and psychological comfort, which has been shown to increase users' trust in the platform and its vendors (e.g., Jiao et al., 2024; Shahbaz et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2019). In this sense, enjoyment not only acts as a direct predictor of behavioral outcomes but may also serve a complementary role by reinforcing trust-based mechanisms that support long-term platform success. Thus, perceived trustworthiness/trust would mediate the relationship between perceived enjoyment and platform success. The resulting theoretical propositions are summarized in Figure 2.

The theoretical framework aligns with the resource-based view, which posits that firms achieve competitive advantage by leveraging valuable, rare, and inimitable resources (Barney, 1991). In the context of B2C e-commerce platforms, capabilities constitute core resources that create value and differentiate a platform in the market. At the same time, the inclusion of perceived trustworthiness/trust and perceived enjoyment highlights that platform success is not only a function of resource availability but also of how these resources are experienced and evaluated by users. The framework thus integrates utilitarian and hedonic dimensions of user behavior.

The findings complement the literature that emphasizes the importance of platform size and network effects in shaping growth dynamics (e.g., McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017). On the one hand, the framework suggests that ensuring platform quality through suitable capabilities, fostering an enjoyable user environment, and increasing perceived trustworthiness to lower barriers to initial adoption are key mechanisms that allow emerging platforms to compete. On the other hand, the framework illustrates how the identified antecedents of platform success can serve as enablers and amplifiers of network effects. As platforms build momentum, they attract more users,

which in turn enhances enjoyment through increased interactivity and social presence, and strengthens trust through reputational cues and social validation.

Referring back to the motivation of this study, the proposed framework offers a plausible explanation for both the sustained success of established B2C e-commerce platforms such as Amazon and the rapid emergence of new entrants like Temu. The market leadership of established platforms can be attributed to the continuous development of platform capabilities. These capabilities not only produce favorable user experiences but also activate psychological mechanisms of trust, reinforcing platform loyalty and long-term engagement. In contrast, the global rise of B2C e-commerce platforms like Temu – initially surprising given the high entry barriers in e-commerce – can be interpreted through their strategic emphasis on affective and interactive features. Their design choices prioritize enjoyment through gamified interfaces, social shopping features, and visually rich environments, thereby stimulating impulsive engagement and purchase behavior (Bouzaabia et al., 2024; Hossain et al., 2023). These emotionally engaging experiences appear to foster familiarity and reduce psychological resistance, ultimately enhancing trust (Shahbaz et al., 2020).

4.2 What do we not know?

While the proposed framework offers a structured explanation for B2C e-commerce platform success, several areas of uncertainty remain that merit further investigation. These research gaps not only reflect limits in the existing knowledge base but also offer promising avenues for theoretical development.

First, additional detailed analyses are needed to complement the existing syntheses on trust (e.g., Soleimani, 2022). While these have advanced our

understanding of trust's antecedents and outcomes, similar meta-analytical efforts for platform capabilities and perceived enjoyment are still lacking. Such work could refine existing categories, reveal dominant drivers, and clarify how variables interact across different platform settings.

Second, contextual factors, such as cultural norms, regulatory environments, and industry structures, remain insufficiently integrated into current research. This gap stems from the tendency of many studies to focus on single-market or single-platform contexts, while not documenting important peculiarities, which limits generalizability. Future studies could explore how context moderates or reshapes the effects identified in the framework, thus strengthening its explanatory reach.

Third, the relationship between perceived enjoyment and trust warrants closer scrutiny. While several studies point to a connection (e.g., Abbas et al., 2023; Hossain et al., 2023), the directionality and development of this link over time remain unclear. Notably, Abbas et al. (2023, p. 9) suggested that trust can enhance enjoyment: "Trust is one of the main reasons which can make online shopping a joyful experience or otherwise". This indicates a potentially bidirectional or recursive relationship that has not yet been systematically theorized.

Finally, as theory-building is an iterative process, the framework should remain open to the inclusion of new and emerging constructs. A theoretical review is one part of a broader methodological toolkit. To balance strengths and limitations, triangulation approaches are desirable to comprehensively examine the success of B2C e-commerce platforms. Future studies could conduct interviews with practitioners or customer surveys to gain further insights into the underlying mechanisms and uncover constructs that have not yet been considered in the literature.

5. Conclusion

This study identified three key success factors of B2C e-commerce platforms: (1) platform capabilities, (2) perceived trustworthiness/trust, and (3) perceived enjoyment. The proposed framework theorizes how these elements interact: capabilities form the operational foundation, trust mediates effectiveness, and enjoyment drives both engagement and trust formation. This provides conceptual clarity and a basis for future empirical research, which should specifically focus, for example, on contextual influences or dynamic relationships. For practitioners, the findings emphasize that platform success requires more than operational efficiency. Trust-building and emotionally engaging user experiences are essential,

especially in competitive, global markets. Likewise, merchants should look beyond reach and cost, choosing platforms that provide strong capabilities, inspire trust, and enable positive user experiences.

However, these insights must be interpreted in light of several limitations. The selected databases, search terms, and assessment criteria may have excluded relevant studies, and academic publication bias may have skewed the prominence of certain factors. While inductive coding enabled conceptual synthesis, it remains interpretive. The review also places strong emphasis on buyer-centric aspects, potentially overlooking seller-side dynamics such as governance or onboarding. Lastly, the focus on product-based platforms may limit transferability to service-oriented platforms (e.g., hospitality or mobility). Despite these limitations, this study sheds light on the interplay of capabilities, trust, and emotion in B2C e-commerce platforms. As users continue to *click, buy, and repeat*, understanding these drivers becomes increasingly vital.

6. Acknowledgements

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7. Digital appendix

<https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.29986411.v1>

8. References

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