

A Survey Report on the Current Status of Online Consumer Disputes and Consumers' Awareness of Rights Protection

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Abstract

With the rapid development of the digital economy, online consumption has become the mainstream consumption pattern for contemporary college students. Due to their diverse consumption needs and high frequency of internet use, college students are a high-risk group for online consumer disputes. This survey, using college students from multiple universities across the country as research subjects, systematically analyzes the types and patterns of online consumer disputes through questionnaires, interviews, and literature review, assesses their awareness and behavior regarding their rights, and analyzes the core difficulties in the process of protecting their rights. The survey found that online consumer disputes among college students are characterized by concentrated types and small amounts, with "cognitive biases" in their awareness and ability to protect their rights, and a clear "platform dependence" in their choice of rights protection channels. Based on a legal perspective and in conjunction with relevant provisions of the Civil Code, the Consumer Rights Protection Law, and the E-commerce Law, this report proposes specific paths to optimize the online consumer rights protection environment and enhance the rights protection capabilities of college students from four dimensions: university legal education, platform governance, regulatory mechanisms, and the students themselves, providing practical reference for the protection of youth consumer rights in the context of building a society governed by the rule of law.

Keywords

University Students; Online Consumer Disputes; Awareness of Rights Protection; Consumer Rights Protection; Legal Education.

1. Background and Significance of the Survey

1.1. Background of the Survey

In the digital economy era, online shopping, live-streaming e-commerce, online food delivery, and virtual service top-ups have become deeply integrated into the daily lives of college students. According to the "2025 Report on Chinese College Student Consumption Behavior," over 98% of college students have experience with online shopping, with monthly online spending accounting for more than 65% of their living expenses. While online shopping brings convenience to college students, it also leads to frequent consumer disputes due to factors such as inconsistent platform entry requirements, imperfect regulatory mechanisms, and consumers' insufficient legal literacy^[1].

From a legal practice perspective, while university students possess a certain level of cultural literacy, their understanding of core clauses in the Consumer Rights Protection Law, such as "seven-day no-reason return policy" and "compensation for false advertising," remains somewhat vague. Faced with disputes involving "product quality discrepancies," "after-sales service shirking," and "personal information leaks," most university students choose to abandon their rights due to reasons such as "the cost of protecting their rights exceeds the

amount of loss," "the process is complex," and "lack of professional guidance," resulting in a contradictory situation of "high incidence of disputes, low incidence of rights protection." This winter break survey, based on a legal professional perspective, focuses on the real-world issue of online consumer rights protection among university students, possessing distinct contemporary relevance and practical value.

1.2. Significance of the Research

1.2.1. Theoretical Significance

This survey combines legal theory with the consumption practices of university students, enriching empirical research in the field of consumer rights protection. By analyzing the unique characteristics of online consumption disputes among university students and interpreting the current application of relevant legal provisions among this demographic, it provides theoretical support for improving the rules governing the application of law in the field of online consumption and optimizing the content of legal education in universities.

1.2.2. Practical Significance

First, it accurately grasps the real situation and pain points of college students' online consumption disputes, providing data reference for e-commerce platforms to improve their after-sales mechanisms and standardize their business practices. Second, it provides direction for universities to carry out targeted legal education, helping to improve college students' legal literacy and rights protection capabilities. Third, it provides practical basis for market supervision departments to optimize online consumption supervision models and reduce the cost of rights protection for young people, promoting the rule of law in the online consumption market.

2. Survey Subjects, Methods, and Content

2.1. Survey Subjects

This survey employed stratified sampling, selecting university students from 23 universities across the country as the survey subjects, covering undergraduate and vocational college students, arts and science students, students of different grades, and students with different monthly living expenses. A total of 450 online questionnaires were distributed, and 412 valid questionnaires were returned, with an effective response rate of 91.56%^[3]. Twenty university students with experience of online consumer disputes were randomly selected for semi-structured interviews, including 14 undergraduate students ^[4], 6 vocational college students, and 3 law students, providing in-depth supplementary information to the survey.

2.2. Survey Methods

2.2.1. Questionnaire Survey Method

The questionnaire was designed and distributed through the Wenjuanxing platform. The content covers five core modules: basic situation of college students' online consumption, current situation of disputes, level of legal awareness, choice of rights protection behavior and difficulties in rights protection. There are a total of 28 questions, including single choice, multiple choice, scale and open questions, to ensure the comprehensiveness and objectivity of the data.

2.2.2. Interview Method

Standardized interview outlines were developed, and interviews were conducted online via video and audio, focusing on issues such as "details of the dispute", "the decision-making process for rights protection", "misunderstandings about legal provisions", and "suggestions for improving rights protection". Each interview lasted 15-20 minutes and produced an interview record of about 30,000 words.

2.2.3. Literature Review Method

By reviewing laws and regulations such as the Civil Code, the Consumer Rights Protection Law, and the E-commerce Law, and by compiling relevant academic papers and research reports on online consumer rights protection for college students from CNKI, we can draw on existing research findings to provide a theoretical basis for the analysis and recommendations in this survey.

2.3. Survey Content

This survey focuses on four key aspects: First, the basic characteristics of college students' online consumption, including the amount spent, platform preferences, and consumption types; second, the occurrence of online consumption disputes, including the types of disputes, frequency of occurrence, and amounts involved; third, college students' legal awareness and rights protection consciousness, including their understanding of core legal provisions and their awareness of the importance of rights protection; and fourth, rights protection behaviors and dilemmas, including the choice of rights protection channels, the success rate of rights protection, reasons for giving up rights protection, and suggestions for improvement.

3. Survey Results and Data Analysis

3.1. Analysis of the Basic Characteristics of College Students' Online Consumption

3.1.1. Consumption Patterns are Becoming more Concentrated, with Live-streaming E-commerce Emerging as a New Growth Driver

The survey shows that college students' online consumption patterns exhibit a clear concentration: clothing and footwear account for 38.35%, food delivery for 26.46%, study materials and courses for 15.29%, beauty and skincare for 12.62%, and other categories (such as virtual top-ups and cultural and creative products) for 7.28%. Notably, live-streaming e-commerce accounts for 57.04% of consumption, with Douyin, Kuaishou, and Taobao Live being the main platforms. Over 60% of college students stated that they had made impulsive purchases based on recommendations from live streamers.

3.1.2. Consumption Amounts Are Small, with Significant Differences in Average Monthly Spending

In terms of average monthly online spending, 52.18% spent less than 1,000 yuan, 36.41% spent between 1,000 and 2,000 yuan, and 11.41% spent more than 2,000 yuan. There is a positive correlation between monthly living expenses and online spending: students with monthly living expenses of less than 1,500 yuan mostly spend less than 800 yuan on online spending per month; students with monthly living expenses of more than 3,000 yuan spend more than 1,800 yuan on online spending per month [5].

3.1.3. Platform Preferences are Fixed, and Small and Medium-sized Platforms Face Higher Risks

Among the online shopping platforms commonly used by college students, the three major comprehensive platforms, Taobao, JD.com, and Pinduoduo, account for 89.56%, while food delivery platforms such as Meituan and Ele.me account for 92.23%, and niche e-commerce platforms and WeChat merchants account for only 8.74%. However, among students who have had consumer disputes, the proportion involving niche platforms and WeChat merchants reached 42.38%, far higher than the 15.63% involving comprehensive platforms.

3.2. Analysis of the Current Situation of Online Consumption Disputes among College Students

3.2.1. The Incidence of Disputes is Relatively High, with Small-amount Disputes Dominating

A survey shows that 68.45% of college students reported having experienced online consumer disputes, with 59.22% experiencing them 1-2 times and 9.23% experiencing them 3 times or more. In terms of the amounts involved, disputes under 500 yuan accounted for 78.64%, those between 500 and 1000 yuan accounted for 15.29%, and those over 1000 yuan accounted for 6.07%. This characteristic closely aligns with the trend of small-amount online spending among college students.

3.2.2. The Types of Disputes are Concentrated, with False Advertising and After-sales Issues Being Prominent

Based on the statistics of valid questionnaires, the types of online consumption disputes among college students can be mainly divided into five categories, with the specific proportions and manifestations as follows:

Table 1. Classification Statistics of Online Consumption Disputes of College Students

Types of disputes	percentage	Typical manifestations
False advertising	32.04%	The livestreamer exaggerated the product's efficacy, the product images did not match the actual product, and the specifications were falsely labeled.
After-sales service shirking responsibility	28.64%	Refusing to accept returns without reason, unreachable after-sales customer service, disputes over return shipping costs.
Product quality defects	21.36%	Received damaged goods, counterfeit or substandard products, or goods that have spoiled within their shelf life.
Personal information leakage	12.14%	After making a purchase, you may receive fraudulent phone calls and spam text messages, and your personal information may be leaked by the platform.
Other (such as price fraud, failure to fulfill virtual service obligations)	5.82%	Promotional prices do not match actual payment prices; online course providers abscond with students' money.

During the interviews, several students mentioned typical problems such as "the 'tenfold compensation for fakes' promised by the livestreaming host, but after discovering that the goods were counterfeit, the platform only agreed to a refund and refused to compensate" and "the second-hand textbooks purchased from niche platforms were found to be missing pages, and customer service refused to handle the matter on the grounds that 'second-hand goods cannot be returned or exchanged'."

3.2.3. The Scenarios in Which Disputes Occur are Highest in Live-streaming E-commerce and Micro-businesses

In terms of the consumption scenarios in which disputes occur, disputes in live-streaming e-commerce account for 45.15%, those in WeChat e-commerce transactions account for 18.23%, those in ordinary online shopping scenarios account for 32.41%, and those in food delivery scenarios account for 4.21%. Live-streaming e-commerce has become a high-incidence area for disputes due to "inducing language from hosts" and "lack of platform supervision"; while

WeChat e-commerce transactions are the most difficult to resolve disputes due to the lack of platform guarantees.

3.3. Analysis of College Students' Legal Awareness and Rights Protection Consciousness

3.3.1. Fragmented Legal Understanding and Insufficient Grasp of Core Provisions

The survey shows that only 12.62% of college students said they were "familiar with the core provisions of the Consumer Rights Protection Law and the Civil Code regarding online consumption," 58.49% said they "only had a superficial understanding, knowing that there is a seven-day no-reason return policy, but were unclear about the specific applicable conditions," and 28.89% said they "had no understanding of the relevant legal provisions at all."

In a knowledge test on core legal provisions, regarding the "scope of application of the seven-day no-reason return policy," only 36.16% of students knew that "customized goods and fresh and perishable goods are not applicable"; regarding the "compensation standards for false advertising," only 10.92% of students knew that "a refund plus three times the amount can be requested, with compensation of 500 yuan if the amount is less than 500 yuan"; regarding "rights protection channels," 62.14% of students only knew to "contact platform customer service," and lacked sufficient knowledge of channels such as "complaining to 12315," "reporting to the market supervision department," and "filing a lawsuit."

3.3.2. They Have a Strong Awareness of Their Rights, but There is a Disconnect between Their Understanding and Their Actions

From a subjective perspective of awareness of rights protection, 89.56% of college students believe that "protecting one's rights is a necessary action to safeguard one's legitimate rights after encountering consumer disputes," while only 10.44% believe that "it's unnecessary to protect one's rights for small disputes, as it's a waste of time." However, in terms of actual behavior, among students who encounter disputes, only 23.54% choose to "actively protect their rights," while 76.46% choose to "give up protecting their rights." This disconnect between "strong awareness and weak action" is one of the core findings of this survey^[2].

3.3.3. Law Students Have a Clear Cognitive Advantage, but There are Still Shortcomings

Of the three law students interviewed, all could accurately recite the relevant legal provisions. However, two of them stated that while they knew the avenues for protecting their rights, the cost of pursuing legal action was too high due to the disputed amount of only 200 yuan, leading them to ultimately choose to give up. This indicates that even with professional legal knowledge, the cost of protecting one's rights remains a key factor influencing university students' actions.

3.4. Analysis of College Students' Rights Protection Behavior and Dilemmas

3.4.1. Limited Options for Rights Protection, with Heavy Reliance on Platform Customer Service

Among the students who chose to protect their rights, the choice of avenues for protection showed a clear homogeneity: 92.31% chose "contact the platform's customer service for negotiation", 64.10% chose "contact the merchant directly for negotiation", 10.26% chose "call 12315 to file a complaint", 5.13% chose "report to the market supervision department", and 0% chose "file a civil lawsuit".

This data shows that college students rely heavily on e-commerce platforms for rights protection, and use legal channels such as administrative complaints and judicial litigation very infrequently. In interviews, students generally stated that "platform customer service is the most convenient; you can contact them with just a click," and "I don't know how to file a complaint with 12315, nor what materials I need to prepare."

3.4.2. The Success Rate of Rights Protection is Relatively Low, Especially for Small-amount Disputes

Among the students who chose to pursue their rights, only 35.90% reported "successful rights protection, receiving a refund, compensation, or apology," while 64.10% reported "failed rights protection, or only received a partial resolution." In terms of the amount involved, the success rate for disputes under 500 yuan was only 28.46%, while the success rate for disputes over 500 yuan reached 65.38%.

In successful cases of rights protection, the main reasons are that "the merchant voluntarily agreed to the return after the platform intervened"; the main reasons for failure of rights protection include "the merchant refused to negotiate and the platform had no coercive measures", "there was a lack of effective evidence to prove the facts of the dispute" and "the rights protection process was cumbersome and time-consuming, so we gave up".

3.4.3. There are Many Reasons for Giving up on Protecting One's Rights, with Cost and Ability Being the Core Obstacles

A survey of students who gave up their rights revealed five core reasons, with the following percentages:

- (1) The cost of protecting one's rights exceeds the amount involved in the dispute, leading to a feeling that it's "not worthwhile," accounting for 42.38%;
- (2) The rights protection process is complicated, and the specific steps are unknown, accounting for 26.46%;
- (3) Lack of valid evidence (such as chat logs, live stream replays, and product vouchers), accounting for 15.29%;
- (4) Fear of trouble, limited time, and unwillingness to expend energy accounted for 10.92%;
- (5) Those who believe that "it's useless to seek redress, as merchants and platforms will just pass the buck" account for 5.05%.

One student's statement during the interview was representative: "I bought a pair of shoes for 199 yuan through a live stream, only to find out they were fake. After contacting customer service, the seller denied it, and the platform asked me to provide a quality inspection report. The quality inspection would cost more than 200 yuan, which is more expensive than the shoes themselves, so I had no choice but to accept the loss."

4. Reasons for the Difficulties Faced by College Students in Protecting Their Consumer Rights Online

4.1. From the Perspective of College Students Themselves: Insufficient Legal Literacy and Weak Awareness of Evidence

On the one hand, legal education in universities is mostly theoretical, lacking practical guidance on protecting consumer rights online. This leads to fragmented understanding of relevant legal provisions among university students, and a lack of knowledge about the procedures and techniques for protecting their rights. On the other hand, university students often engage in impulsive online consumption, lacking awareness of evidence preservation. They fail to save crucial evidence such as chat logs, live stream replays, and product photos after transactions, resulting in "inability to provide evidence" when seeking redress. Furthermore, university students often hold the misconception of "exemption from liability for small claims," believing that minor disputes are not worth the effort, thus condoning illegal business practices by merchants.

4.2. E-commerce Platform Level: Imperfect Governance Mechanisms and Inadequate Fulfillment of Responsibilities

Some e-commerce platforms prioritize attracting merchants over proper oversight, with merchant qualification reviews and product quality supervision becoming mere formalities. This leads to frequent occurrences of counterfeit and substandard products and false advertising. In after-sales service, some platforms suffer from inadequate customer service mechanisms, characterized by buck-passing and low efficiency, lacking effective means of enforceable control over merchants. Furthermore, loopholes exist in the regulation of live-streaming e-commerce. Platforms fail to adequately regulate the language used by livestreamers and rigorously review products, resulting in persistent instances of exaggerated claims and false promises by livestreamers.

4.3. Legal and Regulatory Aspects: High Cost of Rights Protection and Insufficient Regulatory Efforts

From a legal perspective, although the Consumer Rights Protection Law and the E-commerce Law provide legal grounds for consumer rights protection, the "time cost" and "money cost" of judicial litigation are high. For college students involved in small disputes, the cost of civil litigation far outweighs the benefits. From a regulatory perspective, the cross-regional nature of the online consumer market makes supervision difficult and costly for market regulators, creating a "vacuum zone" in the supervision of niche platforms and micro-businesses. Furthermore, insufficient promotion of complaint channels such as 12315 means that some college students are unaware of the complaint methods and procedures, reducing the utilization rate of administrative rights protection.

4.4. At the University Level: Insufficient Targeted Legal Education and Lack of Rights Protection Services

Currently, legal education courses in universities are mostly compulsory general education courses, focusing primarily on the Constitution and Criminal Law, with less coverage of laws closely related to students' lives such as the Consumer Rights Protection Law and the E-commerce Law [6]. Furthermore, universities lack dedicated consumer rights protection guidance institutions, making it difficult for students to obtain professional legal guidance and assistance when encountering consumer disputes, resulting in a lack of professionalism and effectiveness in their rights protection efforts.

The survey results show that while university students have a strong awareness of their rights, their fragmented legal knowledge and insufficient ability to protect their rights lead to a disconnect between awareness and behavior. Their reliance on online platforms for rights protection results in a low success rate. Excessive costs of rights protection, weak awareness of evidence, lack of platform oversight, and insufficient legal education in universities are the core reasons for this predicament. Therefore, it is necessary not only to strengthen legal education but also to enhance market supervision to ensure more disputes are resolved effectively.

5. Conclusion

This survey systematically sorts out the whole picture of college students' online consumption disputes based on first-hand questionnaire and interview data. Live-stream e-commerce becomes the high-risk consumption scene, and small-value disputes dominated by false promotion and after-sales evasion are prominent. Although college students generally recognize the importance of safeguarding their own consumer rights, insufficient legal reserves, weak evidence preservation awareness and high time and economic cost of rights protection cause most students to give up safeguarding their legitimate interests. The dilemma is jointly

formed by four dimensions: individual students, e-commerce platforms, market supervision and university legal education. To fundamentally alleviate this problem, multi-party coordination is required: universities should launch targeted practical legal courses for online consumption; e-commerce platforms need to tighten access supervision and optimize after-sales constraint mechanisms; market regulatory authorities should expand publicity of 12315 complaint channels and strengthen cross-regional online market supervision; college students themselves need to establish standardized evidence retention habits and actively use diversified official rights protection channels. Only through joint efforts of all parties can we lower the threshold of online consumer rights protection for college students and build a standardized and orderly online consumption rule of law environment for young consumer groups.

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