Journal of Business and Management Studies (JBMS)
ISSN: 2709-0876
DOI: 10.32996/jbms
Journal Homepage: www.al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/jbms

JBMS
AL-KINDI CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Construction of an Adaptive Communication Model for Cross-border E-commerce AI Customer Service under Cultural Context Differences: A Case Study of the Russian Market

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| ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of the rapid expansion of Sino-Russian cross-border e-commerce, AI customer service systems face significant challenges in adapting to high-context cultural environments. Based on Hall's high-/low-context theory, this study analyzes typical user complaint cases from the Russian market and identifies a structural mismatch between the low-context communication patterns of existing AI customer service systems and the high-context expectations of Russian users. This mismatch manifests in three key dimensions: rigid language, poor contextual interpretation, and an inability to build relationships. To address these issues, this paper proposes an adaptive communication model comprising three integrated layers: a context perception layer, a strategy generation layer, and an interaction execution layer. Driven by a culturally sensitive communication strategy library, the model is designed to shift AI customer service from standardized responses to contextualized communication. By integrating mechanisms such as emotion recognition, indirect intent inference, and relationship-building dialogue, the model aims to enhance user satisfaction and trust in high-context markets. This study offers a structured framework for incorporating cultural theory into the design of cross-border AI customer service systems and suggests directions for future research, including expansion to other high-context regions and multimodal interaction.

| KEYWORDS

Cross-cultural communication; AI customer service; high- and low-context theory; Russian market; adaptive model; contextualized interaction

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 15 October 2024 **PUBLISHED:** 02 November 2025 **DOI:** 10.32996/jbms.2025.7.7.4

1. Introduction

In recent years, cross-border e-commerce trade relations between China and Russia have become increasingly close, demonstrating strong growth momentum and development potential. According to multiple market reports and statistics, in the first half of 2025, the scale of e-commerce in Russia exceeded 15% of total retail sales, reaching a record high, with a year-on-year growth rate of 30%, significantly higher than the 2.1% growth of traditional retail. Among these, cross-border e-commerce performed particularly well, with China's cross-border e-commerce transaction volume to Russia growing by 67% year-on-year, accounting for 58% of Russia's total cross-border e-commerce imports. (Heilongjiang Economic Daily, 2025)

Despite the broad market prospects, Chinese cross-border e-commerce platforms face severe localization challenges in the Russian market. Among these, the cultural incompatibility of AI customer service systems is particularly prominent, directly leading to increased customer complaint rates and decreased conversion rates.

These problems are rooted in deep-seated cultural differences. Russia belongs to a typical high-context culture (Su Hang, 2016, 2017), where communication emphasizes relationships, context, and non-verbal cues, and exhibits a high degree of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001). When AI customer service provides only rigid, direct, and transactional responses, unable to understand the user's implied meaning or engage in necessary polite small talk, it easily provokes user dissatisfaction. Industry reports indicate that the order abandonment rate due to poor customer service experience can increase significantly in some cases (Zhang Wei, 2023).

2. Development and Challenges of AI Customer Service in Cross-border E-commerce

With advancements in artificial intelligence technology, AI customer service has become a key tool for cross-border e-commerce platforms to enhance service efficiency and user experience. The communication patterns of AI customer service, especially modern systems based on natural language processing and large language models, are rooted in their technical nature, which presents unique advantages and limitations in cross-cultural scenarios.

The advantages of AI customer service in cross-cultural scenarios are mainly reflected in the following three aspects. (1) Efficiency and Consistency: When handling low-context, standardized queries, AI customer service can provide efficient, consistent 7x24 hour service. (2) Multilingual Coverage: Based on large-scale multilingual pre-trained models, AI customer service can achieve broad language coverage, overcoming basic language barriers. (3) Data-Driven Insights: AI customer service can record and analyze dialogue data, providing a basis for optimizing service processes.

However, AI customer service also has inherent limitations. (1) Cultural Insensitivity: AI customer service may fail to understand culture-specific expressions, slang, humor, and value preferences (for instance, it might not grasp the genuine negative sentiment behind a Russian user's subtle complaint like "your service is quite distinctive"). (2) Lack of Contextual Interpretation Ability: AI customer service systems cannot access and understand the full context of a conversation (such as the user's previous shopping experience, local social trends, etc.), making it difficult to handle dialogues common in high-context cultures that rely on shared knowledge. (3) Relative Lack of Relationship-Building Capability: The design logic of AI customer service is "problem-solving," not "relationship-building." It cannot engage in genuine social dialogue aimed at fostering trust and goodwill, which is crucial in high-context business communication.

Current research on AI customer service primarily revolves around two major themes.

The first is the optimization of technical pathways for AI customer service. Current research focuses on how to enhance the performance of AI customer service through Natural Language Processing (NLP), affective computing, and Large Language Models (LLMs). For example, Duan Chen (2024) studied an empathetic response generation mechanism integrating emotion and intent; Dong Jieqiong et al. (2025) explored the potential of LLMs in semantic understanding and emotion recognition for AI customer service; Xie Huajuan (2023) emphasized that the integration of big data and AI technology is the core of building adaptive customer service systems.

The second theme concerns the challenges faced by AI customer service in cross-border scenarios. Research generally focuses on barriers to cross-cultural communication. Studies by Brutian Eranui (2017) and Wang Zhe et al. (2020) revealed that logistics and customer service are key factors affecting Russian consumer satisfaction, and cultural differences exacerbate challenges in these areas. Based on the Technology Acceptance Model, Li Min et al. (2025) found that trust and perceived ease of use significantly impact satisfaction with AI customer service, which is particularly critical in high-context cultures where trust building often relies on communication styles conforming to cultural norms.

3. Hall's High-/Low-Context Theory and Its Application in Business Communication

American anthropologist Edward T. Hall's (1976) High- and Low-Context theory is one of the core theories in cross-cultural research, providing a foundational framework for understanding cross-cultural communication differences. The theory posits that all communication relies on context, but the degree of dependence on context varies significantly across cultures. Context here refers to all the non-verbal cues and background knowledge surrounding a message at the time of communication, including the relationship between the parties, social norms, body language, tone of voice, and shared cultural assumptions. The theory places cultures on a continuum, where high-context cultures (e.g., Russia, China, Japan) rely heavily on situational and non-verbal cues during communication, with much information internalized within the communicators or the physical context; whereas low-context cultures (e.g., USA, Germany) tend to rely on clear, explicit coded language to convey information (Hall, 1976).

Table 1 Comparison of Specific Characteristics of High- and Low-Context Cultures

Dimension	High-Context Culture	Low-Context Culture
Communication Style	Indirect, implicit, circumlocutory	Direct, explicit, straightforward
Information Density	Information resides in context, verbal message carries less information	Information primarily carried by language, high information density
Dependence on Non-verbal Cues	High (value body language, silence, tone, setting)	Low (focus primarily on literal meaning)
Importance of Relationship	Relationship is the basis for communication, relationship precedes business	Business is the basis for communication, relationship serves business
Trust Building	Built through long-term interaction and personal relationships	Built through legal contracts and past performance
Typical Representatives	Russia, China, Japan, Korea, Arab countries	USA, Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavian countries

This theory provides a robust framework for analyzing cross-cultural business communication. A series of studies by Su

Hang (2016, 2017) systematically integrated Hall's high/low-context cultural theory with Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory to conduct an in-depth analysis of cross-cultural communication differences between China and Russia. The research indicates that as a high-context culture, Russia emphasizes relationship-building, indirect communication, and sensitivity to nonverbal cues in business interactions. This contrasts sharply with the direct, task-oriented communication patterns characteristic of low-context cultures.

Firstly, from historical and geopolitical perspectives, Russia's vast territory, harsh natural environment, and history of frequent foreign invasions have shaped a collectivist national character and a clear distinction between "us" and "them." In this context, the boundaries between in-group and out-group are distinct, and communication with in-group members (family, friends, long-term partners) relies heavily on shared background knowledge and unspoken understanding, which is the soil for high-context communication.

Secondly, Russian literature and language fully embody its high-context characteristics. Literary giants like Dostoevsky and Tolstoy are renowned for their profound depictions of characters' complex inner worlds and social backgrounds, requiring readers to delve into the context to understand the characters' actions and dialogues. Linguistically, Russian possesses a complex system of honorifics (such as the distinction between "ты" and "вы"), where the choice of grammar and vocabulary strongly depends on the social status, age, and closeness of the interlocutors, constituting a highly contextualized coding system itself.

Finally, Russia's high-context characteristics are particularly evident in social and business practices. As research indicates, the Russian national character is contradictory—both warm and open, yet cautious and reserved (Xu Yiping, 2022). Before establishing business relationships, Russians tend to invest significant time in informal social activities to observe and evaluate potential partners, thereby building trust. In communication, they value subtlety and indirectness; direct rebuttals or refusals are perceived as rude and impolite. Silence is also highly valued, often signifying deep thought, disagreement, or waiting for the other party to provide more contextual information—rather than an awkward pause. These habits demand exceptional “decoding” skills from both parties, precisely what AI customer service systems rooted in low-context cultures severely lack.

The cross-cultural barriers faced by AI customer service extend far beyond mere inaccuracies in language translation. At their core, these barriers stem from a fundamental mismatch between low-context technological systems and high-context user expectations. When a Russian user expects customer service to understand their unspoken needs and provide respectful, empathetic responses, an AI agent that delivers only direct, transactional answers—even with grammatically perfect Russian—will be perceived as cold, insensitive, or even rude. Hall's theory concretizes this “mismatch” from vague “cultural differences” into observable, measurable variations in communication dimensions. It alerts developers that they must not settle for mere linguistic translation but must engage in “contextual translation.” Specifically:

1. At the dialogue management level, high-context theory requires designing processes for AI customer service that embed cultural rules. For instance, for the Russian market, incorporate relationship-building small talk at the beginning of conversations, and set up high-frequency confirmation points after key information (e.g., "If I understand correctly, your issue is...") to compensate for the lack of non-verbal cues.
2. At the NLP model level, it guides model training to pay special attention to indirect expressions, hedges, and culture-specific scripts in high-context cultures. For example, training models not only to recognize direct complaints like "I am dissatisfied" but also to detect implicit negative feedback such as "I expected it to be better."
3. At the personality and style level, it requires the output generator of AI customer service to adjust its communication style from low-context directness to high-context indirectness and respectfulness.

4. Application and Dilemmas of AI Customer Service in the Russian-speaking Region

Leading Russian e-commerce platforms, exemplified by Ozon, have widely deployed AI-powered customer service systems to enhance service efficiency. However, reality shows that these systems have generated significant user dissatisfaction in practical application. Analysis of multiple user complaint cases—such as User T's request for a 115-ruble refund, User R's dispute over undelivered goods, and User M's confusion regarding the return and refund process—reveals the following prevalent issues with current AI customer service implementation in the Russian market:

Table 2 Manifestations and Impacts of Cultural Incompatibility of AI Customer Service in the Russian Market

Manifestation of Cultural Incompatibility	Impact on Customer Experience	Potential Business Consequence
Rigid Language, Lack of Localization (relying on literal translation, not using authentic Russian or honorifics)	Poor communication, feeling disrespected	Decreased consultation conversion rate
Mismatched Communication Style (overly direct, lacking the indirectness and patience required in high-context cultures)	The customer feels resistant, believing the customer service representative is avoiding the issue.	Reduced customer satisfaction, increased negative review rate

Robot Interaction Triggers Negative Emotions (some users have low acceptance of pure bot interaction)	Unmet need for human interaction, poor experience	Customer churn, increased complaint rate

These observations collectively point to a core conclusion: the currently deployed intelligent customer service systems fail to effectively meet the service expectations of Russian users, as their communication patterns are out of step with local cultural communication paradigms.

4.1 Language Level: Conflict Between Formulism and Flexibility

Literal translation leads to rigidity and lack of politeness: AI customer service responses are based on preset templates or algorithmically generated, potentially using standard Russian vocabulary but lacking the flexibility and emotional warmth inherent in language. Its communication is purely transactional, unable to adjust tone based on the user's age, mood, or the urgency of the problem. For example, for a 70-year-old elderly user (User M), the system did not provide more patient and respectful guidance considering their age and anxiety.

Inability to understand culture-specific expressions: Russian users often use indirect, sarcastic, or culturally nuanced statements to express dissatisfaction. For instance, the strong emotional word in "Озон чат поддержки работает отвратительно" ("Ozon support chat works disgustingly") or the pun in "Бот надо чинить" ("This bot needs fixing"), which the AI customer service might only process literally, failing to grasp the intense emotion and sharpness of criticism behind them.

4.2 Context Level: The Gap Between Isolated Decoding and Comprehensive Understanding

Unable to process “subtext”: In high-context cultures, vast amounts of information reside within the context. User T's brief statement, “I have no strength left to talk to the bot anymore,” itself serves as a strong signal indicating her state of extreme frustration and implies an urgent need for immediate human intervention. However, a low-context AI assistant is likely to interpret this as a routine emotional vent, failing to trigger the priority escalation to human support.

Slow to Respond to Emotional Cues: User R repeatedly emphasized phrases like “никто не звонил” (“No one called me”) and “я его не получал!” (“I didn't receive it!”, “I didn't receive it!”). These repeated, exclamation-marked statements are typical high-context expressions of dissatisfaction and emphasis on problem severity. Yet the agent's response remained standardized: “Свяжемся с вами в этом чате в течение 2 дней” (“We will contact you via this chat within 2 days”). This insensitivity to emotional cues was perceived by the user as indifference and evasion.

4.3 Relationship Level: Disconnect Between Task Orientation and Emotional Connection

Lack of "human touch" in dialogue: Russian communication culture values establishing personal connections and trust in business interactions. In contrast, AI customer service dialogue is entirely task-oriented, with a core logic of "closing tickets" rather than "maintaining customers." Throughout the cases, there were no attempts to build rapport, no genuine empathy shown for the user's situation, making the communication seem mechanical and distant.

Difficulty in establishing trust: Trust is crucial in high-context cultures. When the AI customer service repeatedly provides ineffective solutions (e.g., asking the user to "wait" for days without follow-up) or exhibits inconsistent information (like miscalculating the refund amount in User R's case), it not only fails to resolve the specific issue but also continuously erodes the user's trust in the platform. Ultimately, the user concludes "буду возвращаться обратно" ("I will go back [to using other platforms]"), directly leading to customer churn.

In summary, the “cultural insensitivity” issue of current AI customer service systems deployed in the Russian market fundamentally stems from a low-context system struggling to adapt to a high-context environment. While proficient at handling standardized, explicitly coded information, these systems prove inadequate—and even counterproductive—when confronted with the indirect expressions, emotional cues, and relationship-building expectations that Russian users take for granted. This diagnosis clearly indicates that enhancing the cultural adaptability of AI customer service requires more than mere language translation or technical upgrades. It demands a profound, systematic reconstruction guided by cultural theory.

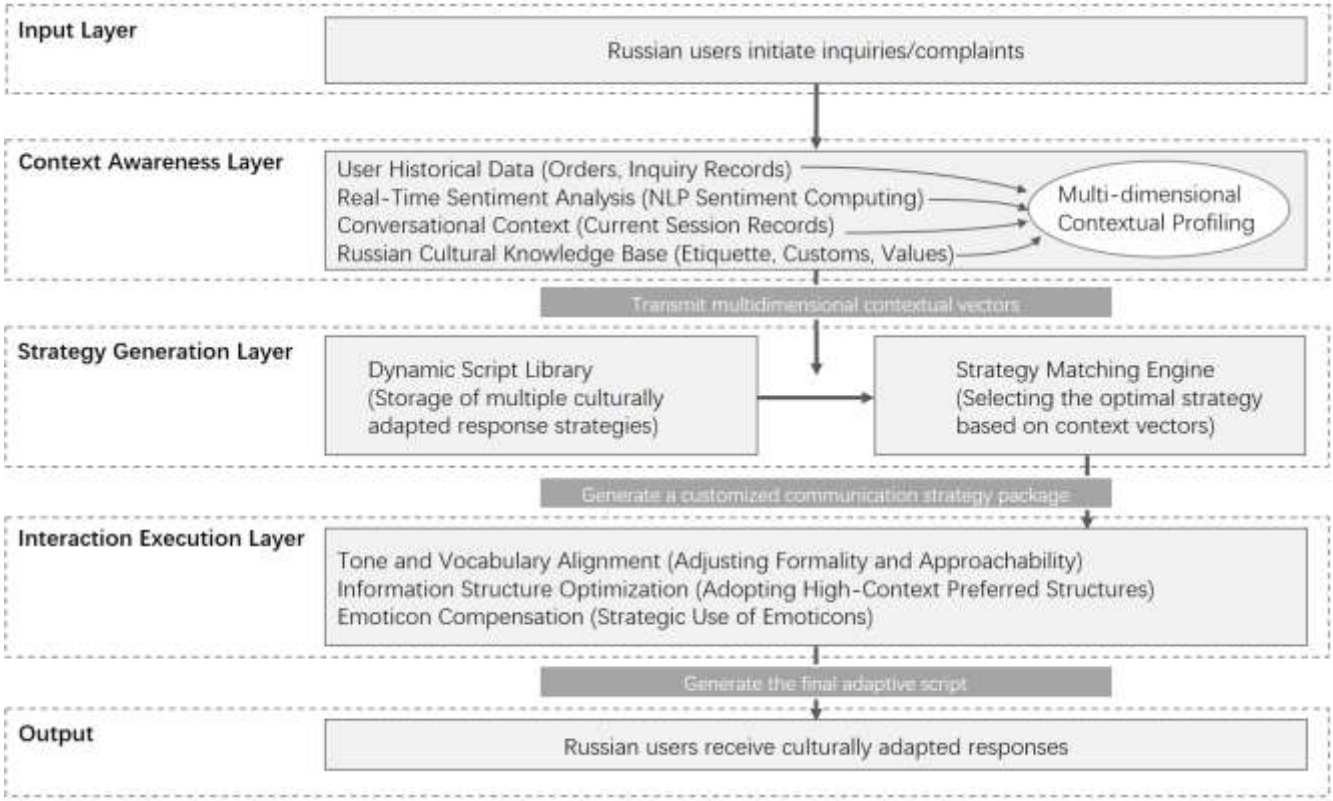
5. Construction of an Adaptive Communication Model for AI Customer Service

Addressing the “cultural incompatibility” issues faced by AI customer service in Russia's high-context cultural market, this paper attempts to systematically construct a novel ‘adaptive’ communication model. Grounded in Hall's high/low-context theory, this model aims to propel AI customer service beyond rigid “standardized responses” toward flexible “contextual communication,” thereby achieving effective and approachable cross-cultural communication.

Standardized responses are linear, keyword-based, and prioritize consistency and efficiency. They assume user needs are explicit and directly codable, positioning customer service as “information extractors” and “solution retrievers.” Contextual communication is dynamic, context- and user-profile-based, prioritizing resonance and trust. It acknowledges that user needs are often embedded within context, emotion, and relationships, positioning customer service as “context decoders,” “emotional resonators,” and “relationship builders.” This model adopts contextual communication as its target paradigm.

The transition from standardized responses to contextual communication relies on a layered, progressive, and cyclically optimized system architecture. The "Adaptive" communication model comprises three core layers: Context Awareness Layer, Strategy Generation Layer, and Interaction Execution Layer. Its architecture and workflow, illustrated below, form a closed-loop system progressing from perception to generation to execution.

Figure 1 Architecture Diagram of the Adaptive Communication Model



5.1 Context Awareness Layer

This serves as the input end and perceptual nervous system of the "adaptive" communication model, responsible for collecting and integrating multidimensional information to construct a three-dimensional portrait of the user's communication context. Its inputs primarily include historical user data, real-time sentiment analysis, conversational context, and a Russian cultural knowledge base.

User Historical Data: Past orders, return records, inquiry history, and rating preferences, used to determine user type and potential needs. Real-time Sentiment Analysis: Utilizes NLP sentiment analysis technology to instantly assess the emotional state expressed in the user's current text (e.g., anger, anxiety, confusion, satisfaction). Conversation Context: Understands the core issue within the current dialogue turn, unresolved sub-issues, and the indirectness of the user's expression. Russian Cultural Knowledge Base: A structured database encompassing Russian social etiquette, common proverbs and euphemisms, significant holidays, and prevailing cultural attitudes toward authority, contracts, and privacy.

The Context Awareness Layer outputs a multidimensional context vector quantifying the current conversation's "context concentration," emotional polarity, and cultural sensitivity, providing data-driven support for strategy selection.

5.2 Strategy Generation Layer

This serves as the brain and decision center of the "adaptive" communication model, with its core comprising a dynamic script library and a strategy matching engine.

Dynamic Script Library: Rather than fixed question-answer pairs, it functions as a database composed of "communication meta-strategies" and "atomized script components." For identical communication intents (e.g., "urging logistics updates" or "processing returns"), it pre-configures multiple response strategies tailored to different contextual styles. Strategy Matching Engine: Receives contextual vectors from the perception layer and selects the optimal communication strategy and components from the dynamic script library based on predefined cultural rules (e.g., if "emotion analysis == anger" and "cultural trait == high-context," then "prioritize high-reassurance, relationship-oriented strategies").

The output of this layer is a customized communication strategy package that defines the core objectives, emotional tone, relationship-building approach, and information presentation sequence for the response.

5.3 Interaction Execution Layer

This represents the output end and final presentation layer of the "Adaptive" communication model, responsible for transforming strategy packages into natural, fluent, and culturally adapted final responses. Its adaptability manifests in the following aspects:

Tone and Vocabulary: Adjusts formality and approachability based on strategy packages, such as choosing the formal address "Вы" over 'ты' and using honorifics like "Многоуважаемый клиент" ("Dear Valued Customer").

Information Structure: Employs a high-context structure of "Relationship Building → Problem Confirmation → Solution Presentation → Reassurance," rather than directly proposing solutions.

Symbolic Compensation: Strategically uses emojis (e.g., 😊, 🙏) to compensate for the absence of nonverbal cues, conveying friendliness, apology, or gratitude.

5.4 Core of the Model: Designing the Communication Strategy Library Based on Contextual Differences

The Strategy Library is the cultural intelligence core of this model. The table below illustrates, in a comparative format, how high-context cultural characteristics can be translated into executable "Adaptive" communication strategies.

Table 3 Example Design of Communication Strategy Library Based on Contextual Differences

High-Context Cultural Feature (Russia)	Adaptive AI Customer Service Communication Strategy	Example Comparison
Implicit information, emphasis on what is unsaid	Enhance intent inference and indirect confirmation: Use hypothetical questions and open-ended inquiries to uncover unstated needs or concerns.	**Traditional:** "Don't you like it?" **Adaptive:** "I understand you might have some concerns regarding the [specific aspect, e.g., size/color] of this product. Could you please share your specific thoughts? Let's work together to find the most suitable solution for you."
Importance of relationships and trust	Incorporate social proof and emotional language: Highlight positive experiences of other users, use words like "we," "together" to foster a sense of community, express personalized care.	**Traditional:** "This product is good." **Adaptive:** "You have a great eye! Many long-time customers like you in Moscow have repurchased this product multiple times, providing feedback that it is very reliable, especially suitable for family use. We also believe it will meet your satisfaction."
Reliance on non-verbal cues	Compensating for E motion with Textual Symbols: Using emojis, exclamations, and more descriptive language to simulate the emotional nuance of face-to-face communication.	**Traditional:** "Okay." **Adaptive:** "Okay, I understand your meaning completely! 😊 Please rest assured, I will handle this for you immediately, expected to be completed within 2 minutes."
Respect for authority and professionalism	Reference official policies to establish authority: Frame platform rules as "Official Worry-Free Return Guarantee Program," "VIP Service Plan," using institutional authority to enhance persuasiveness and credibility.	**Traditional:** "Cannot return." **Adaptive:** "Please be assured, according to our 'Official Worry-Free Return Guarantee Program,' your situation fully qualifies for a return. I have now initiated the process for you, and your rights will be fully protected."

In summary, this paper attempts to construct an Adaptive communication model, providing a conceptual framework for the operationalization of cultural theory and the systematization of communication strategies. Its goal is to transform cold algorithmic output into dialogue rich in cultural warmth and communicative intelligence through the synergistic work of the three-layer architecture. In high-context cultural markets, AI customer service not only needs to "understand the words" but, more importantly, needs to "know how to speak" effectively to enhance user experience and business conversion for cross-border e-commerce platforms.

6. Conclusion

This study, set against the backdrop of Sino-Russian cross-border e-commerce, focuses on the communication challenges

faced by AI customer service due to cultural differences. By examining real user complaint cases and employing Edward Hall's High-/Low-Context theory as the core analytical framework, this study posits that the current "cultural insensitivity" issue of AI customer service is essentially a structural contradiction between its inherent low-context communication style and the high-context cultural demands of Russia. This contradiction manifests specifically at three levels: linguistic rigidity, inability to interpret context, and absence of relationship building.

To provide a conceptual framework for addressing the aforementioned issues, this study constructs an "Adaptive" communication model for AI customer service. This model focuses on achieving a paradigm shift from "Standardized Response" to "Contextualized Communication." Through the three-layer synergy of the Context Perception, Strategy Generation, and Interaction Execution layers, and with the culture adaptation mechanism centered on the context-difference-based communication strategy library, the model translates abstract cultural theory into executable, optimizable concrete communication strategies. The vision of this model is to help AI customer service become a "culture-aware agent" capable of understanding implied meanings, emphasizing relationship building, and skillfully using emotional symbols in communication, thereby effectively enhancing user satisfaction and trust, while reducing complaint rates and customer churn in complex cross-cultural service scenarios.

This study has certain limitations regarding the scope and format of its research object, and the proposed theoretical model awaits validation through empirical research. Firstly, focusing on Russian culture and the Russian cross-border e-commerce market, the generalizability of some conclusions to other cultures may be limited. Therefore, future research warrants the inclusion of other high-context markets (e.g., Japan, the Middle East). Secondly, this study primarily focuses on text-based AI customer service. Although text-based AI customer service is still common, voice interaction and virtual avatar customer service incorporating expressions and gestures are rapidly developing. Future research should incorporate the exploration of multimodal communication information processing and presentation, investigating how to integrate technologies like speech tone recognition and virtual avatar expression management. This would enable AI customer service to capture and adapt to emotional fluctuations in speech and supplement contextual information in communication through non-verbal cues (e.g., the avatar's smile, nod), achieving more effective "Adaptive" communication across all channels. Finally, the model constructed in this study is based on the inductive summarization of user data and analysis grounded in cross-cultural theory. Its effectiveness for users requires validation through future empirical research.

Funding: This research was funded by the Shenzhen Polytechnic University 2025 Teaching Quality and Reform Project "Research on the Pathway of Integrating Generative AI into Cross-border E-commerce Customer Management Practical Training", Shenzhen 2023 Planning Project for Educational Science Research Exploration and Practice of the Integration of Post, Course, Competition, and Certification in the "Less Commonly Taught Languages + Cross-Border E-Commerce" Teaching Model under the Background of Digital Economy — A Case Study of Applied Foreign Language (Arabic) in Higher Vocational Education (Grant No. yb23043)
Conflicts of Interest: Declare conflicts of interest or state "The authors declare no conflict of interest."
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