

# Purchasing of Thematic Kid Fashion at the Belt and Road Market

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## Abstract

Through a closer economic relationship, “The Belt and Road” has brought about remarkable growth in both international trade and cross boarder investment among the alongside countries. Still, obstacles exist for foreign companies to expand their business with China due to the imperfect understanding of the Chinese market. If foreign firms have a better knowledge of the market in China, it will definitely enhance the chance to be successful in doing business with China. This study specifies in the thematic kid fashion market. Sales information of 150 thematic kid fashion products is included to define the elements that influence the sales and feedback of thematic kid fashion. The elements and information are disposed using Factor Analysis so as to recognize the relevant elements and divide them into different factors. Feasible generalized least square (FGLS) method is adopted to measure the impact of each element on the sales of different brands of thematic kid fashion. Based on the result of the model, specific suggestions are proposed for foreign thematic kid fashion companies and retailers to meet the need of Chinese customers better and thus attain a larger market share in China’s market.

**Keywords:** The Belt and Road, Thematic kid fashion, factor analysis, FGLS

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Children’s Wear Market and E-commerce Platform in China

China’s children’s wear market can be divided into offline market and online market. The distribution channels in the online market are relatively rich in spite of its short period of appearance and development. According to “White Paper on China’s Online Maternal and Child Market Development” released by iResearch in 2015, the online children’s wear market was opened in 2000. Between 2005 and 2009, E-commerce companies and network platforms that specialized in children’s wear, like Yuer.com and Redbaby.com, developed rapidly. With the integrated platform such as Taobao, Jingdong, and Amazon entering into the online maternal and child market in 2010, the online children’s wear market gradually expanded.

The transaction size of the online children’s wear market has grown dramatically since 2014, and its growth rate exceeded that of the overall online market. The market penetration rate of the online children’s wear market has exceeded 15%, with a broad development space. According to “Analysis of Present Situation and Trend Prediction of China’s Children’s Wear Market” released by China Information Industry in 2016, children’s wear transactions accounted for 25.4% of the overall online maternal and child transactions and increased by 24.1% from a year earlier in 2015. It is estimated that the online maternal and child market in China will reach 767 billion yuan in 2018, which shows that the space for future development of online children’s wear market is huge. However, although China’s online children’s wear market has been gradually expanding, the market is extremely fragmented.

In addition, China’s online children’s wear market can be divided into domestic brands and foreign brands. Among the domestic brands, there are brands that specialized in children’s wear such as Barabara and Annai, as well as brands extended from original brands such as Anta and Senma. Among the foreign brands, there are fast fashion brands such as H&M and Uniqlo, as well as sports brands, like Adidas and Nike. Although domestic brands understand the market better, the market share of domestic brands is smaller due to their problems of short period of appearance and development, insufficient capital, low brand recognition, and lack of complete development system.

### *1.2 Challenges for Chinese Enterprises*

Although Chinese enterprises have experienced several stages of globalization and made many significant reforms, they are still facing some challenges which can be divided into two areas. The first area is management and operation of enterprises: First, Chinese enterprises lack of effective governance and organization. Due to the increasing size and complexity of enterprises, complicated international environment, and different legal systems, high levels of governance play a more important role. Second, Chinese enterprises lack of the experience of coordinating and managing global business, which increases enterprise business risks and influence business process (Li, 2013). Third, Chinese enterprises lack of brand globalization strategies, which impairs the international competitiveness of Chinese enterprises ‘going out’.

Another area is the situation of foreign market: First, the differences in social systems make Chinese enterprises face cross-cultural obstacles. Second, financial environment of some areas is difficult and limited for Chinese enterprises to conduct global business. Facing those challenges, some enterprises “have gone out” successfully, while others confronted a series of difficulties. The lessons following from them are important to the enterprises that are ‘going out’: First, some enterprises have late-comer disadvantage of developing their own brands, so they should make full investigations into the local markets. Second, Enterprises need to adopt new operation modes and make innovations for exploring the local market. Third, enterprises should integrate their businesses in a global way, which will improve their operating efficiency and benefits. Forth, administrative staff and management personnel with international view who lead enterprises to adapt to the local market’s needs and manage enterprises effectively.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Consumer Behavior*

In order to provide better strategies for the development of a clothing company, it is necessary to study consumer psychology and view the clothing market from consumers’ stand. Previous studies focused on consumers’ psychology have found that consumers will mainly consider four aspects while purchasing clothing online, namely design, utility, quality and service. The pricing attribute of consumer behavior:

In traditional markets, the overall influence of price on consumers’ attitude is not significant. There is a mutual relationship between price beliefs and beliefs in brands’ quality, and in cases that involve behavioral intentions, price may even play a negative roll (Erickson & Johansson, 1985). Meanwhile, the effect of prices in e-commerce differ from that in traditional markets, but how it differs is a complicated issue. Consumers appear to be more sensitive to prices online, but that is due to the stronger impact of online promotion. The total effect of promotion and price changes is actually weaker (Degeratu, Rangaswamy & Wu, 2000). In the Chinese scenario, acceptable price is significantly correlated to the ages and genders of online customers (Chen & Dong, 2017). When prices are increased, different strategies will result in different consumer reaction, depending on the extent to which consumers feel unfair about it (Tu & Liu, 2009)

### *2.2 Design*

Consumers’ attitudes towards design factor when buying clothes vary in regions, ages and different kinds of clothes. Fashion and branding are not important parents to choose kid fashion in Turkey (Köksal, 2007), but thematic cartoon characters on kid fashion have a great influence in making the clothing brands attractive to kids (Jose, 2014). As for the young women in Shanghai, China, however, they concern about the style, color, brand and fashion of the clothes (Tian, 2008), and for the online consumers, the designs of basic outlines and bright colors are preferred (Huang, 2013). Nowadays China’s clothing market is slightly depressed, the local brand lacks the competitive situation, needs to follow the trend design (Leng, 2018). Scholars have also found that online channels and offline entity channels often operate independently, lack of communication and mutual understanding, so the clothing brand image is prone to conflict, thereby damaging the interests of the company, and will greatly reduce the brand value added, design style should be unified, to sustain the company’s long-term development (Zhao, 2016).

### *2.3 Utility*

Apparel fit will influence consumers’ satisfaction greatly, regardless of the difference in gender, nationality and class standing (Shin, 2013). Besides, a survey showed that, some consumers think online clothing brands give them confidence in social interactions and enable them to leave good impressions to others (Bai & Li 2016). A study shows that the trade liberalization has a positive effect on the quality upgrading of products whose quality is near the frontier of the world quality, which can be called the “competition avoidance effect”; however, it has a negative effect on the quality upgrading of products whose quality is far away from the world quality frontier,

namely, “discouragement effect”(Liu, 2015 ). Plus,the impacts of external income shocks on the exports of high quality products are stronger than that of low quality products during the financial crisis(Xie& Jin, 2018 ). The quality of Chinese export products has been slowly rising over the years, and the quality of products is positively correlated with the level of development of the exporting countries. and using Non-linear regression method, it is found that the coefficients of previous export empirical variables are positive, and there exists the quality of export "learning by doing" (Kang& He,2014).

#### 2.4 Quality

When choosing clothes for their children, parents in both China and Bangladesh, stated respectively by Wang and Wu (2009) and Rayhan and Saha (2014), regard comfort as a prime factor, and Indian parents would like to be loyal to the brands that can provide their children with safe garments (Kothari& Mathews, 2015). Moreover, children also concern about quality, specifically material most while purchasing (Cardoso& Araujo, 2008). Therefore, it is indicated that consumers, regardless of age and regine, value the quality of clothing much while making decisions.

However, a factor why Indian parents concern about the safety issue is that regulations regarding the kids wear safety are missing and all the kids wear are not safe, so it is also suggested that relative legislations should be introduced to the market like the developed nations (Kothari& Mathews, 2016).

#### 2.5 Service

Since the garment distribution channel appears to be omni-channel, a combination of the offline and the online (Pawar& Sarmah, 2015), the service provided to customers can be discussed as the traditional offline consumer services and the lately emerged online ones. In the offline channel, Armstrong and Niinimaki (2015) suggests that innovative business models, specifically product-service systems should be introduced. The research showed that young consumers prefer innovative and social approaches, such as renting and swapping, while older consumers prefer product satisfaction, which customization and consulting can provide them with. As for the online channel, previous studies have shown that online customer services, as well as the website design, reliability and privacy, have great influences on consumer perception (Shergill& Chen, 2005). The affective experiences and perceived value of services can lift customers' satisfaction, which will then contribute to their loyalty (Molinillo& Gómez-Ortiz, 2017).

#### 2.6 Thematic Kid Fashion

When it comes to thematic kid fashion, there is few previous research on this topic, but researchers have studied the popular characters used on kid fashion before. Many designers apply cartoon characters to designing in order to arouse children's desire for the clothes, because of the representative image itself, the amusement these characters bring along and the fantasy of ideal lives and surrealistic stories in the fictional world of cartoon (Wang, 2005). Meanwhile, some kid fashion brands are even named after these characters directly, such as Barbie, PEPCO, Winnie the Pooh and so on (Kang, 2014).

#### 2.7 Chinese Kid Fashion Company under OBOR

Under the Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese kid fashion companies are facing the unprecedented opportunities and challenges. To be specific, on one hand, previous researchers suggested that clothing companies can aim at the developing countries and regions, where there are abundant raw materials and cheaper labor, and cooperate more with the local companies, which will reduce the international logistics (Cui& Hou, 2017). On the other hand, however, due to the unsafe design and manufacture in Chinese kid fashion and the different standards for kid fashion between China and other countries, there are still some problems in the export of kid fashion, so relevant measures should be carried out by both the companies and the government (Xie& Jin, 2011).

### 3. Research Method

#### 3.1 Methodology

This paper first uses the method of factor analysis.

Step 1: Select variables to analyze. Variables are factor indexes on consumption behavior. There should be a strong correlation between each variable when selecting variables, and the prerequisites of factor analysis should be met for subsequent analysis. If the correlation between variables is weak or not exists, common factors will not exit.

Step 2: Calculate correlation matrix. Correlation matrix describes the correlation between variables. Existence of correlation between variables and rationality of selected variables can be judged by observing correlation matrix. Also, the factor structure can be preliminarily estimated by correlation matrix.

Step 3: Calculate characteristic values and cumulative variance to determine the number of common factors and select them. Then select the common factors of the eigenvalue more than 1 or the variance more than one, and the cumulative variance contribution reach 60%.

Step 4: Rotate factors. If the selected factors are difficult to interpret, component matrix can be converted to rotated component matrix through factor rotation, which can be used to confirm the specific meaning of each common factor of some instances.

From the result of Factor Analysis, we multiplied the weight by original data to get four new independent variable F1, F2, F3, F4, and one cross term variable of F1 and F2. Then we designed three different models and use FGLS to determine the coefficient correlation between sales and those variables.

### *3.2 The Analysis of Current Situation of Chinese Children's Wear Market*

In Chinese children's wear market, there are kinds of brands which are divided into native brands and foreign brand. Foreign brands are divided into three types, brands with strong bands like Adidas and Nike and brands basing on cartoon images like Disney and Hello Kitty. Native brands are divided into adult clothing brands likes Semir and LiNing, well-known brands in other industries like Wahaha and Haier, and some professional clothing brands. Although native brands gather more information on market demand, the market share of native brands is smaller due to the problems of starting later, weak foundation, insufficient capital, low brand recognition, and lack of complete development system.

According to the latest data on population statistics, population of children under the age of fourteen years' accounts for 25.4 percent of the national total. At the meanwhile, there will be more than 20 million neonates each year. With the two-chiller policy, it is clear that Chinese children's wear market has a very vast prospect, which allows native brands to gradually standardize and rationalize.

### *3.3 Sample Selection and Data Collection*

#### *3.3.1 Sample Selection*

Nowadays, there are many brands in the increasingly large market of children's wear, which have made the market competitions unprecedentedly intense. For deleting the difference between different brands and ensuring the rationality of evaluation results, the coverage of selecting samples is wide. 15 brands are selected in the comprehensive evaluation to find the thematic children's clothing consumption behavior, to analyze consumption psychology and to provide valuable information for the development of brands in the market of children's wear.

#### *3.3.2 Data Collection*

150 groups of high quality data on evaluation of thematic children's wear consumer are collected on a large-scale e-commerce platform. The data includes 15 brands, 19 themes, and 12 factors. 12 factors are considered to be the factor indexes of consumption behavior. Meanwhile, these raw data are saved to Excel for subsequent analysis.

## **4. Results**

### *4.1 The Construction and Test of the Factor Indexes of Consumption Behavior*

According to the data collected, deal with the raw data of the factor indexes of thematic kid fashion products consumption behavior, and test the rationality of the construction of index system in order to ensure that the evaluation result is valid. Then do the evaluation analysis and draw a conclusion.

In the following section, data was processes by using SPSS regression software. Use Factor Analysis Method to extract factors and remove the key words of minimum occurrences and the value of the exception. The data should be tested for several times in order to modify and improve the data.

Step1: Standardized data, and determine the correlation coefficient between each factor. Then calculate the factor index in the table of commonalities, test the correlation between each factor, and determine if the factor analysis is valid.

Table 1. Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
Fitted	1.000	.758
Corresponding To Descriptions	1.000	.930
Low Price-Performance Ratio	1.000	.973
Good Fabric	1.000	.976
Aberration	1.000	.883
Washable	1.000	.852
Stylish	1.000	.903
Fast Delivery	1.000	.959
Nice Service	1.000	.963
Delicate Tailored	1.000	.867
Unfitted	1.000	.814
Warmth	1.000	.893

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Calculate the eigenvalue and cumulative variance, and determine the number of factors.

Table 2. Total Variance Explained

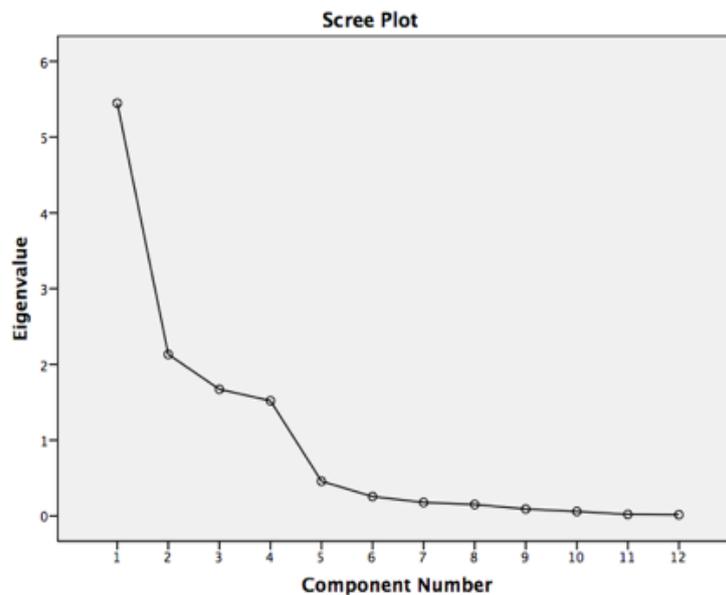
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Rotation			Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.448	45.400	45.400	5.448	45.400	45.400	4.412	39.236	39.236
2	2.132	17.765	63.165	2.132	17.765	63.165	2.279	20.361	59.597
3	1.672	13.934	77.099	1.672	13.934	77.099	2.168	19.327	78.924
4	1.520	12.664	89.763	1.520	12.664	89.763	1.912	17.103	96.027
5	.458	3.815	93.578						
6	.256	2.133	95.711						
7	.177	1.479	97.190						
8	.151	1.261	98.451						
9	.091	.760	99.212						
10	.059	.491	99.703						
11	.020	.169	99.872						
12	.015	.128	100.000						

Table 3. Total Variance Explained

Component	% of Variance	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings	
			Cumulative %
1	36.770		36.770
2	18.994		55.765
3	18.066		73.831
4	15.932		89.763
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Select the first four factors whose cumulative variance is 89.763%, which guarantee the principle of eigenvalue more than 1, which means the data can fully reflect the factors influencing consumption behavior and ensure the rationality of factor analysis.



Graph 1. Screen Plot

The scree plot generated by the table above shows the eigenvalue and the numbers of factors in a descending order. The corresponding eigenvalues of the first four factors have a steep gradient, while the corresponding eigenvalues of the last eight factors are mostly in a straight line. The steep gradient means the large difference between the first four factors which are more important, while the last eight factors have a small impact on the analysis result. Therefore, the rationality of selecting the first four factors as key factors is validated.

Establish component matrix:

Table 4. Component Matrixa

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Good Fabric	.988	.001	-.019	-.005
Low Price-Performance Ratio	.928	-.070	.126	-.300
Fitted	.832	.066	.129	.213
Corresponding to Descriptions	.822	-.271	-.082	-.418
Warmth	.815	.324	-.337	.096
Aberration	.799	-.173	-.230	.402
Unfitted	.687	.049	-.559	.163
Fast Delivery	.252	.864	.384	-.049
Nice Service	.264	.860	.389	-.050
Delicate Tailored	.434	-.455	.657	.198
Stylish	.328	-.343	.337	-.751
Washable	.196	-.317	.556	.635

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.<sup>a</sup>

a. 4 components extracted.

Component matrix calculates the share of each common factor. It can be seen from component matrix that the typical representative of each factor is not prominent, which can not better explain the factors. Therefore, it is necessary to rotate the component matrix. Omit the specific factors after rotation, the rotated component matrix can be established:

Table 5. Rotated Component Matrixa

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Warmth	.891	.060	.287	-.112
Unfitted	.884	-.028	-.082	-.159
Aberration	.877	-.003	-.120	.315
Good	.850	.411	.189	.221
Fitted	.708	.197	.267	.383
Stylish	-.082	.946	-.034	.037
Corresponding to Descriptions	.617	.736	-.082	.015
Low Price-Performance Ratio	.655	.688	.199	.176
Nice Service	.086	.000	.978	-.015
Fast Delivery	.078	-.008	.976	-.022
Washable	.056	-.156	-.028	.907
Delicate Tailored	.096	.366	-.027	.850

According to the rotated component matrix above, it can be seen that partial loadings of factors indexes of consumption behavior are larger.

Then choose indexes with large loading of each factor as included properties of each factor. Table divided by property of factors is as follow:

Table 6. Factor Indexes of Consumption Behavior

Sequence Number Of Factor	Factor Name Of Factor	Factor Indexes Of Consumption Behavior	Loading
1	Service Factor	Low Price-Performance Ratio	0.978
		Fast Delivery	0.976
2	Quality Factor	Washable	0.907
		Delicate Tailored	0.85
3	Design Factor	Stylish	0.946
		Corresponding To Description	0.736
4	Utility Factor	Nice Service	0.688
		Warmth	0.815
		Unfitted	0.884
		No Aberration	0.877
		Good Fabric	0.85
		Fitted	0.708

It can be seen from the table above that properties are divided into four factor based on their magnitude of loadings. According to the properties of each factor, the factors are named of service factor, quality factor, design factor, and utility factor. The Service factor includes tags of low price-performance ratio and fast delivery; the quality factor includes takes of washable and delicate tailored; the design factor includes tags of stylish, corresponding to description, and nice service; the utility factor includes tags of warmth, unfitted, not aberration, good fabric and fitted.

#### 4.2 Empirical Research of Sales

Table 7. Coefficient and Significance Level

SALE	M1	M2	M3
F1	-0.136**	-0.152***	-0.125*
F2	-0.680	-0.094***	-0.050
F3		0.306	0.497*
F4			-0.208
F1F2	-0.338**	-0.019*	-0.298*
N	150	150	150

Significance levels: \*p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01 \*\*\*p<0.005

From the FGLS result above, we can see the Module 2 is the most significant, Module 1 and Module 3 also very significant. It means that the service factor, and quality factor and their cross term have significant effect on sales of thematic kid wearing products. Design factor also have effect on sales, but utility factor included 5 elements which makes it complicated, and do not have clear evidence that influence sales. There is an interesting fact that the coefficient of correlation of sales and some factors are negative. From the original data, we found that this phenomenon could be explained by composition adaption theory. Due to the reputation and hefty sales, consumers always trust those products they have bought before or some big brands. Consumers' cognition of products is different basing on whether they can see the material objects of products. Also, consumers have fixed thinking modes which makes they believe the products of large brands or they have bought are of good quality or good service, so they do not need to comment on them. According to the above, the marginal comments decrease. This phenomenon also demonstrates the importance of establishing a good enterprise image, which helps to gain complete recognition of consumers. All in all, the result corresponded to the expectation. Those factors are very important and noteworthy for kids fashion companies and retailers.

## 5. Discussion

According to the result, customers basically focus on the following four factors when and after purchasing a piece of kid fashion: service factor, quality factor, design factor and utility factor. There are also limitations: This study primarily focuses on online thematic kids fashion in China, and although e-commerce definitely holds great potential, the offline market is still a fundamental part of consumption in kids fashion, and consumer behaviors, which are not included in this paper, are expected to be different. In addition, the full comment of consumers are either held confidential by e-commerce platforms or not easy to access, which makes it unfeasible to dig further information from consumers' review.

### 5.1 Design Factor

Design is the core of a fashion brand, including kid fashion brands. Besides the narrow sense "design", this factor is related to cost performance ratio and the consistency between the real items and on line description. We discovered the relationship between consumers' degree of emphasis on cost performance ratio and their economic status. People with a higher income able to afford more expensive products and care more about the quality and utility of the clothes they buy for their children, while people with a relatively lower income prefer thematic kid fashion that are cheaper and more suitable for certain situations such as school or a party.

Speaking of the design of kid fashion, culture is a fundamental element. According to our search on Taobao, Korean kid fashion is usually more popular in China than the Japanese fashion, as Korean and Chinese people have a better mutual understanding of each other's culture than they do with Japanese, whose kid fashion are too plain in color for the Chinese. In fact, in almost every industry, it is crucial for most companies to meet the psychological need of their consumers of the target nation or region.

Therefore, it is necessary for designers to have basic knowledge of Chinese culture and customs, and fusing Chinese element properly into their designs can improve the popularity of their clothes among Chinese children and parents.

### 5.2 Utility Factor

This factor makes up much of the reason why a brand of clothes is chosen instead of others. Among the related elements, the quality of fabric has always been top priority. If children feel uncomfortable wearing a brand's clothes, it will be rather unlikely for their parents to buy a second piece from the brand, regardless of the design and price. It also has a direct impact on what feedback the brand receives from the consumers. Utility factor includes a number of elements, different consumers' preference of these elements can be remarkably different, which makes it advisable to conduct surveys and divide the market before entering it.

### 5.3 Quality Factor

Consumers tend to have a higher expectancy on the quality of imported garments and the price as well. Imported kid fashion products are supposed to be made of healthy material, and be outstanding in quality and fashion. Thus, it is wise for exporting clothing companies to devote enough money and time to ensure the products are free from serious quality problem. Fabric quality is what consumers consider in the first place. Pure cotton shell is preferred by most children and parents for the comfort it provides while fabric composed of too many chemical substances often makes kids uncomfortable and parents concerned about health issues. Poor fabric literally turns consumers away, and not just away from one piece of clothes, but possibly from the brand as a whole, as there are plenty alternatives in the market. Small companies that are not so famous should pay extra attention to quality issues, since they neither have the loyalty of a large number of parents, nor can they afford to lose consumers because of avoidable reasons.

### 5.4 Service Factor

Service is a company's effort to meet its consumers' various need, including consultancy, delivery, after-sale service, etc. As the society develops, in China the competition between companies is becoming so intense that they are forced to focus on service so as to attract and keep customers. What customers receive today is usually not the unfair treatment, such as refusal to return or replace the products of poor quality, but active and considerate help by the firms who try their best to meet their customers' service need within their capacity. Service is no longer a burden, but the extension of the sales process instead.

Online business is also a current trend. Even for physical-store-based companies, it yet devotes much of its resource into the field. Its successful practice includes having each physical shop run an online store, on which pictures and other relevant information of newly for sale products are posted for registered customers to check, in case they don't have time to pay a visit to the physical shop. Comments, including complaints, can also be

sent to the manager of each store, and staff can give personal advice to customers on the design, color, size and other aspects, too.

In terms of delivery, an issue that many e-commerce businesses are confronted with. Kid fashion companies and retailers should realize that they cannot pay too much attention to customer service as long as it does business with Chinese or in China, and online business is a good field to open up.

The result of FGLS also indicates that service factor has a significant effect on the sales volume, so do the following three factors.

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