

# Drowning in Reviews Starving for Insight

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China's cross-border e-commerce trade reached CNY 2.75 trillion in 2025, growing nearly 70% year-on-year (China Customs, 2026). Behind that number sits an even larger asset most enterprises barely use: millions of consumer reviews in dozens of languages.

The data is there, but the insight is not. The industry calls this gap the "insight black box" – the painful distance between owning data and acting on it (Liu et al., 2025). Dashboards report star rating and word clouds rarely answer the real question.

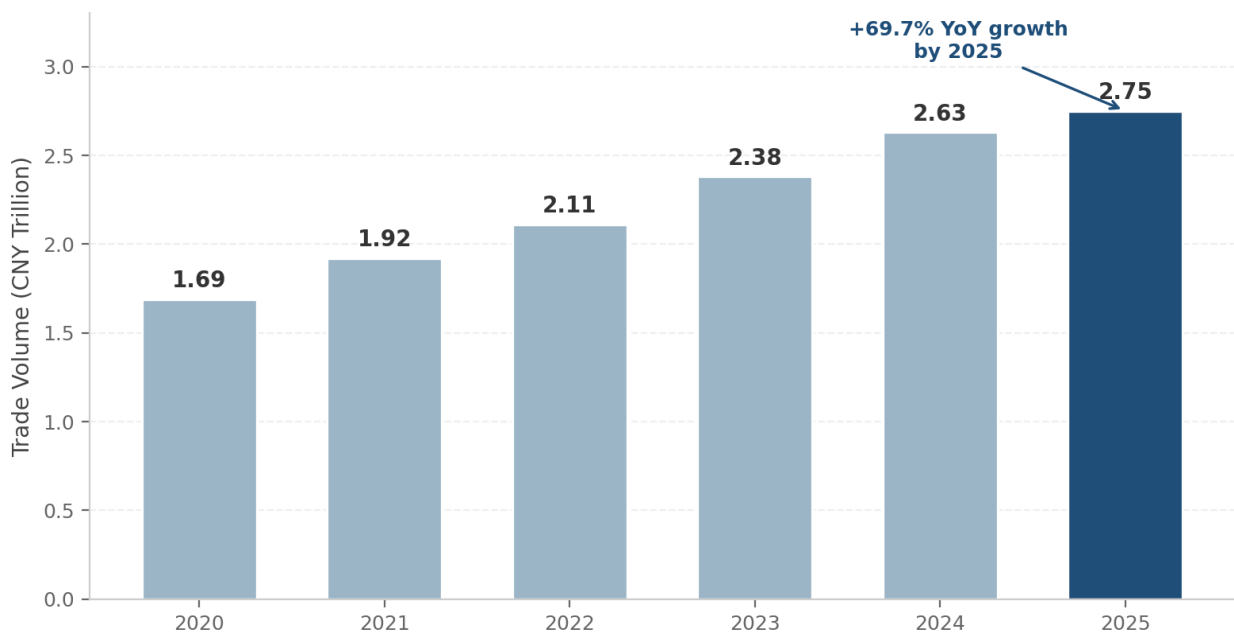
What brand should actually change next quarter, and why? Part of the problem is technical. Standard sentiment analysis still struggles with how real customers write.

A five-star review saying "great quality... for the price" is not really five stars. A complaint wrapped in irony reads as positive to most off-the shelf models. Recent work shows pretrained language models continue to underperform on irony, metaphor, and culturally loaded expression

But the deeper problem is conceptual. Even when sentiment is correctly classified, the output usually stops at "68% positive." That number doesn't tell a marketing team whether to fix product, the price, the packaging, or the post-sale service.

Sentiment analysis has been treated as an end, when it should be an input – into pricing, positioning, and customer-experience decisions. What's missing is a shared language between NLP researchers and the people making real business decisions.

## China's Cross-Border E-Commerce Trade Volume (2020-2025)



China's cross-border e-commerce trade volume, 2020–2025. Source: China Customs (2026).