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CONSUMER PRODUCT RETURNS: INSIGHTS INTO BEHAVIOUR AND REVERSE LOGISTICS PROCESSES

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INTRODUCTION:

Evolution of e-commerce and the expansion of global trade have been made possible by technological advancement and globalization (Mykhailo et.al 2022).Goods returns are basically the purchase of goods that were only available through online or offline channels After that, sent back to the company by the customer (Kamrul Ahsan.et.al 2021). Theoretically, depending on how marketing tools influence anticipated, actual, and perceived costs and benefits associated with a product, returns may grow or decrease. To encourage customers to purchase and test new products, online companies can have lenient return policies (Julia Otte.et.al 2015). Consumer Behaviour Pattern is one of the most important reasons for Product Return. Reverse logistics (RL) operations heavily rely on forecasting product returns (Saurabh Agrawal.et.al 2019).An interesting research and practical subject is how to manage product returns effectively and efficiently(Srivastava, S. K.et.al (2006). Reverse logistics (RL) is becoming more and more relevant due to growing environmental concerns and the development of RL concepts and methods. Globally, product returns are influenced by three factors: customer pressure, regulations, and the economy. Strong global competition, higher customer expectations, pressures on profitability, and improved supply chain performance have all contributed to this trend's acceleration.In the opinion of Nanayakkara et al. (2022), the most popular method of managing the return of goods from customers to suppliers or manufacturers in an online business is reverse logistics. Reverse logistics is a more complex, labour-intensive procedure that deals with returning goods from customers to the vendor, in contrast to traditional tactics, which are centred around transporting items to clients (Dutta et al., 2020).

It is without a doubt essential to improve circular reverse logistics in order to handle product returns. Circular reverse logistics should be used to handle product returns in order to lessen pollution and its effects on the environment. Because it helps achieve organizational

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goals including raising customer satisfaction and lowering resource investment levels, reverse logistics is essential.Resources will be saved and pollution will be decreased by creating innovative items that use less energy. Many governments have put in place a variety of rules and guidelines pertaining to recycling, trash management, and environmental sustainability. Circular reverse logistics can make it easier to abide by these rules and prevent penalties and legal repercussions. For instance, India is not giving e-waste management enough attention, and the process still has a lot of flaws because of a lack of infrastructure, stringent laws, a lack of public support, and socioeconomic circumstances.

Online retailers typically provide lenient return policies despite the outlay of handling returned goods because the sales they generate more than offset the costs of handling returns (Janakiraman et al., 2016; however, for a different perspective, see Hjort and Lantz, 2016). In addition to lowering the risks involved with online purchases (Mollenkopf et al., 2007; Petersen and Kumar, 2015), generous return policies also act as a signal of product quality for customers (Wood, 2001).Return policies, whether strict or not, are increasingly seen as a crucial component of online merchants' total offerings, along with their extensive product selections, competitive pricing, and quick turnaround times. Online purchases made within the European Union are eligible for a complete refund within 14 days for any reason (European Union, 2019). Returning goods is therefore permitted in these nations without regard to morality or the need for a valid explanation, such as the item being damaged or the store shipping the incorrect size.

It is not astonishing that the previous authors have attempted to elucidate the relationship between online retailers' return policies, returning inclination (Janakiraman et al., 2016; Wood, 2001), and firm performance (Bower and Maxham, 2012; Griffis et al., 2012; Hjort and Lantz, 2016; Mollenkopf et al., 2007; Petersen and Kumar, 2009), as this is a crucial firm-centric viewpoint. Examining the connection between product returns and customer outcomes, including happiness with the company, is likewise becoming more and more popular (Walsh and Brylla, 2017). The way that customers view the returning procedure, which may be time-consuming and emotionally charged, and how these views affect their relationship with the retailer and eventually profitability is not being discussed in the current discourse. It is unexpected as the return procedure enhances the overall customer experience in the event that a consumer returns an item. Therefore, providing information about how consumers see the return procedure and determining the degree to which these perceptions effects on loyaltyand organization satisfaction is the main factor here.

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BUYER BEHAVIOUR IN PRODUCT RETURN

The behaviour of consumers on the internet includes the consumer decision-making process in various stages, such as understanding problems, searching acquiring information, examining alternatives, making an option, and experiencing outcomes(Darley et al. 2010). Consumer satisfaction is determined by how they assess a product or service's performance up to the present time(Johnson, M.D.et.al 2021).Satisfied customers tend to make additional purchases in the future.Customer satisfaction depends on the calibre of goods, services, and conversation. essential for building and maintaining customer loyalty(Nunes and Cespedes 2003). The identified customers react to those specific stages. There are five steps in the purchasing process: recognition, consideration, favouritism, buying, and after-sales support. Order completion includes all tasks from when a customer places an online order until the products are handed over to the customer(Lummus and Vokurka 2002; Pyke et al. 2001).

In internet retail, clients are not exposed to view, touch, or feel the actual thing(Shulman et al., 2011),Consumers have a tendency to create a framework image of the thing in their mind, even before the object is delivered to them(Golder et al., 2012)So, around 68% of online purchased items were returned simply because buyers did not like the product after getting it, with just 5% of products returned due to faults.Commodities return behaviour is a type of post-purchase activity in which buyers are encouraged to return the products to the merchant for severalreasons. Product returns provide an important type of two-way communication between customers and businesses.

Hence, this study focused on online product returns based on consumer behaviour and decisions.Without carefully examining the details, individuals often end up having to return products they have purchased. Recent statistics indicate that more than 30% of online purchases are returned, while only 9% of items bought in physical stores are returned.Thus, this paper enumerates the effectiveness of Product return while also assessing their impact on reverse logistics systems

PRODUCT RETURN AND REVERSE LOGISTICS

Product take-back for consumer products is generally expensive, particularly in reverse logistics. Logistics involves being effectively in charge of the procurement, transportation, and storage of supplies, components and completed items to maximize profitability through cost management and process efficiency. In terms of transportation is the best approach to transporting items to suppliers and buyers.The following key functional areas fall under logistics: network design, transportation, and inventory management(Min et al., 2019).

The reverse operations distribution network consists of the movement of goods and materials

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planning for end-of-life (EOL) items including environmentally aware production practices such as which is all about exerting control over the production, distribution, and return of products by focusing on reuse, remanufacturing, disassembly, and recycling. In essence, it involves ensuring that there is a systematic approach to the entire product lifecycle, from manufacturing to customer use and return. The definition of reverse logistics by the Association for Reverse Logistics (ARL) encompasses all pertaining to a service or product after it has been sold, with the end goal in mind. of improving or streamlining aftermarket operations to save costs and protect the environment.

In the context of reverse logistics, the words "third-party logistics," "retrogistics," and "aftermarket supply chain" are interchangeable(Elmas, Get.al.2011). Reverse logistics can involve Broken products, Inventory that varies by season, restocking, Recycling, hazardous materials, recalls, and salvage. Disposal of the equipment is outdated and no longer in use. and asset recovery(Elmas.et.al.2011).There are multiple justifications to consider establishing or running an RL system, encompassing legal, psychological, and monetary reasons.The research area of RL that focuses on managing the recovery of products that consumers no longer want (end-of-use products, EoU) or can no longer use (end-of-life products) is important for obtaining the financial value of the items that were retrieved. Balancing product returns necessitates companies to establish regulations that are simple enough to encourage recurring purchases, but stringent sufficient to deter exploitation of returns, while maintaining an efficient procedure for handling returned items(Goldman (2016) and Jack et al. (2010) recommend implementing an efficient approach for disposing of returned merchandise. Traditional product return techniques aim to reduce returns identifying characteristics of "serial" returners should be addressed as soon as possible(Daunt and Harris, 2012).

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

J To examine the underlying consumer behaviour patterns in product returns and evaluate their impact on reverse logistics operations.

J To identify the main factors that have an impactover return decisions.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In today's dynamic retail environment, particularly in the e-commerce industry, product returns have gained greater significance in customer behaviour.This expanding practice not only impacts consumer happiness and brand loyaltybut also puts a significant burden on firms' reverse logistics operations. Understanding the underlying elements that influence consumer behaviour surrounding product returns, such as unhappiness with the goods, purchasing mistakes, or return policy leniency, is critical for establishing successful

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solutions. Furthermore, it is necessary to examine how these behaviours influence reverse logistics procedures, such as handling, transit, refurbishing, and redistribution, to assure profitability and sustainability.The ultimate objective of the investigation is to assess consumer behaviour in the context of product returns, investigate the issues that businesses experience in reverse logistics operations, and propose new solutions that can lower return rates while increasing reverse logistics efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

RESEARCH APPROACH

Research Design and Data Collection method

This research adopts a descriptive research design to investigate consumer behaviour in product returns and its impact on reverse logistics in the e-commerce sector. Primary data were collected through surveys targeting e-commerce customers to understand return motivations and interviews with logistics managers to explore operational challenges. Secondary data, such as company reports and industry benchmarks, provides additional insights.Quantitative analysis is used to identify patterns and correlation through factor analysis. The study aims to propose actionable solutions to reduce return rates, optimize reverse logistics operations, and enhance profitability and sustainability, ensuring a balance between customer satisfaction and operational efficiency.A sample of 320 consumers were considered for the study who used to return the products when they are not satisfied for various reasons. The responses were measured using a Likert scale to assess the degree of agreement or satisfaction with each factor.This study methodology and data collecting approach will give a strong framework for understanding the primary determinants of product returns in online retail and informing return rate reduction methods.

Table 1- KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.915
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	8936.275
	df	136
	Sig.	.000

The KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy is a statistic that reflects the data's suitability for factor analysis. Values near 1 are preferable, however, values less than 0.5 suggests that factor analysis might not be appropriate. According to Kaiser's interpretation, a KMO value of 0.915 indicates "Good" sample adequacy, demonstrating that the data is highly satisfactory for factor Bartlett's Test of Sphericity analysis determines if the Pearson correlation matrix differs considerably from that if the variables are uncorrelated.The approximate Chi-square result suggests show significant correlations exist between the

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variables, suggesting that factor analysis is acceptable for this set of data.The use of component analysis is validated by the p-value (less than 0.05), which shows that the null hypothesis is rejected.

Communalities

The communalities in a Principal Component Analysis (PCA), including the original and extracted values for the numerous reasons consumers return products. The beginning values are all 1.000, as predicted in PCA because each variable's initial communality is equal to its entire variance. The extraction values represent the proportion of each variable's variation that can be explained by the primary components preserved in the study. The analysis shows that misleading product descriptions, performance failure, and unmet expectations regarding features and quality are the most dominant reasons for product returns. The items with high communalities (above 0.9) indicate that a significant portion of their variance is explained by the principal components. Moderate Communalities (0.8 - 0.9) indicate that a significant portion is not as strongly tied to the principal components as issues with product representation. This analysis provides valuable insight into which areas businesses should focus on to reduce product returns and improve customer satisfaction.

Table 2-Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	11.797	69.391	69.391	11.797	69.391	69.391	6.249	36.762	36.762
2	1.561	9.184	78.575	1.561	9.184	78.575	5.378	31.638	68.400
3	1.347	7.925	86.500	1.347	7.925	86.500	3.077	18.101	86.500
4	.690	4.058	90.559						
5	.416	2.447	93.006						
6	.229	1.344	94.350						
7	.202	1.185	95.535						
8	.167	.985	96.521						
9	.159	.936	97.457						
10	.128	.755	98.211						
11	.080	.471	98.682						
12	.072	.422	99.105						
13	.062	.362	99.467						

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14	.043	.255	99.722						
15	.029	.170	99.892						
16	.018	.104	99.996						
17	.001	.004	100.000						
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.									

According to the study, three main components account for the majority of the variation, with the first being the most dominating, followed by the second and third. The first eigenvalues, which measure the amount of variation explained by each component, reveal that the first three components account for the bulk of the volatility in the data. The first component has an eigenvalue of 11.797 and accounts for 69.39% of the total variance, making it the most important element in explaining the variability. The second component contributes 9.18% of the variation, bringing the overall amount to 78.58%. The third component provides an additional 7.93%, bringing the total variance explained to 86.50%. Following rotation, the first component accounted for 36.76% of the variation, the second for 31.64%, and the third for 18.10%, which explains 86.50% of the total variation.

Table 3- Rotated Component Matrixa

Variables	Component		
	1	2	3
Customer who shops online sometimes discover the size or design does not fit their expectation	.908		
Customers may accidentally place aduplicate order and upon realizing they may initiate a return	.902		
Customers may find an alternative that suits their better need	.851		
Customers may decide they no longer need the want the product for the personal reason	.839		
Customers may return their items when they receive something different from what they ordered	.785		
Customers Prefer To return the product when it is defective or damaged	.703		
Delays in Delivery led to dissatisfaction and a return	.673	.520	
Product Was Perceived as not offering enough value for its price	.649	.537	
Product Lacked advertised or expected features		.900	
The Product Did Not work as expected or failed to perform its intended function		.898	
The Description or Marketing of the product was in accurate or misleading		.881	
Product's Quality was Lower than expected		.869	
Products that do work as intended withy the other items the consumer owns			.847
Customers may return item if they find the quality or performance to be unsatisfactory			.761
Products may be returned with inadequate packaging			.738
Negative experience with the customer service can influence return decisions		.561	.656
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.			
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.			

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This rotation distributes the variation more equally among the three components, improving interpretability. Each element of the rotational solution contributes in a unique and significant way to the explanation of the data's underlying structure, which clarifies the interpretation.

Table 4- Factor I - Return Motivation Factor

Factor	Variable	Rotated Loading	% of Variance	Eigen Value
Return Motivation Factor	Customer who shops online sometimes discover the size or design does not fit their expectation	.908	69.391	11.797
	Customers may accidentally place a duplicate order and upon realizing they may initiate a return	.902		
	Customers may find an alternative that suits their better need	.851		
	Customers may decide they no longer need the want the product for personal reason	.839		
	Customers may return their items when they receive something different from what they ordered	.785		
	Customers Prefer To return the product when it is defective or damaged	.703		
	Delays in Delivery led to dissatisfaction and a return	.673		

The eigenvalue analysis of the components contributing to product returns in e-commerce yields important insights. The component with the greatest eigenvalue (11.797)explains 69.391% of the total variance, showing that it effectively reflects the underlying causes for customer returns. The most relevant explanation for this aspect is that buyers realize that the size or design does not satisfy their expectations (loading of 0.908). Other significant causes include customers initiating returns owing to inadvertent duplicate orders (0.902), discovering better alternatives (0.851), and deciding they no longer desire the goods for personal reasons (0.839). Returns are also driven by customers obtaining wrong or faulty items (0.785 and 0.703 respectively). The high loadings indicate that these variables are tightly associated, underscoring the importance of consumer discontent in product returns in the online buying environment.

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

Table 5 -Factor II - Product Value and Quality Factor

Factor	Variable	Rotated Loading	% of Variance	Eigen Value
Product Value and Quality Factor	Product Was Perceived as not offering enough value for its price	.537	9.184	1.561
	Product Lacked advertised or expected features	.900		
	The Product Did Not work as expected or failed to perform its intended function	.898		
	The Description or Marketing of the product was in accurate or misleading	.881		
	Product's Quality was Lower than expected	.869		

The eigenvalue analysis of the Product Value and Quality Factor identifies important factors for customer dissatisfaction with online transactions. This component has an eigenvalue of 1.561, which accounts for 9.184% of the variation and focuses on difficulties linked to the gap between consumer expectations and actual product performance. The product's absence of claimed or expected features (loading of 0.900) and failure to function as expected (0.898) are the two most important components of this category, indicating serious performance problems. Furthermore, erroneous or deceptive product descriptions or marketing (0.881) and lower-than-expected quality (0.869) are significant sources of discontent. Although the view of the product not providing adequate value for its price (0.537) is less heavily weighted, it nevertheless adds to the overall feeling of the product. This factor emphasizes the significance of product integrity, correct marketing, and consumer happiness.

Table 6-Factor III - Product Compatibility Factor

Factor	Variable	Rotated Loading	% of Variance	Eigen Value
Product Compatibility Factor	Products that do work as intended with the other items the consumer owns	.847	7.925	1.347
	Customers may return an item if they find the quality or performance to be unsatisfactory	.761		
	Products may be returned with inadequate packaging	.738		
	Negative experiences with the customer service can influence return decisions	.656		

ISSN : 0972-8945 (Print) | 3048-6165 (Online)

The Product Compatibility Factor's eigenvalue analysis finds significant factors influencing customer return behaviour in e-commerce. This component, which has an eigenvalue of 1.347 and accounts for 7.925% of the variance, focuses on a number of crucial elements. The greatest substantial contribution occurs when goods do not work correctly with other items owned by the consumer (loading of 0.847), emphasizing the importance of product compatibility in customer satisfaction. Poor product quality or performance (0.761) and inadequate packing (0.738) also have an influence on returns, as they indicate consumer complaints about the condition and performance of received items. Finally, a negative experience with customer service has a significant impact, although with a little lower influence (0.656), showing that poor post-purchase support may lead to return decisions.

DISCUSSION

The growing significance of product returns in the e-commerce industry has created a dual challenge: balancing customer satisfaction with operational efficiency. On one hand, lenient return policies foster trust and loyalty among consumers, making returns seamless and risk-free. However, this convenience has fuelled a rise in return rates, often due to reasons like dissatisfaction with products, errors in purchasing decisions, or misuse of lenient policies (e.g., "wardrobing" in fashion). Understanding the motivations behind these returns is crucial for businesses to address customer expectations without overburdening operations. From a logistical perspective, the reverse supply chain-handling, inspecting, refurbishing, and redistributing returned products-presents significant hurdles. High return rates increase costs for transportation, labour, storage, and even disposal of unsalvageable goods. Moreover, inefficient reverse logistics systems can harm profitability and sustainability, given the environmental impact of waste and carbon emissions from transport. The lack of integration between customer behaviour insights and logistics strategies further complicates this issue.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyse the underlying consumer behaviour patterns in product returns and evaluate their impact on reverse logistics operations. Through the examination of key factors such as product compatibility, quality, packaging, and customer service experience, several important insights were revealed.The data demonstrate that product returns are highly impacted by compatibility concerns with other things owned by the user, poor product quality or performance, insufficient packing, and unpleasant customer service experiences. These characteristics not only influence return decisions but also show areas where e-commerce enterprises could improve to reduce returns.Understanding these

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patterns of behaviour is crucial to optimizing reverse logistics operations. By addressing the key factors identified in this study, such as improving descriptions of products, facilitating compatibility, improving packaging, and providing better customer service, companies can reduce the frequency of product returns, improve customer satisfaction, and streamline reverse logistics processes.In the end, this study offers useful data for online retailer aiming to improve operational efficiency and save expenses related with product return.

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