

I SEE IT, I BUY IT, I REGRET IT: A STUDY OF ONLINE POST-PURCHASE REGRET PHENOMENA OF FASHION PRODUCTS

Valda Nurul Izah and Budi Permadi Iskandar

School of Business and Management, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia

*Email: valda.nurul@sbm-itb.ac.id

Abstract. From the eye of the parties involved in a shopping experience, purchasers hope to get fulfilment while sellers hope to maintain their buyers. Nevertheless, not every shopping activity yield such outcomes. Particularly that nowadays Internet has made it easier for consumers to purchase fashion products anywhere, consumers are more prone in experiencing regret after purchase. This study aims to dig deeper into types of post-purchase regret that occurs in the context of fashion products online purchases, the factors that affects it and the behavioral consequences following the regret. Qualitative approach of Constructivist Grounded Theory was used in this study. Open ended interview with a total of 19 purposive and 3 theoretical samples of early adults residing in Indonesia were conducted. Through the analysis of initial, focused coding, and categorizing, the finding indicates that there are two types of regret experiences namely Regretting the outcome and Regretting the process. The former includes Product Quality, Product Fit, Product Aesthetics, Product Price and Product Utility, whereas the latter consist of Social Influence, Impulsive Buying, Information Search, and Alternative Evaluation. This study also discovered behavioral consequences following the post-purchase regret including; Anticipating through learning, Complaining, Taking revenge, Switching, Giving up.

Keywords: Post-purchase regret; Behavioral consequences; Grounded theory; Fashion products; Online shopping.

INTRODUCTION

Starting off for more than two decades ago, online shopping refers to the activities of purchasing goods or services over the Internet. The growth of online shopping has been rapidly occurring in the world, and there is no place as exciting as Southeast Asia. Bain Southeast Asia Digital Consumer Survey (2015) noted that out of 150 million digital consumers in Southeast Asia, two-thirds already shop online. Taking a deeper look at online shopping activities in Indonesia, the first most purchased category is fashion and beauty, with total amount spent of \$2.466B (Statista Digital Marketing Outlook, 2018). In a shopping experience, consumers expect to get satisfaction with the products or services they have bought, whilst sellers expect to retain their consumers by making them satisfied and generate the behavior of loyalty. Nonetheless, not every shopping activity yields such results. Particularly that nowadays consumers are able to products anywhere through online platforms due to the advancement of technology, consumers are more prone to dissatisfaction and consumers experience regret after purchase (Selvaraj & J, 2018). Moreover, post-purchase regret is shown to be peculiarly frequent among fashion products (Skelton & Allwood, 2016), which has been the top purchased product category in Indonesia for both e-commerce and social media shopping (Statista Digital Marketing Outlook, 2018; IDNtrepreneur, 2019). Post purchase regret is defined as a feeling where consumers wish they could have done something in different manner, to revise the mistake happened in the purchase (Zeelenberg, et al., 1998). Consumers are trying their best in order to avoid regret so they able to maximize the outcome (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007). As consumers undergo additional action based on the evaluation, regret leads to deleterious consequences like brand switching and word of mouth. (M'Barek & Gharbi, 2012). Built upon the status quo, an urge therefore arises to discuss the problem of online post-purchase regret of fashion products, experienced by Indonesians. As this post-purchase regret is an unfavorable occurrence that people want to avoid, it also leads to deleterious consequences. Hence, studying this topic is fundamental. As this study would give a view for both e-tailers and consumers how important it is to prevent as well as to handle one. Despite the fact that researches have been gone into this phenomenon of post-purchase regret and its result, those that have aimed to discover the factors prompting for this negative feelings, especially for a specific product category such as fashion are still few and far between. The gap remains therefore being a fascinating opportunity to do further research in Indonesia that would investigates post-purchase regret in certain type of product, since Indonesian online shopping behavior are much more attractive, accounting for 81% of the internet users already shop online (Tempo, 2017). It is also because the online shoppers have unique characteristics of social shopper, where they need social approval before they make a purchase (Dewanto, 2016).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Post-purchase regret

It is a situation commonly found when consumers have completed the purchasing process, they are frequently evaluate the decisions they have made (Bakshi, 2012). Study shows that consumers do not always feel confident about the purchases they

made. They may feel doubt in considering whether or not they made the right decision, or to even regret their decision (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2010). Post purchase regret is defined as a feeling where consumers wish they could have done something in different manner, to revise the mistake happened in the purchase (Zeelenberg, et al., 1998). Existing studies on post-purchase regret have found factors including:

Impulsive buying, many of the previous research that shown strong direct relationship between impulsive buying and post-purchase regret (Hoch & F., 1991). On the other hand, a study by Armstrong et al. (2017), stated that impulsive buying does not significantly impact post-purchase regret.

Product's Price, Blackwell, et al. (2006) argues that price has positive relationship with cognitive dissonance. Moreover, M'Barek & Gharbi (2011) supports the argument by stating that high prices boost the feeling of regret, specifically after a negative experience. There is a two-way relationship between regret with the choice between brand and price (Simonson, 1992).

Decision Making Process, Armstrong, et al. (2017) argued that generally, consumers are prone to experience higher level of regret when they did not take enough sufficient time on each stages of their decision making process. On the other hand, consumers will construct a better buying decision once they have thoroughly been in all the steps (Punj & Staelin, 1983), by considering and measuring all aspects carefully.

Consumers Involvement, it is argued by preceding research, higher post-purchase regret will possibly emerge from lower effort of involvement the consumers put, since the probability of buying the regrettable product becomes bigger (George & Edward, 2009).

Consumers Expectation, in relation to post-purchase regret, based on the preceding research, the action of comparing prior expectation to the actual outcome have been associated to the emotional response whereas post-purchase regret (Marcatto & Ferrante, 2008; Mellers, et al., 1997). Selvakumar & Shrikrishnan (2018) later break down consumer's expectation based on the product quality and the product aesthetics. The study concludes that the unmet expectation of the product quality has the highest influence on post-purchase regret.

Behavioral Consequences of Post-purchase regret

Post-purchase behavior defined as the actions taken by consumers, purely based on their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction (The Market, Media, Life, 2017). It is reported by previous study that regret has a direct deleterious impact on consumer's post-purchase behavior, namely behavior of complaint, behavior of change, and word of mouth (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004). Further, M'Barek and Gharbi (2012) argued post-purchase regret has influence on behavioral consequences like complaint, repurchasing behavior, word of mouth, inertia, return, and abandonment.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses qualitative method fits to understand in certain and specified phenomena including people, events, experiences, institutions and activities from the participants' viewpoints in context-specific settings (Hoepfl, 1997). Specifically, the type of qualitative method pursued in this study is the Constructivist Grounded Theory. Charmaz brought and reclaimed these systematical approach from positivist underpinnings to form a revised, more open-ended practice of grounded theory that stresses its emergent, constructivist elements. This Constructivist Grounded Theory use grounded theory methods as flexible, and heuristic strategies that focus on meaning making furthers interpretive (Charmaz, 2006). The participants would be those who are sufficed all these following criteria: 1. Male of Female age 18-25 years old, domiciled in Bandung, Jakarta or Cirebon. 2. Participants have experienced a fashion product purchase through online channels that did result in regret. To reduce the bias, the triangulation done in this research including literature review, constant comparative methods, and transcribed interview. Initially, the researcher seeks justification of existing phenomenon of post-purchase regret through the literature review, subsequent to that, researcher gathers data from targeted participants in regards to the phenomenon. Through the constant comparative analysis, it was done one by one from the first participants to the next, for this study to be intimately grounded on the data. The constant comparative analysis also accompanied by informal memo writing throughout the data collection and analysis, to help connect the findings quickly as they emerge. Further literature review in data triangulation is also done used to check on where does this study contribute on giving the new factors or supporting the existing factors.

FINDINGS AND ARGUMENT

The finding of this research summed on the visualized diagram of Grounded Theory shown in Figure 1. Online Post-purchase regret of Fashion Products contains two main elements that answer the research questions and objectives of the study. The elements are the factors and type of regret, and the behavioral consequences following the post-purchase regret.

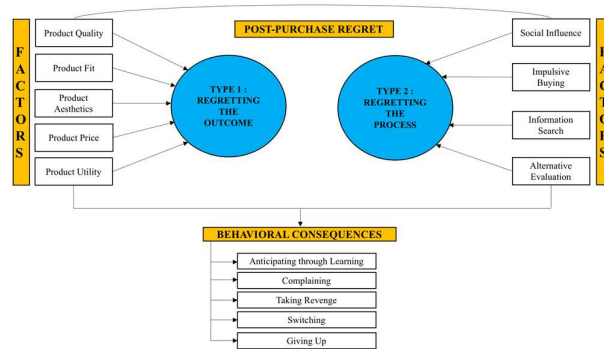


Figure 1. Online Post-purchase regret Phenomena of Fashion Products (Izah, 2019)

Post-purchase Regret Types

Type 1: Regretting the outcome

This category refers to the regret consumers feel because their prior expectation was not confirmed by the characteristics that the outcome delivers. This type of regret emerges due to the unfulfilled expectations. They tend to regret more in the discrepancy between the expectations and the product actual performance. On this type of regret, it is found 4 factors

Product Quality; For specific object like fashion products, participants are associating product quality with the materials or fabric used. When consumers shop online, they are dealing with the intangibilities nature of online shopping. Consumers don't have chance to examine actual product, as to feel or to touch it. This way, they can only set their expectations based on the information disclosed. Therefore, it is concluded that this factor of unfulfilled expectation in terms of the product quality lead consumers in feeling post-purchase regret.

Product Fit; In online shopping, consumers are unable to try before they buy. This leaves them abundant of uncertain estimation about how the product will fit on their body. Some of the respondent in this research were experiencing regret because the product they bought doesn't fit them, specifically in terms of the size. This factor is validated by the fact that 94% people in the fashion industry agreed that garment fit is a huge problem that still exist in retail and manufacturing today (Kennedy, 2017).

Product Aesthetics; Aesthetics are defined as the visual appearance of the product. In this case, product aesthetics includes the shape, form and the color. In the situation of online shopping, consumers are exposed to the pictures and the video of the product only. Thus, how consumers see the product from the photo or video with the actual may be different due to external things such as the quality of the camera, lighting, and the filters used for the photo.

Product Price; Product price is the factor that refers to the specific amount of money that is spent by the buyer that is able to get them the result they want. It is analyzed that in the condition when consumers have knowledge limitation regarding the quality of the product, which often happens in terms of online shopping, the consumer is likely to perceive that a higher product price indicates a higher level of quality.

Product Utility; This factor refers to the condition where consumers do not have their expectation fulfilled in terms of the utility of the product, and this occurs on certain point in time after the purchase. Prior to the purchase, consumers have expected some particular use and need to be fulfilled. However, after they receive the product, regrets emerge when they just realized that they are not using the product as it expected it to be afterwards. They stated that when the product turned out to be worn rarely or never be worn at all, then the product does not serve its utility optimally.

Type 2: Regretting the process

This category refers to the participants who regret the activity throughout the process, both in the time before and after the purchase of the product. On this type of regret, it is found 5 factors that influence it, namely Social Influence, Impulsive buying, Information Search, Forgone Alternatives, and Change in Significance. Below is the detailed explanation of each factors. The new factor found on this study is the Social Influence.

Social Influence; Analysis of responses from the open ended questions deduces that social influence has an affected on post-purchase regret. When buying fashion product online, some consumers that account only their personal judgment towards the product without having social influence is likely to feel post-purchase regret. This factor was not mentioned in any previous research to our knowledge. To support, this new finding is validated through the fact that is explained by Dewanto (2016) saying that Indonesians are happen to be social online shopper, where they need social justification and approval for their purchase.

Impulsive Buying; Participants affirmed that they feel regret because they are driven by their powerful sudden urge to buy a certain fashion product. When it comes to impulsive buying, participants confessed that they didn't plan the purchase, but the urge to buy came after they received external stimuli, such as the visual merchandising. It can be inferred that they let their emotion to

dominate and react. Thus, they see themselves being held responsible for the error it causes, they wish if they did not follow the sudden urges, they would less likely to experience the post-purchase regret. This finding converge with many previous literature saying that there is a strong and direct relationship between impulsive buying and post-purchase regret (Hoch & F., 1991; Wood, 1998; George & Vaoyuneyong, 2010; Saleh, 2012).

Information Search; Information search refers to the effort that is given by consumers before they buy a product. Some participants are telling how little information they tried to find regarding the purchase. Since the activity of online shopping relies heavily on the information they gathered, participants that does not find out a complete information by not giving effort to obtain in more information are having their purchase ended up in regret. The result dig deeper on the study by Armstrong, et al. (2017), which argue that insufficient manner of decision making process could lead to post-purchase regret, whereas in this case, the information search stage was not conducted sufficiently. This is seen by a missed opportunity that normally came with a degree of responsibility for not optimizing the effort prior to the purchase when it is available.

Alternative Evaluation; This factor accounts those situations in which consumers are regretting their choice over specific option because they do not give a thorough evaluation to another alternative. This study concluded that based on participant's statements, that the forgone alternative may or may not be known beforehand by the consumers. While the former explains that consumer regrets the purchase because they feel that the other known alternative would've been better taken, it is also possible for consumers to regret the purchase if they are exposed to new alternatives that they weren't noticed before. If they had evaluated the alternative thoroughly, it is likely for her to make a better decision and not experiencing post-purchase regret afterwards.

Behavioral Consequences

Category 1: Anticipating through learning

This category refers to the activity of consumer that learns from their past experience of post-purchase regret for them to anticipate and prevent the occurrence of future post-purchase regrets. These behavioral consequences are considered positive, since it improves them to have deeper process in making the purchasing decision. This activity does not involve the intention of terminating online shopping in the future, therefore this category does not bring up deleterious consequences for online sellers. The category is formed by 4 focused codes namely, evaluating on the needs, putting more attention to product details, reading reviews, and asking opinion from reference group. Our finding is the first to our knowledge that post-purchase regret, the low level ones leads consumers to do the Learning for anticipation of the post-purchase regret of future purchases, as this involved the activity of self-blaming more on the regret occurrence, it is supported by the learning theory in psychology by the Experiential Learning Theory by David Kolb (1984), whereby learning is the process in which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience, as this learning activity is done based on their experience in having post-purchase regret.

Category 2: Complaining

The only behavioral consequences of post-purchase regret in this category is the action of complaining which also comes with asking for return. There are two kinds of return in this case, which are refund and product exchange. Participants perceived that asking for return could in some way reduce the intensity of the regret felt. It can be concluded that activities in this category are perceived negative and has deleterious consequences for online sellers. Plus, participants who have engaged in this activity realized that complaining and asking for return does require more effort.

Category 3: Taking revenge

Although this activity were less frequent than the other, but as this category give deleterious consequences to online seller, thus it's worth explained. The term taking revenge refers to the action taken in return of the seller's faults to compensate for some earlier loss faced by consumers, where in this case is post-purchase regret. In this category, there are two focused codes that emerge, namely *Spreading negative offline word of mouth (WOM)* and *Spreading negative online word of mouth (eWOM)*. Participants affirm that the activity of spreading negative WOM also done to prevent their family and friends in experiencing the same thing. Same goes with the negative eWOM, they express their opinion on the seller's comment section, in hopes that another customer will acknowledge about that problem and her regret experience won't be repeated to other customer. Seen this way, a larger number of potential customer may gain the exposure of that negative comment, and thus it may decline the willingness to do the purchase.

Category 4: Switching

This category emerged with the highest frequency contains in overall transcript. This category represents the activity of consumers who's no longer want to shop in the respective online shop who made them suffer from regret. They were moving their trust to another online shop that they have no regret experience with. From this category it can be inferred that regret has a negative influence on repurchasing intention from the same brand. Based on the verbatim, this study concluded that they don't see themselves responsible for the regret that happened, but rather the mistake came from the seller.

Category 5: Giving up

This factor is quite commonly found on the overall corpus, where it represents the activity of participants who have terminated online shopping for fashion products. This study proves that regret, specifically those with high levels, could generate the sense of giving up and distrust to the whole online shopping experience. The category involves two activities of *reducing online shopping intensity* and *terminating online shopping*. Some participants affirm that they do not fully terminate, but only lessen their activity to shop online after the experience of post-purchase regret, as their interest to shop online is declining. Although there were only

a few participants admit of executing this behavior, the finding does give a meaningful insight on how post-purchase regret could give a significant and deleterious consequences not only to specific online sellers but also to the whole online shopping activity in general. This newly discovered consequence is supported by the operant conditioning theory by Skinner (1938), where an action leads to a negative outcome or punishment decreasing likelihood of behavior.

CONCLUSIONS

The finding of the study intersects with what previous study mentioned in the literature review has pursued, moreover, this study gives new insights as there are new factors emerge such as *product fit*, and *social influence* that as the factors that affect to post-purchase regret. In regards to the behavioral consequences of post-purchase regret, this study provides more category of the behavior that previous study hasn't been able to cover and explore, namely the activity of Anticipating through *Learning and Giving Up*. Hence, this study shed light on the theory of consumer behavior regarding the post-purchase regret experience. The findings thus potential to be applied on preventing the occurrence of post-purchase regrets in the context of fashion product online shopping. As the number of online shopping keep on emerging in Indonesia, rather than just putting the focus on what to do, online shops should take "what's not to do" into account. Seen this way, they will be able to maintain their consumers and even to turn them into the very loyal ones. The findings also could be the base of the post-purchase service development that haven't been that commonly found nowadays in the area of online shopping. Furthermore, the finding of this study will as well be meaningful to consumers as they will discover the way to prevent the regret as well as the coping mechanism after the regret happened in a very detailed manner. The researcher recommends that it would also be useful for further studies to conduct the quantitative research to test the impact of each factors to post-purchase regret, and also to assess which of the behaviors the post-purchase regret affect the most. Further development on having a wider number and range participants' demography such as age and locations would be necessary to elevate the findings, as behavioral and cultural differences might occur within further geographical locations and other age groups may account other post-purchase regret experience. To add researcher also found a fascinating opportunity for future research to discover post-purchase regret phenomena on other frequently purchased online product category, for example electronic products.

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