

Causes of customers' cognitive dissonance and product return frequency: a Malaysian packaged food context

ABSTRACT

Manuscript type: Research paper Research aims: The cost and frequency of purchased product return are of considerable concern to marketers and retailers. This paper examines the post-purchase cognitive states that influence product return and the drivers that cause cognitive dissonance. Design/Methodology/Approach: A total of 208 valid responses were collected and analysed using SPSS v.22 and SmartPLS 3.2.8 software. Research findings: The findings indicate that emotional dissonance and product dissonance were the main contributing factors determining product return frequency. Switching barriers, customer opportunism and customer attitude significantly affected the level of dissonance; the consideration of liberal return policies and customer expectations of product did not. Findings support the mediating hypothesis of emotional dissonance and show that product dissonance significantly affects emotional dissonance. Importantly, emotional dissonance has a larger impact on product return frequency than product dissonance. Theoretical implications: This study expands upon the existing literature by providing valuable insight into understanding the external and internal factors contributing to cognitive dissonance and product return frequency. Importantly, the study contributes to the conceptualisation of the mediating role of emotional dissonance in consumer behaviour, particularly in the retail context. Practitioner/Policy implications: The findings are useful in assisting grocery marketers in designing and implementing effective customer retention strategies and loyalty programmes. Pairing of right perceptions about product quality, quantity and volume with cost would be effective to reduce emotional dissonance, and retailers could highlight exclusive product offerings to reduce product dissonance. Research limitation/Implication: Future studies could take into account the influences of demographic variables and various communication platforms which might cause differences in consumers' product return behaviours. This study only presents the findings of a cross-sectional study. A longitudinal study could be conducted to compare consumers' product return patterns and cognitive dissonance over a longer time frame.