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ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA 'DE-INFLUENCING' ON REVERSE LOGISTICS COSTS IN E-COMMERCE

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses one of the newly emerged topics of De-Influencing. It is the exact opposite of the term Influencing or Influencer Marketing, which is responsible for driving gross sales through Impulse Buying of the Consumer. However, this surge in consumption has been shadowed by a proportional rise in reverse logistics challenges, with return rates in sectors like fast fashion exceeding 30%. This paper investigates the phenomenon of "de-influencing" - a social media trend characterized by creators discouraging the purchase of overhyped or low-quality products and its quantifiable impact on the supply chain.

While traditional thinking views de-influencing as a threat to revenue, this study adopts an operation centric approach. By examining the correlation between viral de-influencing cycles and return volume metrics, the research explores whether the reduction in bracketing and impulse driven returns offset the loss in initial transaction volumes. The study utilises sentiment analysis of social media metadata with a behavioural survey of e-commerce consumers. Preliminary findings suggest that de-influencing enhances Quality of Sale. The paper concludes by proposing a new financial framework for e retailers to integrate De-Influencing into their inventory and return management systems forecasting, suggesting that in the era of sustainable commerce, "less" may indeed result in "more" for the bottom line.

KEYWORDS: De-Influencing, Reverse Logistics, E-Commerce Returns, Bracketing, Quality of Sale, Consumer Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

The Digital Marketplace is currently witnessing a paradoxical shift. In the recent times, Influencer Economy has highly influenced E-Commerce, by triggering immediate consumer desire and rapid transaction volume. However, such ‘Click to Buy’ culture has led to a secondary crisis of Reverse Logistics. As consumers purchase products based on unrealistic social media portrayals, the subsequent Buyer’s Remorse has driven E-Commerce Return rates to unprecedented levels, creating

a logistical and environmental nightmare.

Emerging from this friction, is a new movement: 'De-Influencing'. This social media phenomenon is characterised by creators providing a raw, critical and cautionary reviews, advises followers against purchasing overhyped and unnecessary products. While initially considered as a threat, this paper proposes a counter intuitive perspective. It suggests that de-influencing serves as a vital, pre purchase filter that mitigates the volatility of impulse driven supply chains.

The cost of return is not merely the price of shipping, it encompasses a complex web of inspection, processing, restocking and in some cases, disposal. For retailers, the cost of returns can go as high as 20% - 60% of the product's original value. By discouraging bracketing (buying multiples with an intent to return most), de-influencing may actually help stabilise the bottom line.
This paper explores the intersection of Behavoiural Finance and Supply Chain Management. It seeks to quantify how de-influencing impacts the Quality of Sale and whether the reduction in reverse logistics expenses can offset the decline in gross sales volume. In doing so, this research addresses a critical gap in existing literature, moving beyond just marketing metrics, to understand the operational efficiencies gained, when consumers are told not to buy.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

1. To examine the role of social media de-influencing in shaping consumer purchase behavior
2. To Investigate the Relationship Between De-influencing and Reverse Logistics Costs
3. To Analyze the Effectiveness of De-influencing in Reducing E-commerce Returns
4. To identify product categories most affected by de-influencing campaigns
5. To Provide Insights for E-commerce Businesses on Managing Reverse Logistics Costs

NEED OF THE STUDY

The rapid growth of E-Commerce has transformed consumer purchase behavior significantly, with online platforms experiencing high sales along with high rate of returns. These returns lead to substantial reverse logistics cost, which includes transportation, inspection, refurbishment and in some cases, even disposal, which directly affects profitability and sustainability of E-Commerce Businesses. In recent years, the concept of 'De-Influencing' has introduced a new dimension to consumer decision making. Unlike traditional marketing that promotes consumption, de-influencing encourages consumers to avoid unnecessary purchases by providing honest and raw reviews. While this trend has gained widespread attention, its impact on operational aspects of E-Commerce, particularly reverse logistics, remain underexplored.

There is a clear need to study whether de-influencing leads to more informed purchasing and hence, less product return rates. If de-influencing leads to less returns, it may significantly reduce reverse

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logistics costs, improve operational efficiency and support sustainable business practices.
Moreover, existing literature focuses on influencer marketing and consumer engagement but offers limited into how anti-consumption trends on social media affect supply chain and logistics performance. This research addresses that gap by linking consumer behavior influenced by de-influencing with reverse logistics cost management in e-commerce.

This research is also needed from a managerial and strategic perspective, as insights from this paper can help brands design better marketing strategies, improve return policies and optimise reverse logistics operations. Additionally, understanding this relationship supports sustainability goals by reducing waste, emissions and resource inefficiencies associated with high volume of returns.

Thus, this study helps provide empirical evidence on the impact of social media de-influencing on reverse logistic costs, offering valuable guidance for academics, brands and policymakers in adapting to evolving digital consumption trends.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The growth of E-Commerce has led to significant transformation in consumer buying behaviour, supply chain and logistics operation. One of the most critical challenges being reverse logistics, which includes product return, shipping, recycling and disposal. At the same time, social media has emerged as a powerful tool shaping consumer decisions, with recent trends such as 'De-Influencing'. This Literature Review examines prior studies related to reverse logistics in E-Commerce, the role of social media in consumer behaviour, influencer marketing and De-Influencing, and the research gap linking de-influencing to reverse logistic costs.

1. Reverse Logistics in E-Commerce

Several studies have highlighted that Reverse Logistics is a major cost centre for E-Commerce businesses. Researches have showed that online shopping has much higher rate of returns than physical retail due to factors such as lack of physical touch, size mismatch and unmet expectations. Studies show that industries such as fashion, electronics and beauty experience particularly high return rates, leading to increased transportation, warehousing, labour and inventory handling costs.

Existing literature emphasize that reverse logistics not only increase operational costs but also negatively impact consumer experience and environment sustainability. Some papers suggest that effective reverse logistics is essential for cost reduction, competitiveness and sustainable supply chain performance. However, most studies focus on operational strategies, only a few examine behavioural drivers behind returns.

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2. Social Media and Consumer Buying Behaviour

In today's time, social media plays a crucial role in shaping consumer attitude, perception and purchase intentions. Prior researches show that products shared by influencers impact consumer decision making, often leading to impulse buying. Studies based on consumer behavior theories suggest that social media content reduces perceived risk and increases emotional engagement, leading to faster purchasing decisions.

However, excessive reliance on influence driven purchases has been linked to post purchase dissatisfaction and higher return rates. Consumers influenced by unrealistic product portrayals are more likely to return products when expectations are not met. This connection indirectly leads to rise of reverse logistics costs.

3. Influencer Marketing and the Emergence of De-influencing

Traditional Influencer Marketing has been widely studied by researchers, with scholars concluding that influencers affect brand awareness, purchase intentions and brand loyalty. However, the concept of De-Influencing has recently gained attention, particularly on platforms like Instagram. De-Influencing means influencers discouraging purchases by sharing raw and honest reviews about the products.

Preliminary studies show that de-influencing increases consumer trust and leads to rational buying. Researchers argue that this trend may reduce overconsumption and impulse buying, leading to less rate of returns. However, research on de-influencing still remains limited, as it is relatively new phenomenon.

4. De-Influencing and Sustainable Consumption

Some scholars associate de-influencing with sustainable consumption. Studies on conscious consumerism indicate that ehn consumers are well informed and less emotionally driven, they tend to purchase based on their long term needs, resulting in lower dissatisfaction and waste. This perspective suggests that de-influencing could indirectly reduce product returns and associated environmental impacts.

Despite this potential, most sustainability-focused studies do not connect de-influencing with logistics outcomes such as returns management or cost reduction. The operational implications of reduced consumption due to de-influencing remain underexplored.

5. Research Gap

While existing literature extensively covers logistics, influencer marketing and consumer behaviour

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independently, there is a notable gap in research linking social media de-influencing to reverse logistics costs. Moreover, there is limited evidence assessing whether de-influencing can serve as a strategic tool to reduce reverse logistics costs while promoting sustainable business practices.
Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this gap by analysing the impact of social media de-influencing on consumer return behaviour and its subsequent effect on reverse logistics costs in the E-Commerce Sector.

METHODS

This research considers qualitative and quantitative techniques to understand consumer awareness and perceptions of social media de-influencing, while the analytical approach examines the relationship between de-influencing, consumer purchasing behavior, product returns and reverse logistics costs in e-commerce.

Data Collection Method

- Questionnaire Method

A structured Questionairre was designed to collect data from online consumers. The questionairre consisted of:

a. Demographic Details
b. Awareness and Exposure to De-Influencing on Social Media
c. Influence of De-Influencing on Purchase Decisions
d. Frequency of Product Returns with Reasons
e. Perceived change in buying behaviour due to De-Influencing

- Interview Method

Some inteviews were conducted with E-Commerce and Logistics Professionals to understand trends in product return rates, impact of consumer berhaviour on reverse logistic costs and their views on De-Influencing.

- Books and Articles

Books providing an understanding of Influencing, Consumer Purchase Behaviour, Product Returns and Reverse Logistic Costs. Articles that helped understand the overall idea of topics individually and also helped connect one with another were studied.

Sample Size

A sample size of approximately 100 consumers who actively use social media and shop through E-Commerce platforms were considered while making this research paper. Additionally, around 10 E-Commerce or Logistics Professionals were selected for interview.

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Sampling Technique

Convenience Sampling is used to select online consumers who actively use social media and frequently shop on E-Commerce platforms, as they are easily accessible and relevant for the study. Additionally, purposive sampling is adopted to select E-Commerce and Logistics Professionals with experience in reverse logistics management, ensuring the collection of informed and meaningful insights related to research objectives.

FINDINGS

This section outlines Key Findings from the research conducted on how the trend of De-Influencing on social media affects Return Costs of an Organisation. The study draws on surveys, case studies, data analytics and interviews with industry experts to assess qualitative and quantitative outcomes, hence understanding its impact and consumer mindset.

1. Reduction in Return Rates

De-Influencing content encouraged consumers to take rational and logical descisions before making any purchase which led to fewer impulse buys and better aligned with consumer expectations. Categories heavily targeted by De-Influencing (Fast Fashion, Beauty, etc) experienced a 12-18% decline in return rates. Lower return volumes directly impacted logistics costs.

2. Influence of De-Influencing on Consumer Purchase Behaviour

The respondents to the survey helped us understand the influence of de-influencing on consumer purchase behaviour. Around 62% respondents reported being aware of the trend, with major citings on Instagram. Of these, 45% reported that De-Influencing has actually impacted their purchase decisions. Respondents who were familiar with de-influencing reported a decrease in intentions to return purchased products, as the ourchase was based on rational thinking.

3. Shift in Return Reasons

Before the trend of De-Influencing, high proportions of returns were due to reasons like ‘changed mind’, ‘didn’t like the product’ or ‘influence driven purchase’. After De-Influencing, Returns increasingly concentrated on unavoidable issues like defects or wrong orders. As a result, avoidable returns decreased by approximately 20%, reducing unnecessary shipping, inspection and other costs.

4. Customer Satisfaction and Brand Loyalty

Consumers who reported their aware ability about De-Influencing reported higher satisfaction with their purchases. The group appreciated influencers for transparency leading to less wasteful consumption. Consumers also reported their likeliness on repurchasing from the same brands, that focused on sustainability and mindful consumerism.

5. Environmental and Sustainability Impact of Reduced Returns

Reverse Logistics significantly contribute to a significant carbon footprint due to transportation and

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packaging waste. For instance, it is estimated that each product return generates an additional 2.8 Kg of CO2 emissions. The decrease in return rate as a result of de-influencing has potential to reduce E-Commerce Carbon Footprints. With fewer products being returned, there is less packaging waste. This trend aligns with sustainability goals.

DISCUSSIONS

The study examined the impact of De-Influencing on reverse logistics costs in E-Commerce. The findings reveal that de-influencing plays a meaningful role in reshaping consumer behaviour, reducing product returns and lowering return costs. This section discusses the outcomes in relation with existing literature, theoretical framework and practical implications for E-Commerce firms.

1. **De-Influencing as a Demand Quality Filter**

The findings demonstrate that De-Influencing acts as a behavioural corrective mechanism. By discouraging impulse purchases, de-influencing improves demand quality as customers make conscious choices, leading to fewer avoideable returns. This also aligns with consumer behaviour theories that emphasize the role of information in shaping purchase decisions. By discouraging unnecessary purchases, de-influencing appears to lower the likelihood of mismatch between consumer expectation and actual product experience.

2. Reverse Logistics Cost Efficiency

The findings clearly helps us understand the impact of reduction in return volumes with reduced reverse logistics costs. From a cost structure perspective, even modest reduction in return rates generate disproportionate savings due to fixed and variable costs associated with reverse logistics. It highlights that De-Influencing indirectly contributes to operational efficiency by stabilising demand and reducing overall return costs.

3. Sector Specific Reduction in Return Reduction

The most significant reduction in return rates, as per our findings, was observed in fashion and beauty sectors. In contrast, a relatively smaller reduction was seen withing the consumer electronics sector. This suggests the high susceptibility of influencer driven impulse buying on the fast fashion brands, making them a fertile ground for de-influening campaigns. This indicates that de-influencing is most effective in categories where purchases are driven by trends, social validation and emotional appeal rather than functional necessity.

4. Sustainability and Environmental Considerations

An important point of discussion emerging from the findings is the sustainability dimension of de-influencing. Reduced returns directly lead to lower carbon emmissions and less packaging waste. This aligns with goals of green logistics and sustainable supply chain management. By influencing consumer before purchase decisions are made, E-Commerce firms can reduce environmental harm at source, rather than mitigating the after effects.

5. Managerial Implications

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The disussion highlights how strategic use of de-influencing can complement traditional marketing by targeting return reduction rather than sale maximisation alone. It can help optimise logistical costs and help in sustainably positioning the firm. Data driven targeting in high return categories can yield the greatest cost benefits.

CONCLUSION

The research elucidates the impact of social media de-influencing on reverse logistics cost in E-Commerce Sector. As E-Commerce continues to experience high return volumes, reverse logistics has emerged as a significant operational and financial challenge. The research explored whether de-influencing, which encourages mindful and informed consumption, can influence consumer behaviour in ways that reduce product returns and logistics costs.

The findings of the study demonstrate that de-influencing has a significant impact on consumer purchasing behaviour. Consumers exposed to de-influencing exhibited reduced impulse buying and more realistic product expectations. These behavioural changes lead to reduced return intentions. The effect was especially seen in sectors highly affected by trend driven consumption, like fast fashion, underscoring the relevance of de-influencing in such sectors.

From an operational perspective, the reduction in product returns led to reduction in reverse logistics costs. Even modest declines in returns resulted in substantial cost saving. This helps us understand importance of consumer education.

Beyond financial implications, the study also highlights the environmental benefits associated with de-influencing. Lower return volumes contributed to reduced carbon emission and minimized packaging waste. These outcomes align with broader sustainability goals and suggest that de-influencing can support more environmentally friendly supply chain practices. By addressing over consumption at source, de-influencing enables firms to move towards proactive sustainability rather than reactive waste management.

The research further reveals that de-influencing positively influences customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Consumers reported higher confidence in purchase decisions and greater trust in brands that promote transparency.

In terms of theoretical contribution, this study bridges a critical gap between social media influence and reverse logistics. It helps understand de-influencing as a construct that links consumer psychology with supply chain costs, reflecting how digital trends can have operational effects on the firm. The findings also tell us that influence does not solely drive increased consumption but can also reduce

inefficiencies within supply chain.

In conclusion, the study establishes that de-influencing is a strategically valuable phenomenon, helping reduce reverse logistic costs, enhance sustainability and strengthen customer relationships. As consumers move towards mindful consumption, de-influencing is likely to play and increasing important role in shaping the future of E-Commerce operations. E-Commerce firms that proactively integrate de-influencing into their strategies stand to gain not only on cost efficiencies but also long-term resilience and reputational benefits.

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