Digital Post-Purchase Blues to Strategic Insights: A Bibliometrics-Based Systematic Review of Customer Purchase Regret

Asma Zaheer

Department of Marketing, Faculty of Economics and Administration, King Abdulaziz University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Email: ameraj@kau.edu.sa

Abstract: *Deciphering the trends and evolutionary paths of the research on customers' post-purchase regret inside the business milieu is crucial for marketing research and application. The current study in-tends to present a succinct bibliometric review based on synthesising the research on customers' regret. We followed a systematic, sequential and objective process to retrieve a literature corpus comprising 204 peer-reviewed articles from the Scopus database. The literature corpus was cleaned first and then analysed using statistics-based techniques such as descriptive analysis, co-citation network analysis and keyword co-occurrence analysis. The analyses revealed (1) performance, revealing the most productive constituents and trends of the domain and (2) science of the domain, resulting in five thematic clusters representing the domain's intellectual structure: purchase decision and sales, decision-making and regret, post-purchase regret, and anticipated regret. This study provides crucial insights and presents an agenda for research for future marketing scholars by comparing the recent advancements in the literature on consumerism with those in the wider marketing management literature.*

Keywords: Post-Purchase regret, systematic review, bibliometrics, visualisation, keyword co-occurrence analysis, customer decision-making, emotional response

INTRODUCTION

Customer Purchase Regret (CPR) is a phenomenon that has garnered increasing attention in the discipline of marketing management in recent years. It represents a powerful emotional response experienced by consumers post-purchase when they perceive a discrepancy between their pre-purchase expectations and the actual product or service received (Silva & Martins, 2017). CPR is an intriguing and multifaceted concept that has drawn substantial attention from marketing scholars, practitioners, and businesses (Workman & Lee, 2019). As an emotional reaction to purchase outcomes, it plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer behaviour, influencing brand perceptions, and ultimately impacting market performance (Liao et al., 2021).

Consumers' experiences of regret following a purchase decision have significant implications for businesses, as they can impact customer satisfaction, loyalty, and, ultimately, a firm's bottom line (Tzeng

& Shiu, 2019). While the concept of regret may appear straightforward, the multidimensional nature of this emotional response makes it a complex and multifaceted area of study (Abendroth & Diehl, 2006). Researchers have sought to uncover the factors contributing to purchase regret, its consequences, and potential strategies for its mitigation, yielding a burgeoning body of literature (Cooke et al., 2001; Gounaris & Almoraish, 2024).

Following the research objective crafting approach employed by Mukhopadhyay *et al.* (2023), we developed and pursued the below-mentioned research objectives to synthesise the literature on customer purchase regret:

> *RO1*: To decipher the performance trends of the research domain of consumer purchase regret.
> *RO2*: To uncover the consumer purchase regret research's thematic evolution and intellectual structure.
> *RO3*: To chalk out the research agenda for future consumer regret scholars.

Literature Review

Concept of Customer Purchase Regret (CPR)

CPR, often referred to as post-purchase regret, is a multifaceted emotional response that has been central to the discourse within marketing management. Building on the seminal work of Bell *et al.* (1988), regret in the context of consumer purchases has been conceptualised as a cognitive-emotional evaluation of a past purchase decision. This evaluation involves a retrospective assessment of the decision-making process, where consumers reflect on their choices and the outcomes they experience. Mellers and McGraw (2001) emphasised that regret can indicate choice quality, signalling the misalignment between consumers' expectations and their post-purchase evaluations. This conceptualisation of customer purchase regret underscores its dynamic nature, as it is not solely based on objective product attributes but is heavily influenced by the individual's perceptions and expectations (Sfar, 2024; Shahid Sameeni et al., 2022).

Regret, as an emotional response, is associated with various cognitive processes, such as counterfactual thinking and re-evaluating decision outcomes. Regret is explained as the "negative cognitively based emotion that we experience when realising or imagining that our present situation would have been better had we decided differently" (Zeelenberg and Pieters, 1999, p. 94). Do and Chan (2016) explored how consumers use memory scanning to assess the consequences of their choices, which contributes to the formation of post-purchase regret. This conceptualisation underscores the notion that customer purchase regret is not a uniform experience but is shaped by various antecedents and individual factors (Crotts & Butler, 2023; Silva & Martins, 2017). The emerging literature has highlighted the importance of distinguishing between different types of regret, such as action regret (regretting a purchase made) and inaction regret (regretting not making a purchase), offering a nuanced view of this emotional response (Pizzutti et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). Therefore, understanding how customers conceptualise and experience regret is pivotal for developing strategies to address this phenomenon and enhance customer satisfaction (David Clarke & Mortimer, 2013; Tzeng & Shiu, 2019). The study of customer purchase regret is grounded in the seminal work of Mellers and McGraw (2001), who provided a foundation for understanding how consumers evaluate their decisions and experience regret. Building upon this foundation, Mellers and McGraw (2001) explored the antecedents of regret in the context of

consumer choice, identifying various factors that influence the likelihood of post-purchase remorse. Furthermore, research by Gilovich and Medvec (1995) delved into the temporal aspects of regret, highlighting that the timing of regret can vary based on individual differences and product characteristics. These early contributions laid the groundwork for subsequent research that has expanded our understanding of the multifaceted nature of customer purchase regret (Lubis et al., 2022). With the proliferation of online shopping and e-commerce platforms, the study of customer purchase regret has gained renewed importance. Tsiros and Mittal (2000) underscored the significance of studying online purchase regret and its unique drivers, setting the stage for a growing body of literature exploring consumer regret's digital context.

METHOD

Bibliometric analysis
It is both desired and difficult at the same time to provide a broad picture or overview of the constantly changing scientific knowledge on a given issue, dispersed across various disciplines (António & Rita, 2023; Dhakate et al., 2023). Thus, bibliometric analysis involves analysing large corpora of publications on a subject of intellectual interest using quantitative and statistical methodologies (Filgueiras & Melo, 2023). The methods aid in preventing subjectivity and are often used to establish future research priorities and delineate the limits of current knowledge (Lal et al., 2023; Owusu et al., 2023; Sepulcri et al., 2020; Verma & Gustafsson, 2020). Notably, a bibliometric network consists of edges and nodes; in this instance, the nodes are articles and keywords (Leonidou & Leonidou, 2011; van Bommel et al., 2023; Yagmur et al., 2020). Conversely, relationships between pairs of nodes are represented by edges or links. Additionally, edges show the strength of the association in addition to its presence (Cobo et al., 2011). While scholars have explored many other kinds of analytical techniques, our analysis focuses on two of the most popular forms of tools (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2015; Tahamtan et al., 2016), i.e. co-citation and keyword co-occurrence analysis (Koseoglu et al., 2022).

In the current study, integrating several bibliometric analysis techniques is required since each technique has certain drawbacks and advantages (Donthu, Kumar, Mukherjee, et al., 2021). Additionally, there is little overlap between the two chosen methodologies; thus, using them successfully enables a thorough study that thoroughly comprehends the body of information already known about the targeted research topic (Cuccurullo et al., 2016; Mukherjee et al., 2022).

Co-citation analysis occurs when two papers are referenced jointly in a third work (Boyack & Klavans, 2010; Zupic & Čater, 2015). A significant co-citation connection shows commonalities among the research in a group of publications (Koseoglu et al., 2022). This is established because several later articles consider them pivotal enough. "Therefore, co-citation is a relationship recognised and maintained by current researchers" (Small and Griffith, 1974, p. 19). Furthermore, co-citation analysis might be useful in identifying groups of co-citation pairings, elucidating the unified framework, and providing a knowledge foundation within the relevant study field (Perez-Vega et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2017).

Additionally, using a keyword list collected by the authors, we examined networks of co-occurrence of terms (Cakmakoglu Arici & Koc, 2023). In such published records where two keywords appear

together, it is used to compute the number of co-occurrences of those terms (Stone-Sabali et al., 2023). Additionally, we may visualise the interaction between the keywords by examining the co-occurrence intensity of each term (Ramesh & Chawla, 2022). The author-provided keywords show the primary ideas of the study, while the co-occurrence of these terms highlights the research subjects and themes as well as their temporal development (Kouropalatis et al., 2019). Bibliometric analysis is an analytical tool that myriad academics have used to illustrate the underlying intellectual structure of a study domain, such as financial distress in banking industry (Fakhar et al., 2023), social media platforms research (Ali et al., 2023), open innovation (Sikandar et al., 2023) and electronic word of mouth (Donthu, Kumar, Pandey, et al., 2021; Mukhopadhyay et al., 2023).

Identification	Preliminary literature search using suitable keywords	**Database**- Scopus (n=431) **Search Period**- No limit - 2023
Screening	First screening (non-relevant subjects and document type)	**Non-relevant subjects** (n= 176) **Non relevant document type** (n= 30)
	Second screening (Language)	**Non-English language articles** (n= 13)
Eligibility	Eligible articles pertaining to the domain of Customer Purchase Regret research	**1. Descriptive analysis:** Top articles, Top Outlets, Top authors **2. Science Mapping**: descriptive analysis; Keyword co-occurrence network analysis

Inclusion	Final set of articles for *Bibliometric variant of systematic review* (n= 202)	**3. Visualisation**: Bibliometrix-R & VOSviewer

Figure 1 Database and search procedure

Keyword strategy and Data retrieval

We used the Scopus database for our study even though we had access to many other scholarly databases for the literature review. Its most extensive coverage of multidisciplinary peer-reviewed literature is the main justification for its usage (Lu et al., 2023; Perez-Vega et al., 2022), compared to Google Scholar and Web of Science (WoS). Further, as shown in Figure 1, we used a four-stage procedure to determine our sample data set for the study.

Table 1 Database and search string employed for data acquisition

Database	Search String (Boolean Operators and Keywords)
Scopus	"Consum*" OR "shopper" AND "purchas*" OR "buy*" AND "regret*" OR "remors*" OR "disappoint*"

RESULTS

Our data analysis was conducted using the flexible R programming language. For this dataset, we employed the R Bibliometrix package (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017), and to create the networks and their clusters, we also used the well-known network diagramming programme VOSviewer (van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

Descriptive analysis

Table 2 Descriptive statistics

Information about the data	Customer Purchase Regret
Timespan	1977:2023
Outlets (Journals)	123
Articles	202
Annual productivity (in %)	7.34
Average Age of the document	7.4
Average citations per document	25.32
Author based information	
Total Authors	509
Authors of single-authored document	20
Single-authored documents	21
Co-Authors per document	2.75
Co-authorships (International) (in %)	24.75

The descriptive statistics of our dataset are mentioned in Table 2. The timespan in which the domain's research has grown covers more than 45 years, in which this domain has seen a significant rise. We found 399 customers purchase regret-related publications in the business and management discipline, garnering 5115 citations. The popularity and significance of the study area can be observed by the high average number of citations (25.32) per manuscript in the domain. The total number of authors who have contributed to the domain is 509, with the average number of co-authors per manuscript remaining 2.75. International collaborative efforts have also been observed at a significant rate, i.e. 24.75, which indicates that authors have increasingly collaborated with authors from foreign countries. The descriptive analysis strengthens our desire to compile and contrast the information gathered under the domain, which may provide fresh themes and paradigms for further studies.
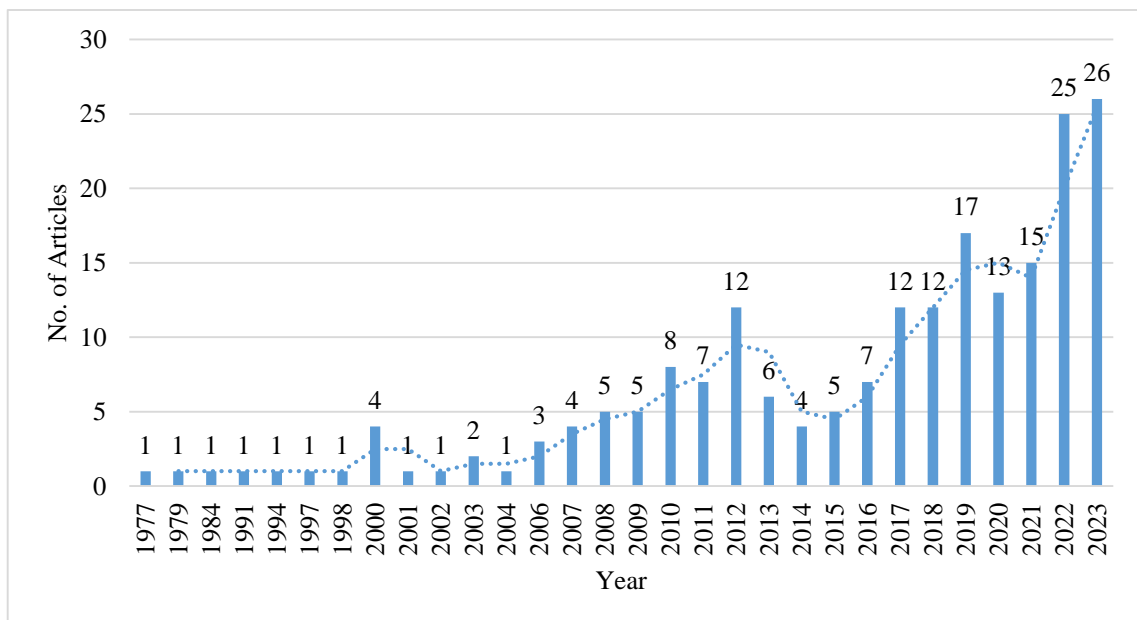

Figure 2 Exponential growth in customer purchase regret research

3.2 Source Performance Analysis

Table 3. Most impactful and productive journals

Journal	*h*	TC	NP
Journal of Business Research	7	211	8
Journal of Marketing Research	6	628	7
Management Science	5	334	5
Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics	4	59	6
Journal of Consumer Marketing	4	95	6

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development UK

Journal of Consumer Research	4	466	4
Journal of Economic Psychology	4	290	4
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	4	63	7
Marketing Letters	4	251	4
Psychology and Marketing	4	252	4

Note: *h-* h index; TC- total citations; NP- Number of publications

For upcoming scholars, performance analysis of various journals in these domains may provide crucial insights into the evolution and structure of the customer purchase regret domain. The performance of the top ten sources (outlet) for the domain of customer purchase regret is shown in Table 3. We used quantitative metrics to summarise our results and delineate meaningful insights, including the overall number of citations, total articles published, and *h* index. The number of articles emphasises volume, while the number of citations annually shows the journal's calibre. For example, most research (628) in the domain has been published in the Journal of Marketing Research. The fact that marketing outlets (journals) have published articles on the domain suggests a rising body of research interest in customer purchase regret from various areas, including IT, marketing, e-commerce, and hospitality/tourism, as seven journals (outlets) out of top ten are from core marketing area, such as — Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, Journal of Consumer Research, and Psychology and Marketing — to name a few. Hence, it may be stated that these journals provide scholars with a good platform for publishing research studies related to customer purchase regret.

Figure 3 Word Cloud (Title keywords)
Source: *Bibliometrix-R*

Keyword analysis

Table 4 Most frequent keywords (author keywords) found in the domain of customer purchase regret

Keywords	Occurrences
Anticipated Regret	32
Post-Purchase Regret	31
Regret	30
Pricing	9
Consumer Behaviour	8
Satisfaction	8
Consumer Behavior	7
Behavioral Economics	6
Retailing	6
Impulse Buying	5

Source: *Bibliometrix-R*

We attempted the keyword analysis using the author-provided keywords before performing the co-occurrence analysis. This kind of study, which identifies the key topics and related knowledge domains, aids in understanding how knowledge has evolved within the discipline. Figure 3 and Table 4 display the terms that authors have used the most in the domain of customer purchase regret. As shown, anticipated regret and post-purchase regret remain the highest recurring keywords in the titles of the studies found in the domain. Also, the word cloud in Figure 3 indicates that regret is a central word, i.e., the most recurring and significant keyword in the literature corpus.

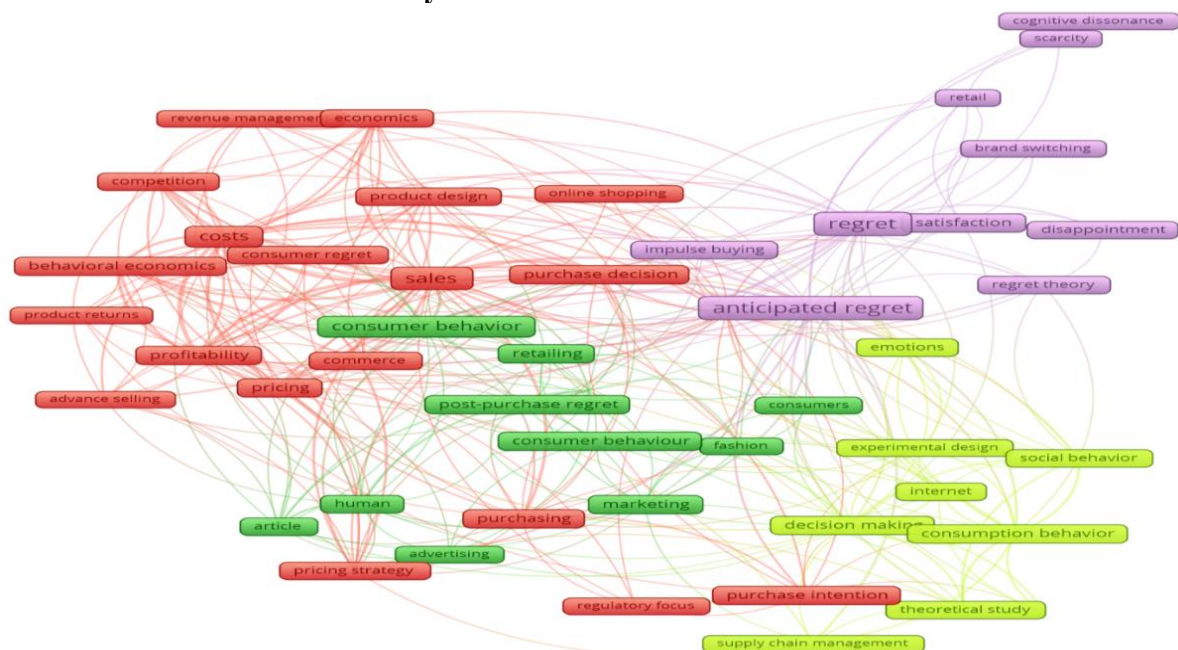**Keyword co-occurrence network analysis**

Figure 4 Co-occurrence network
Source: *VOSviewer*

We used author keywords to determine the primary research topics rather than other types of keywords (such as those taken from the manuscript's titles and abstracts), often resulting in ambiguous and challenging-to-understand thematic networks (Sharma et al., 2024). We could examine how customer purchase regret research topics changed and developed throughout the rather lengthy time span of publications in our dataset (See Figure 4). Furthermore, we displayed the co-word networks about each domain and sub-period to demonstrate the link between the keywords and arrange them into several clusters. Following Abhishek and Srivastava (2021), we chose author keywords with a minimum threshold of 3 recurring keywords rather than including all keywords in the final network. Only when a keyword has at least three edges connecting it to other keyword nodes does it become a node (vertex) in the network. The knowledge themes, as depicted in Figure 4, are presented and elaborated below:

(1) *Purchase decision and sales* – The keywords in this domain's foundation elaborate on the phenomenon's rise and its conceptual and theoretical depth. Researchers have found that although product scarcity solely affects inaction regret, the discount level raises both action regret (buying) and inaction regret (not buying) (Gabler et al., 2017). Also, researchers revealed that price awareness and materialism are individual traits that affect purchasing decisions, but materialism is the sole factor that affects regretful purchase decisions (Gabler et al., 2017). Researchers have further addressed a pertinent issue of whether regret impacts brand-switching intentions, the extent of rumination and a customer's satisfaction level (Bui et al., 2011).

(2) *Decision-making and regret* - This domain's foundational keywords expound upon the phenomena's emergence and its profound conceptual and theoretical implications. Researchers have demonstrated that (1) sunk costs majorly impact consumers' online purchasing decisions. The impacts were less significant, however, when consumers purchased experience goods as opposed to search goods because of the different product characteristics (Liang et al., 2014); (2) the service quality and sunk costs of an initial selection and new choice would impact the degree of regret felt concerning the customer's initial choice (Liang et al., 2014). Also, Barta *et al.* (2023) have demonstrated that the desire to write bad reviews is ultimately driven by regret for both the purchase process and the product after purchase completion.

(3) *Post-purchase regret* - The emergence of post-purchase regret and its conceptual depth is further explained by the keywords in this domain's basis. Post-purchase regret has been established as a significant antecedent of consumer complaining behaviour (Tzeng & Shiu, 2019). Also, David Clarke and Mortimer (2013) examined several antecedents (such as self-gifting) of post-purchase regret. Academic groups have demonstrated that greater (as opposed to milder) sentiments of sorrow result from brand betrayal for utilitarian (as opposed to hedonic) products (Shahid Sameeni et al., 2022).

(4) *Anticipated regret* - Keywords in the anticipated regret domain's foundation expound on the emergence and depth of conceptualisation. Regret theory has been employed extensively to unearth how economic hostility negatively affects consumers' perceptions of foreign products (i.e., product judgement and reluctance to purchase) (Khan et al., 2019). Researchers have demonstrated how expected regret and consideration together impact value in various manipulations, purchasing scenarios, items, and decision contexts (Ang et al., 2022). Furthermore, Regardless of the perceived pace of innovation,

Shih and Schau (2011) show that providing customers with attribute-based explanations for an instant purchase results in a consistent amount of AR and purchase delay.

DISCUSSION

This bibliometric review article looks at the vast domain of customer purchase regret research and tracks its development over the last 46 years. A thorough bibliometric examination of 202 articles from 123 journals published between 1977 and November 2022 was performed. To address the proposed research questions, we employed select tools from the bibliometric toolbox (Mukherjee et al., 2022), such as descriptive analysis and keyword co-occurrence analysis. Descriptive analysis revealed that the number of papers about customer purchase regret has consistently grown over the last ten years since 2012. The earlier phase, which spans 1977 to 2011, is the early, little-published period of the domain. After 2012, an exponential rise in articles was observed as the literature on the domain moved into a second phase. With 267 citations, the research article by Yi and Baumgartner (2004) is the most cited work. Based on the average number of citations per document and the overall number of citations, Adamantios Diamantopoulos and Sergio Barta are the most influential authors in the domain. The Journal of Business Research has published the most papers on the research domain with eight articles. Among the most cited journals are the Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of Consumer Marketing and Journal of Consumer Research. These findings imply that the top marketing journals have also been the leading publications in the domain of customer purchase regret.

The most often occurring terms in the literature on service robots are "Anticipated Regret", "Post-Purchase Regret", "Regret", "Pricing", "robotics," and "Satisfaction", as per the keyword analysis. These keywords provide insights into the major areas of interest that have dominated research on the domain. Lastly, we used keyword co-occurrence analysis to pinpoint recurring themes in the literature on customer purchase regret. The findings show that three research themes—'*Purchase decision and sales*', '*Decision-making and regret*', '*anticipated regret*' and '*Post-purchase regret*'—have impacted customer purchase regret research most. Our results have significant value for both scholars and organisational practitioners. Since it identifies the performance and science that have impacted customer regret research and offers insights into the most important contributions to this field of study, it contains significant academic insights.

In addition, we advance theory by summarising the fundamental ideas that emerge from the literature on customer purchase regret and charting the discipline's progressive advancement over time. Our study aims to provide managers with a comprehensive overview of the concept of customer purchase regret to better understand its intricacies before deciding to use it in their organisations. In other words, managers would find this study helpful in understanding the basic notion behind countering customer purchase regret as a strategy, motivating them to consider this concept as a component of a strategic intervention for their companies. Research would also benefit managers since it would point them toward possible ways to minimise regret by designing the offerings and mitigating post-purchase dissonance.

Future Research Avenues and Limitations

This study is a unique effort to provide an organised and panoramic overview of the literary corpus on customer purchase regret research. Despite the study's rigour, relevance, and breadth, a few limitations must be noted. The primary constraint of this investigation is its dependence only on the Scopus database for data collection. Most bibliometric research focuses on a single database for analysis to avoid needless redundancy and duplication, but this might result in losing out on publications that could be highly beneficial to the domain of customer purchase regret. Bibliometric approaches are used to evaluate a vast body of literature to identify important avenues for future research, which impacts possibilities for prospective studies. Also, future studies might investigate how expected remorse affects value concerning comparable manipulations in certain situations of participatory pricing (Ang et al., 2022). Future studies may also concentrate on investigating this concept from a variety of disciplinary angles, such as psychological aspects and sociological aspects may also be investigated (Song et al., 2023).

Consequently, a bibliometric study focusing on customer regret should be conducted every five to seven years as part of an ongoing research effort. This would ensure that the topic is still relevant for researchers in the future, which would support its development and deliver novel insights. Researchers may also consider including customer groups from any industry who have recently faced service failure in their research, as the perception of unsatisfied customers may vary across sectors (Tzeng & Shiu, 2019). To sum up, bibliometric analysis may be used in various ways to conduct a literature review. In this work, three of these analytical techniques were used. Therefore, future studies should include other bibliometric techniques to understand this subject better.

CONCLUSION

This study conducted a bibliometric examination of the literature concerning customer purchase regret. The bibliometric research indicates a growing scholarly interest in this field, which was initiated in 1977 and became a prominent research focus in the 2010s, with the Journal of Business Research being the leading constituent with the highest number of academic records. The results indicate that the quantity of pertinent academic literature is strongly linked to the developmental phase of customer purchase literature.

The research published between 1977 and 2013 can be categorised into three phases: first, the *starting stage* (1977-2006); second, the *rising growth stage* (2007-2016); and third, the *exponential growth stage* (2017-2023). These three periods consist of several themes, such as (1) *purchase decisions and sales,* indicating the relevance of regret a consumer may feel after the sales and the decision a consumer makes in the post-purchase stage, (2) *Decision-making and regret*, highlighting the role of regret in the post-purchase decision making, (3) *Post-purchase regret*, indicating the complex emotions a customer may feel making a purchase, and (4) *Anticipated regret*, highlighting the role of regret which is expected by the customers, in the consumer well-being.

The study identified two potential research directions: (1) Exploration of sociological and psychological mechanisms behind post-purchase regret and (2) Examining service failure experiences with a diverse set of customers in emerging markets. Furthermore, this work contains some constraints that

may serve as a guide for future research. The data in this research is restricted to English literature found in the Scopus database. Hence, the outcomes could be skewed. The literature primarily originates from Western countries, with limited representation from emerging Eastern markets. Future scholars can enhance their studies by utilising more data sources and exploring non-English literature, like French and Chinese literature, which has a significant Generation Z and Generation Alpha population in China.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Asma Zaheer.
Data curation: Asma Zaheer.
Formal analysis: Asma Zaheer.
Funding acquisition: Asma Zaheer.
Investigation: Asma Zaheer.
Methodology: Asma Zaheer.
Project administration: Asma Zaheer.
Resources: Asma Zaheer.
Software: Asma Zaheer.
Supervision: Asma Zaheer.
Validation: Asma Zaheer.
Visualization: Asma Zaheer.
Writing – original draft: Asma Zaheer.
Writing – review & editing: Asma Zaheer.

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