Qualitative analysis of return process experiences on e-commerce platforms in Türkiye: A comparison of Trendyol, Hepsiburada, and n11

Türkiye'de e-ticaret platformlarında iade süreci deneyimlerinin nitel analizi: Trendyol, Hepsiburada ve n11 karşılaştırması

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Abstract

This study compares consumer complaints about the return processes of Trendyol, Hepsiburada, and n11 — the leading e-commerce platforms operating in Türkiye. A total of 345 user complaints obtained from the Şikayetvar platform between May 2025 and October 2025 were analysed using the qualitative content analysis method. The findings indicate that the primary issues triggering return processes across all three platforms are product-related; furthermore, uncertainties regarding shipping logistics and the operational flow of the return process negatively affect consumer trust. The study reveals that the loss of trust in e-commerce platforms is shaped not only by the presence of return or compensation mechanisms but also by process-based factors, such as how the platform manages the process and the extent to which it informs and guides users. In this regard, the research contributes to the service failure literature by addressing the return process within the context of platform–consumer interaction and provides practical implications for improving return processes for e-commerce platforms.

Keywords: E-Commerce Return Processes, Consumer Complaints, Service Failure, Digital Platforms

Jel Codes: L81, M31, D12

Öz

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de faaliyet gösteren Trendyol, Hepsiburada ve n11 e-ticaret platformlarındaki iade süreçlerine yönelik tüketici şikâyetlerini karşılaştırmalı olarak analiz etmektedir. Şikâyetvar platformundan derlenen Mayıs 2025 – Ekim 2025 dönemine ait toplam 345 kullanıcı şikâyeti, nitel içerik analizi yöntemiyle incelenmiştir. Bulgular; her üç platformda da iade sürecini tetikleyen temel sorunların ürün odaklı faktörler etrafında yoğunlaştığını, kargo süreçleri ile iade mekanizmasının işleyişindeki belirsizliklerin ise tüketici güvenini zedelediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Araştırma; e-ticaret platformlarındaki güven kaybının yalnızca iade veya telafi imkânlarının varlığına değil; sürecin yönetimi, kullanıcının bilgilendirilme düzeyi ve yönlendirme kalitesi gibi süreçsel unsurlara bağlı olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu yönüyle çalışma, iade sürecini platform–tüketici etkileşimi bağlamında ele alarak hizmet başarısızlığı literatürüne katkı sunmakta ve uygulayıcılar için stratejik çıkarımlar sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: E-Ticaret İade Süreçleri, Tüketici Şikayetleri, Hizmet Hatası, Dijital Platformlar

JEL Kodları: L81, M31, D12

Introduction

With the proliferation of e-commerce, logistics has evolved from an operational function focused solely on delivering products to customers into a broader management domain encompassing return processes. Increasing product return rates in online retail have made reverse logistics and return management increasingly critical for businesses. These processes are considered key touchpoints that directly influence customer experiences and perceptions, while simultaneously posing challenges for logistics operations, inventory management, and overall operational efficiency. Indeed, research indicates that consumers' perceptions of the return process—whether they execute planned or unplanned returns—significantly shape their satisfaction and future purchase intentions (Rintamäki et al., 2021). Similarly, the literature highlights that return management is often examined through the lens of operational burdens, logistics processes, and inventory control, emphasising the importance of effective management (Stevenson & Rieck, 2024).

Furthermore, studies show that e-commerce logistics extends beyond product delivery to include post-purchase services—particularly return processes—which directly affect customer satisfaction and repurchase intentions (Öztürk & Dündar, 2020; Kazancı & Bayarçelik, 2021). In the context of e-commerce, return processes are not only customer service practices but also crucial interaction points that shape customer experiences and brand perceptions. Research suggests that flexible and convenient return policies positively affect customer satisfaction and brand trust, thereby enhancing consumers' overall online shopping experiences and fostering platform loyalty (Gülmez et al., 2025). While flexible and free return policies may encourage online purchase behaviour (Hjort & Lantz, 2016), their long-term implications for businesses can vary. In particular, increasing return volumes can trigger reverse logistics processes, raising operational costs and generating environmental burdens (Kutlu, 2024). This underscores the critical need to design return processes that both support customer satisfaction and maintain operational efficiency for the sustainable success of e-commerce.

In the Turkish context, large-scale platforms such as Trendyol, Hepsiburada, and n11 operate in highly competitive environments with varying return policies and user support mechanisms. Trendyol holds a 27% market share, making it the leading e-commerce platform in Türkiye, followed by Hepsiburada with 17% and n11 with 9%, which justifies their selection for this study (Webtekno, 2025). Prior research highlights the need to examine the effects of return processes on customer satisfaction and repurchase intentions, specifically in Türkiye, as e-commerce logistics' customer service dimension has been reported to influence satisfaction and loyalty significantly (Kazancı & Bayarçelik, 2021). However, operational challenges such as delays, return rejections, refund processing issues, and customer service shortcomings continue to impact consumer experiences directly. Although Turkish legislation (e.g., the Consumer Protection Law and e-commerce regulations) secures return rights, the extent to which these regulations are implemented on platforms and reflected in user perceptions remains underexplored.

This study aims to address this gap by qualitatively analysing return process experiences on Turkish e-commerce platforms. Drawing on consumer reviews, the research systematically examines users' perceptions of return processes, the challenges they encounter, and their expectations. Employing a thematic descriptive content analysis approach, the study analyses user expressions obtained exclusively from the Şikayetvar platform to generate a code- and theme-based interpretation.

Both deductive and inductive coding approaches were applied in the data analysis, enabling a comprehensive evaluation of shared and platform-specific aspects of return processes across Trendyol, Hepsiburada, and n11. Through an in-depth examination of consumer experiences, the study seeks to develop a holistic understanding of how return processes affect customer satisfaction, trust, and platform loyalty. Furthermore, by highlighting platform-specific return dynamics and the central role of product-related issues in service disruptions, the research contributes to the literature on service failures and return management by demonstrating that return processes are not merely logistical events but integral service experiences that shape consumer perceptions. In this way, the study provides qualitative evidence to the academic literature while offering actionable insights for practitioners aiming to design customer-centric return policies.

Literature review

E-commerce and consumer experience

The growth of e-commerce has positioned the consumer experience at the centre of digital environments, significantly reshaping purchasing decision-making. Online platforms provide consumers with rapid access to information and the ability to compare options, while pre- and post-purchase interactions have become integral components of the overall consumer experience.

Consequently, understanding consumer experience in e-commerce is critical for firms' competitive advantage and customer satisfaction (Jothimani et al., 2023).

This transformation accelerated further with the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted consumers' in-store visits and prompted a rapid shift toward online shopping. During and after the pandemic, online shopping became a more attractive option due to its accessibility, time-saving benefits, and cost advantages. At the same time, firms increased investments in e-commerce infrastructure to adapt to changing consumer behaviours. Even after physical stores reopened, the persistence of online shopping habits underscored the need for businesses to consider e-commerce as a long-term, strategic channel (Ahmad et al., 2024).

The post-COVID-19 expansion of online shopping has not only generated quantitative growth but also qualitatively transformed consumers' expectations of digital channels, emphasising experience-oriented criteria. Intensified competitive pressures have compelled firms to move beyond product- and price-focused approaches, highlighting the importance of the quality and consistency of consumer interactions. Within this framework, how customer experience is defined and evaluated in digital channels has become an increasingly prominent area of scholarly inquiry (Dabija et al., 2024).

Research in this context indicates that online shopping behaviour cannot be fully explained by technological infrastructure and digital capabilities alone; psychological and cognitive factors, including trust, perceived risk, ease of use, and the quality of online information, also play a decisive role in consumer decision-making. Indeed, Hipólito et al. (2025) demonstrate that consumer trust in online shopping mitigates perceived risk, which, in turn, significantly enhances satisfaction with the online shopping experience.

These developments have necessitated that firms assess competitive advantage not only through product or price factors but also through the quality of customer experience offered on digital channels. In the literature, customer experience is conceptualised as a dynamic process shaped over time through multiple interactions rather than as a single touchpoint. Accordingly, the online customer experience is closely linked to the different stages of the customer journey and should be evaluated holistically (Siebert et al., 2020; Følstad & Kvale, 2018).

Within the customer journey, the pre-purchase and purchase stages are shaped by all touchpoints that influence information search, alternative evaluation, and decision-making. The post-purchase stage, in turn, encompasses product usage experiences, participation in brand communities, co-creation activities, and return and complaint processes (De Keyser et al., 2020). Additionally, the post-purchase stage includes the "loyalty loop," in which specific triggers can reinforce customer loyalty or redirect consumers back to the pre-purchase stage to reassess alternatives (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

In this context, as digital connectivity becomes increasingly pervasive, the deliberate and strategic design and management of online customer experiences are considered critical for firms to develop long-term customer relationships and secure sustainable competitive advantage (Koronaki et al., 2023).

E-service quality

In the literature, service quality (SQ) and electronic service quality (e-SQ) have been extensively examined, with many studies relying on the SERVQUAL and SERVPERF models developed by Parasuraman et al. (2005). Traditional service quality is typically defined in terms of human interactions and face-to-face experiences during service delivery. In contrast, e-service quality focuses on interactions between individuals and technology, evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of the online shopping process. In this regard, e-service quality provides a foundational conceptual framework for assessing the extent to which digital services meet consumer expectations (Pires et al., 2024).

Empirical studies in e-retailing indicate that perceived e-service quality has significant and direct effects on consumer satisfaction, trust, and repurchase intentions. In this context, the e-SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman et al. (2005) conceptualises e-service quality through the dimensions of reliability, ease of access, responsiveness, security, and personalisation, offering a systematic framework for evaluating online service experiences.

Within this framework, consumers' experiences during delivery and order fulfilment following an online purchase play a decisive role in shaping perceptions of e-service quality. The effectiveness of logistics and order fulfilment activities integrated into the online purchase process directly influences consumers' trust in the website and the reputation they ascribe to the platform. Indeed, in online retailing, trust is central to reducing perceived risk and fostering positive attitudes toward digital

platforms, while negative experiences in delivery and service processes have been shown to weaken both satisfaction and trust (Bandara et al., 2020; Aljohani, 2024).

Evaluating service quality in the context of online shopping is not limited to the timely and seamless delivery of products; it also encompasses post-purchase service processes such as returns, refunds, and complaint management, reflecting a holistic experience perspective. Within this scope, consumers' perceptions of the transparency of return processes, the adequacy of refund speed, and the effectiveness of problem-resolution mechanisms are considered integral components of e-service quality. The literature provides empirical evidence that these post-purchase service elements directly influence consumers' overall service quality perceptions and the online customer experience (Parasuraman et al., 2005; Collier & Bienstock, 2006; Holloway & Beatty, 2008).

Service failures and service recovery in e-commerce

In online retail, the technology-based nature of service delivery facilitates consumer experiences but also creates conditions for various service failures. The inability of consumers to physically see, touch, or try products in digital environments, particularly for categories such as clothing, footwear, and accessories, increases the risk of subjective mismatch and contributes to the high return rates that characterise these segments within the e-commerce ecosystem (Hong and Pavlou, 2014). These limitations heighten perceived risk and uncertainty during the purchase process, leading consumers to interpret service process failures more sensitively and negatively (Das and Kunja, 2024). Moreover, negative word of mouth spreads much more rapidly in online contexts (Sousa & Voss, 2009).

Within this framework, e-commerce service failures may manifest as delayed deliveries, damaged or incomplete products, disruptions in return and refund processes, and challenges in accessing customer service (Owusu et al., 2025). As a consequence, online product returns are often driven by post-purchase regret or product defects. The literature further emphasises that online return behaviour is not unidimensional but shaped by the interplay of multiple individual, situational, and contextual factors. Key determinants include the pursuit of product variety, intense competitive pressures, unmet consumer expectations, unethical business practices, and the influence of social groups and reference networks, all of which collectively shape online product return behaviour (Saarijärvi et al., 2017).

Return processes and consumer perceptions in e-commerce

Product returns, particularly in online marketplaces, are inevitable for businesses and are a costly process (Duong et al., 2022). In the literature, product returns are conceptualised as a reverse flow within the traditional supply chain, encompassing the movement of products back to retailers (Ambilkar et al., 2022). Within this framework, the return process plays a critical role in service failure recovery for online retailers. Effective management of product returns extends beyond a purely logistical function, enhancing customer satisfaction and strengthening repurchase intentions. Timely responses and appropriate compensation are among the key factors that mitigate the negative impact of service failures and transform adverse consumer experiences into positive ones (Jafarzadeh et al., 2021).

The effectiveness of a retailer's product exchange policy as a service recovery strategy significantly impacts consumer attitudes and behaviours. A positively perceived exchange policy can reinforce consumers repurchase intentions (Dailey & Ülkü, 2018). Furthermore, effective exchange policies can convert negative experiences into positive ones, fostering both customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kennedy & Kundu, 2022). Therefore, product returns should be regarded not only as an operational necessity but also as a strategic element that shapes consumer perceptions and can create competitive advantage. Flexible, consumer-oriented return policies reduce perceived risk during the purchase process, contributing to a positive corporate image and increasing consumers' likelihood of preferring the retailer (Rokonuzzaman et al.,2021). Additionally, instant refund practices, as a complementary aspect of the return process, improve overall consumer satisfaction and positively influence behavioural outcomes, such as loyalty and word-of-mouth communication (Martínez-López et al., 2022). Although return processes may not directly generate profit, studies indicate that consumers who engage in returns often provide higher long-term profitability for businesses than those who do not repurchase due to dissatisfaction (Ketzenberg et al., 2020).

Empirical studies on consumer experience and return processes in Turkish e-commerce platforms

The rapid growth of the e-commerce market in Türkiye has prompted increased academic attention to consumer experiences. However, comprehensive qualitative research specifically addressing return processes remains limited. Relevant studies on this topic are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Empirical Studies on Consumer Experience and Return Processes in Turkish E-Commerce Platforms

Author(s) / Year	Article Title	Key Findings (Return Reasons and Scope)
Atmaca & Tolon (2025)	Post-Purchase Cognitive Dissonance and Return Intention in Online Impulse Buying	Cognitive dissonance (regret) following impulse purchases is a primary driver of return intentions, with return rates increasing particularly for high-priced products when expectations are unmet.
Gülmez et al., (2025)	Online Product Returns: Strategic Advantages for Brands	Flexible and transparent return policies enhance consumer motivation, satisfaction, and loyalty, while lenient return procedures provide strategic competitive advantages.
Turgut (2024)	Evaluating Customer Complaints Related to Final Delivery by Courier Companies in E-Commerce	Most complaints concern lost or damaged products, originating from the complexity of warehouse and distribution operations; digitalisation and trained personnel are suggested as solutions.
Altın & Kırçova (2024)	Consumers' Awareness of Returns and Their Environmental, Social, and Economic Impacts in E-Commerce	Returns mainly occur due to quality/size mismatches and bracketing; consumer awareness and process optimisation are recommended to mitigate environmental and economic impacts.
Kızılırmak (2023)	Examining Courier Services on a Third-Party Platform in Terms of Customer Satisfaction	Within service quality, complaints are concentrated around delivery times, lost shipments, and damaged packages/products.
Karadağ & Gültekin (2023)	The Effect of Reverse Logistics on Repurchasing Intention in Electronic Commerce and the Mediating Role of the Perceived Risk Variable	Fast, transparent, and consumer-friendly return and reverse logistics practices increase customer trust and positively influence repurchase intention; simplified processes and skilled personnel are emphasised.
Kava & Börühan (2022)	The Role of Return Management in Omni-Channel Retailing	Perceived risk, customer trust, return flexibility, and channel integration affect return satisfaction, with prior service experiences strengthening this effect.
Kazancı & Bayarçelik (2021)	Effects of E-Commerce Logistics on Customer Satisfaction and Repurchase Intention: The COVID-19 Global Pandemic	The primary causes of returns are missing, damaged, or incorrect products; self-service applications and locker delivery methods are suggested as solutions to facilitate the return process.
Güllü & Tarhan (2021)	Post-Sales Services and Their Relationship with Consumers' Repurchase Intentions: An Application in the E-Retail Sector	Easy return and warranty processes enhance customer satisfaction and increase consumers' likelihood of repurchasing.
Öztürk & Dündar (2020)	The Effect of Online Shopping Services on Customer Satisfaction: The Mediation Role of Return Management	Effective return management, conducted quickly, easily, and transparently, increases customer satisfaction and underscores the mediating role of post-sales services in trust and loyalty.
Engin (2011)	Regret in the Consumer Decision-Making Process and the Applicability of Flexible Return Policies in Türkiye: A Study on the Ready-to-Wear Sector	Price-based economic regret and poorly timed purchases are major reasons for returns; consumers who shop impulsively have the highest return rates.

Source: Created by the author.

An analysis of the studies summarised in Table 1 indicates that product returns in online shopping are influenced by both seller-related and logistics/courier-related factors. Seller-related factors include quality and size mismatches, missing or damaged product deliveries, and bracketing behaviour, while psychological factors such as cognitive dissonance and price-based regret also shape consumer behaviour. Managing return processes in a flexible, transparent, fast, and consumer-friendly manner, along with digitalisation and the deployment of skilled personnel, can mitigate the effects of both seller- and logistics-related issues, enhancing customer satisfaction, trust, and repurchase intention. Additionally, delivery times and the complexity of distribution processes contribute to logistics-related complaints, whereas prior service experiences and channel integration positively influence return satisfaction.

Research gap and contribution

A review of the existing literature reveals that, while there are studies on customer experience and service quality in Turkish e-commerce platforms (see Table 1), there is a lack of empirical research specifically focusing on product return processes and examining these processes comparatively across different marketplace platforms such as Trendyol, Hepsiburada, and n11 using qualitative methods. This comparative approach enables a deeper understanding of inter-platform differences in service quality, return process transparency, and overall consumer experience, providing insights into consumer perceptions, satisfaction, and loyalty. This study addresses this gap by conducting an in-depth qualitative content analysis of online consumer feedback and experiences, focusing on themes such as return initiation, product-related reasons, seller responsibility, logistics and courier experience, and perceived loss of trust or satisfaction. By doing so, it offers a comparative assessment of return

processes at Trendyol, Hepsiburada, and n11 in terms of consumer perceptions, service quality, and satisfaction levels, thereby filling a critical gap in the current literature.

Research Aim and Questions

This study aims to qualitatively examine consumer experiences with return processes on Türkiye's leading e-commerce platforms—Trendyol, Hepsiburada, and n11—and to assess how these experiences influence consumer trust, satisfaction, and platform loyalty. By conducting a detailed analysis of user comments and feedback, the study seeks to uncover not only return behaviours but also consumer perceptions and motivations, providing actionable insights for both academic literature and industry practice.

Research Questions:

1-What are the most common issues consumers face during the return process on Turkish e- commerce platforms?

2- Into which thematic categories can these return-related issues be classified?

3- Are there platform-specific differences in return process experiences across Trendyol, Hepsiburada, and n11?

4- How do consumers perceive the return process, and how are these perceptions related to their trust and satisfaction?

Methodology

This study is structured within a qualitative descriptive research design, aiming to explore and systematically describe consumer complaints related to e-commerce return processes. Within this qualitative framework, descriptive content analysis is employed to analyse textual data from the Şikayetvar platform. Descriptive content analysis enables a systematic, in-depth, and interpretive examination of textual data by identifying themes and subcategories, thereby facilitating the derivation of meaningful insights (Ültay et al., 2021).

The data for this study were collected from consumer comments on Trendyol, Hepsiburada, and n11, primarily sourced from the Şikayetvar platform. Web scraping techniques were employed to automatically collect the data, followed by manual cleaning procedures to remove irrelevant, incomplete, or duplicate entries. This step is critical for ensuring high-quality qualitative data and producing an analysis-ready dataset (Rahm & Do, 2000). Since the data analysed in this study consist of publicly available consumer comments and do not involve direct interaction with human subjects or the disclosure of personally identifiable information, this study does not require an ethical committee approval. Furthermore, all data were anonymised during the analysis process to uphold research ethics and protect consumer privacy.

For the analysis, the qualitative data analysis software Taguette was used to systematically code the texts, categorise them, and generate themes (Rampin & Rampin, 2021). This tool supports the organisation of core content analysis constructs—codes, categories, and themes—facilitating a structured, rigorous examination of qualitative data. Both deductive and inductive coding methods were applied in the analysis of the data. In the literature, these approaches are recognised as key coding strategies in qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Deductive coding assigns codes based on pre-established themes derived from the literature, whereas inductive coding identifies new themes and concepts emerging directly from the data. The coding process was conducted by a single researcher, with theme development based on the researcher's interpretation. Although a single researcher conducted the coding and theme development, all decisions were systematically documented, and continuous comparisons ensured consistency and trustworthiness. To ensure methodological rigour, the coding and theme development were guided by a systematic, transparent, and iterative analytical framework. The analysis was carried out systematically using both deductive and inductive strategies, ensuring data integrity and the consistency of themes. Data collection and coding continued until thematic repetition was observed and no substantially new codes emerged, indicating data saturation. A purposive sample of 115 comments from each platform was selected, resulting in a total of 345 comments collected over six months from May 2025 to October 2025. This six-month time frame was deliberately chosen to capture a sufficient volume and diversity of consumer complaints, allow recurring patterns to emerge, and minimise the effect of short-term or event-based fluctuations in return-related experiences. The sample size of 115 per platform was determined to provide an optimal balance between analytical depth and breadth, ensuring

the reliability and comprehensiveness of the thematic analysis. The main themes presented in Table 2 are grounded in e-service quality and online service recovery frameworks (Parasuraman et al., 2005). Subthemes were developed inductively by the researcher, based on the similarities and relationships among codes derived from participant data. To ensure transparency in the coding process and to demonstrate the data-driven nature of the themes, each subtheme is supported with representative participant quotes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles et al., 2014). Methodologically, this structure provides a roadmap for classifying and analysing the raw data collected from Trendyol, Hepsiburada, and n11. In this context, the table aims to facilitate a clear and systematic presentation of the qualitative content analysis process.

Table 2: Code–Theme Matrix of Return Process Experiences on E-Commerce Platforms in Türkiye

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Code	Sample Participant Statement	Description / Comment
Return Process Initiation	System and Communication Issues	Missing system or guidance	"My return request was not approved."	Indicates failure in the return request due to system or guidance issues; negatively affects user experience and customer satisfaction.
	Unclear Procedure	Complex or ambiguous return procedures	"I didn't know who to contact."	Lack of transparency in the process harms user experience and reduces perceived trust.
Shipping and Logistics Experience	Item Not Picked Up / Lost	Logistic failure and information gap	"I returned the package, but it doesn't appear in the system."	Reflects logistical issues and communication gaps; reduces satisfaction with the return process.
	Shipping Fee Issue	Unexpected charges	"It said free returns, but they charged me."	Shows unexpected fees during returns; negatively affects fairness and trust perception.
Seller Responsibility	Seller Rejection	Return rejected by seller	"The seller did not accept my return request."	Indicates lack of trust in seller–platform interaction; negatively impacts consumer trust and platform loyalty.
Product-Related Reasons	Damaged Product	Return due to product quality	"The product arrived broken, so I requested a return."	Physical defects that trigger returns directly affect customer satisfaction.
	Wrong Product	Operational error	"I received a different model than I ordered."	Demonstrates order mistakes and operational errors; may reduce trust and satisfaction.
Refund	Delayed Payment	Payment delay	"My refund hasn't been processed for 3 weeks."	Shows a delay in refund processing, leading to dissatisfaction and a loss of trust.
	Incomplete Refund	Partial refund	"A deduction was made; the refunded amount was less than expected."	Undermines consumer fairness perception and causes trust issues.
Trust and Satisfaction	Loss of Trust	Loss of trust due to a negative return experience	"I will never shop on this site again."	Indicates that negative return experiences reduce consumer loyalty and platform attachment.

Source: Adapted from Parasuraman et al. (2005).

In this study, the code–theme structure developed to systematically analyse consumer experiences of the return process on e-commerce platforms is grounded in a comprehensive analytical approach that integrates theoretical and data-driven perspectives. The main themes were determined deductively, guided by the widely accepted E-S-QUAL model, which defines dimensions of electronic service quality, and by studies in e-retailing that conceptualise service quality through process, outcome, and recovery dimensions (Parasuraman et al., 2005; Collier & Bienstock, 2006).

Within this framework, the main themes—including return process initiation, shipping and logistics experience, seller responsibility, product-related reasons, refunds, and trust and satisfaction—were aligned with the relevant dimensions of e-service quality. In contrast, sub-themes and codes were developed inductively by identifying recurring meaning patterns in participants' statements during the qualitative content analysis. The coding and thematic extraction were conducted in accordance with the principles of thematic analysis, ensuring that participant experiences were structured in a manner that was both consistent with the theoretical literature and sensitive to empirical data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Analysis and findings

In this section, consumer complaints regarding Trendyol, obtained from the Şikayetvar platform, were classified at both the main theme and sub-theme levels and analysed using frequency and percentage distributions. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of Consumer Complaints Regarding Trendyol by Theme and Sub-Theme, Derived from the Şikayetvar Platform

Main Theme	n (%)	Sub-Theme	n (%)
Loss of Trust / Satisfaction	15 (13.05)	Customer Service Indifference	6 (5.22)
		Authority Exceeded	9 (7.83)
Shipping & Logistics Experience	15 (13.05)	Package Not Picked Up / Lost	10 (8.70)
		Delayed Shipment	5 (4.35)
Seller Responsibility	6 (5.22)	Seller Refusal	6 (5.22)
Product-Related Reasons	74 (64.35)	Missing Product	9 (7.83)
		Damaged Product	43 (37.39)
		Wrong Product	22 (19.13)
Return Process Initiation	5 (4.35)	System & Communication Issues	5 (4.35)
Total	**115 (100.00)**		**115 (100.00)**

As shown in Table 3, consumer complaints on Trendyol are predominantly concentrated under the Product-Related Reasons main theme (64.35%; n = 74). Within this theme, damaged products emerge as the most prominent sub-theme (37.39%; n = 43), indicating that seller-related quality and packaging issues play a central role in shaping the consumer experience. Additionally, complaints about incorrect products (19.13%; n = 22) and missing products (7.83%; n = 9) indicate structural deficiencies in order accuracy and supply chain processes. Following product-related issues, both the Loss of Trust / Satisfaction and Shipping & Logistics Experience themes are notable, accounting for 13.05% (n = 15) of complaints each. Perceptions of customer service indifference and authority overreach largely shape trust-related concerns. At the same time, logistics-related complaints are primarily focused on packages not being picked up, lost packages, and delays.

Although the Seller Responsibility (5.22%; n = 6) and Return Process Initiation (4.35%; n = 5) themes represent comparatively lower proportions, system and communication issues during the return process highlight the critical importance of post-purchase services in determining overall consumer satisfaction. To examine whether similar complaint patterns emerge on a different e-commerce platform, Table 4 presents the distribution of themes and subthemes in consumer complaints related to Hepsiburada.

Table 4: Theme and Sub-Theme Distribution of Consumer Complaints Regarding Hepsiburada from the Şikayetvar Platform

Main Theme	Main Theme n (%)	Sub-Theme	Sub-Theme n (%)
Loss of Trust / Satisfaction	6 (5.22)	Customer service indifference	6 (5.22)
Shipping & Logistics Experience	9 (7.83)	Shipping delay	9 (7.83)
Refund Issues	11 (9.57)	Refund not processed	11 (9.57)
Product-Related Reasons	76 (66.09)	Low-quality product	8 (6.96)
		Damaged product (seller-related)	56 (48.70)
		Wrong product	12 (10.43)
Return Process Initiation	13 (11.30)	System or communication issues	13 (11.30)
Total	115 (100.00)		115 (100.00)

As shown in Table 4, consumer complaints regarding the Hepsiburada platform are largely concentrated under the Product-Related Issues main theme (66.09%; n = 76). Within this theme, seller-related defective products emerge as the most prominent issue (48.70%; n = 56), indicating significant shortcomings in quality control and delivery processes. In addition, incorrect product shipments (10.43%; n = 12) and low-quality products (6.96%; n = 8) constitute other notable sub-themes that negatively affect consumer satisfaction. Following product-related issues, the Return Process Initiation (11.30%; n = 13) and Refund (9.57%; n = 11) themes are noteworthy, suggesting that consumers encounter systemic and communication-related challenges, particularly during post-purchase return and refund stages. Conversely, Shipping and Logistics Experience (7.83%; n = 9) and Trust/Satisfaction Loss (5.22%; n = 6) account for lower proportions; however, shipping delays and perceived inattentiveness of customer service clearly demonstrate the critical role of service quality in shaping the overall consumer experience. The consumer complaints identified through content analysis for n11 are summarised in Table 5, presenting frequency and percentage values at both the main theme and sub-theme levels.

Table 5: Theme and Sub-Theme Distribution of Consumer Complaints Regarding n11, Based on Data from the Şikayetvar Platform

Main Theme	n (%)	Sub-Theme	n (%)
Shipping and Logistics Experience	20 (17.39)	Package not picked up / lost	10 (8.70)
		Delivery of a damaged product	10 (8.70)
Seller Responsibility	8 (6.96)	Seller rejection	8 (6.96)
Product-Related Issues	79 (68.70)	Low-quality product	5 (4.35)
		Missing items	5 (4.35)
		Defective products	57 (49.57)
		Incorrect products	14 (12.17)
Return Process Initiation	8 (6.96)	System and communication issues	8 (6.96)
Total	115 (100.00)		115 (100.00)

An examination of Table 5 indicates that the majority of consumer complaints are concentrated under the main theme of Product-Related Issues (68.70%; n = 79). Within this theme, the most prominent sub-theme is defective product delivery (49.57%; n = 57), highlighting significant shortcomings in seller-related packaging, quality control, and shipping processes. Additionally, sub-themes such as incorrect product delivery (12.17%; n = 14), low-quality product (4.35%; n = 5), and missing items (4.35%; n = 5) suggest that consumers' product expectations were not met and that notable discrepancies exist between the pre-purchase information and the delivered products. These findings clearly indicate that product-related issues are a primary determinant of consumer dissatisfaction. Following product-related issues, the main theme of Shipping and Logistics Experience (17.39%; n = 20) is also notable. Within this category, packages not picked up or lost (8.70%; n = 10) and delivery of damaged products (8.70%; n = 10) are equally prominent, pointing to significant vulnerabilities in the reliability of logistics processes. Furthermore, the sub-themes of Seller Responsibility (6.96%; n = 8), particularly seller rejection of returns or requests, and Return Process Initiation (6.96%; n = 8), including system and communication issues, indicate that consumer–platform–seller interactions during post-purchase processes are not managed effectively. These results suggest that consumer experience is not solely determined by product quality; logistics, return management, and seller behaviour also play a critical role in shaping perceived service quality and trust. To illustrate the similarities and differences in consumer complaints across the three e-commerce platforms, the comparative analysis results at the main theme and sub-theme levels are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Comparative Analysis of Consumer Complaints by Theme and Sub-Theme Across Trendyol, Hepsiburada, and n11 Platforms

Comparison Criterion / Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Differences Across Trendyol, Hepsiburada, and n11 Platforms	Similarities Across Trendyol, Hepsiburada, and n11 Platforms
Return Process Initiation	System and/or Communication Issues	On Hepsiburada, 11.30% of complaints are related to unclear procedures and application delays; on Trendyol, 4.35% stem from insufficient user guidance; on n11, 6.96% involve delays in request approval.	All three platforms show that users encounter systemic and procedural ambiguities when initiating returns.
Shipping and Logistics	Lost, delayed, and/or damaged delivery	Trendyol: 13.05% lost/uncollected shipments; Hepsiburada: 7.83% delays; n11: 17.39% damaged deliveries.	Logistics issues are a common and major factor affecting user satisfaction across all platforms.
Seller Responsibility	Seller rejection of return requests	Trendyol: 5.22%, n11: 6.96%; on Hepsiburada, rejections are relatively rare.	While seller-initiated return rejections occur on all platforms, the frequency and platform response differ.
Product Issues	Damaged, incorrect, and/or missing products	Trendyol: 64.35% damaged/incorrect; Hepsiburada: 66.09%; n11: 68.70%; on Hepsiburada, quality and size mismatches are more prominent, whereas on n11, missing items stand out.	Product defects and incorrect deliveries are the most frequent complaint category across all three platforms.
Refunds	Delayed and/or incomplete refund	Hepsiburada: 9.57%; Trendyol and n11 report negligible complaints.	Refund issues, particularly on Hepsiburada, can negatively affect user satisfaction across all platforms.
Trust and Satisfaction	Loss of trust and/or avoidance of repeat purchases	Trendyol: 13.05%; Hepsiburada: 5.22%; n11: none reported.	Post-negative experiences, trust loss is evident across all platforms, particularly on Trendyol.

The analysis results in Table 6 reveal both inter-platform differences and common trends in user complaints across Trendyol, Hepsiburada, and n11. Product defects and incorrect deliveries (64–69%) are the most prominent issues on all three platforms, with missing items particularly notable on n11 and quality/size mismatches more pronounced on Hepsiburada. Complaints related to shipping and logistics vary across platforms: lost packages on Trendyol (13.05%), delivery delays on Hepsiburada (7.83%), and damaged shipments on n11 (17.39%) negatively impact user experiences. Regarding return initiation, Hepsiburada has a higher complaint rate (11.30%) than Trendyol (4.35%) and n11 (6.96%); however, systemic and procedural ambiguities are a shared issue across all platforms. Seller-initiated return rejections are more prominent for Trendyol (5.22%) and n11 (6.96%) users, while this issue is minimal on Hepsiburada. Refund issues are primarily significant on Hepsiburada (9.57%), whereas trust and satisfaction losses are more evident among Trendyol (13.05%) and Hepsiburada (5.22%) users.

Conclusion

This study examined consumer complaints on Türkiye's leading e-commerce platforms—Trendyol, Hepsiburada, and n11—within the context of return processes, thereby revealing the structural dynamics of service failures on digital platforms. The findings indicate that product-related issues are the most common trigger of return intentions; 64–69% of consumers initiated a return due to damaged, missing, or incorrect products. This result aligns with the findings of Kazancı and Bayarçelik (2021), who identified product defects as the primary source of dissatisfaction in e-commerce logistics. Therefore, it can be argued that seller oversight and product quality control processes in Türkiye have yet to meet the desired standards, and, despite digitalisation, the delivered physical output does not fully conform to the promised specifications. This suggests that operational practices and managerial decisions, such as packaging standards and logistics coordination, play a critical role in shaping customer perceptions and driving return behaviour.

Suggestions for the results and discussion section

Examining inter-platform differences reveals a distinct "crisis profile" for each marketplace. On Trendyol, the main issue in the return process is lost packages: 13.05% of consumers experienced trust issues and avoided repeat purchases as a result. On Hepsiburada, procedural delays in initiating returns (11.30%) and financial complications during the refund stage (9.57%) stand out as the primary issues distinguishing it from other platforms. For n11, damaged deliveries (17.39%) resulting from logistics processes are the most prominent concern. These findings corroborate Turgut's (2024) and Kızılırmak's (2023) observations regarding operational complexities in shipping services and indicate that platform-specific differences largely stem from managerial decisions and operational practices. Managers should consider these platform-specific disruptions when designing return processes, implementing proactive monitoring, and training staff to reduce operational errors and enhance customer trust.

To improve Türkiye's e-commerce return ecosystem, all platforms must position return policies not merely as operational burdens but, as emphasised by Gülmez et al. (2025), as strategic tools for fostering consumer loyalty. To minimise product-related issues, seller oversight should be based not only on sales volume but also on return rates. Moreover, as noted by Altın and Kırçova (2024), considering the negative environmental and economic impacts of returns, consumer awareness and preventive measures against mispurchases should be prioritised. Within this framework, technological investments suggested in the literature—such as augmented reality applications or precise sizing charts to reduce returns due to quality and size mismatches (and thereby carbon emissions)—should be widely implemented by digital platforms as a strategic imperative for both operational efficiency and social responsibility. This highlights the practical significance of understanding platform-specific complaints and aligning operational and strategic decisions to minimise disruptions.

Theoretical contributions

This study makes a significant theoretical contribution to the literature on service failures and service recovery by introducing the concept of "platform-specific disruption profiles." While many studies in the literature treat e-commerce returns within a general framework, this research empirically demonstrates how complaints vary and evolve across the business models of digital platforms (e.g., seller-centric vs logistics-focused). By providing evidence of the direct relationship between product defects and return processes, the study extends operationally oriented theories, such as those proposed by Kazancı and Bayarçelik (2021), to incorporate consumer behaviour and trust-loss perspectives. Consequently, the return process is theoretically conceptualised not merely as a logistical outcome but as an integrated service experience, offering a novel lens to the e-commerce literature. This framework explicitly addresses the empirical gap regarding platform-specific service disruptions, differentiating it from generalised approaches in prior literature.

Practical implications

The findings provide actionable insights for digital platform managers. For Trendyol, it is recommended to modernise tracking systems to reduce loss rates in the logistics network and to integrate loyalty programs into the return experience to mitigate trust erosion. Hepsiburada could address platform-specific issues by shortening the time for financial refunds and increasing transparency in its refund notification system. For n11, the focus should be on monitoring sellers' packaging standards to reduce the incidence of damaged products. More broadly, within the Turkish e-commerce ecosystem, rapid reverse logistics practices—such as the "easy return button" and "transparent process tracking" suggested by Karadağ and Gültekin (2023)—can enhance the customer experience and strengthen platform trust. Managers are encouraged to adopt differentiated strategies that consider platform-specific complaint profiles to improve operational efficiency, customer satisfaction, and loyalty.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is that the data were collected exclusively from a third-party complaint platform within a specific time frame, capturing only the voices of dissatisfied users and excluding a broader segment of consumers who were satisfied with the return process or chose not to file complaints. Additionally, the analysis did not differentiate by product category (e.g., apparel, electronics, cosmetics), limiting the ability to examine sector-specific variations in return reasons. Another methodological limitation is that coding and theme development were conducted by a single researcher, which may reduce inter-coder reliability. To enhance transparency and consistency, all coding decisions were systematically documented, and a subset of the data was reviewed to verify consistency.

Future research

These limitations point to avenues for future research. Comparative analyses across different product groups could provide deeper and more comprehensive insights into return behaviours. Furthermore, it is recommended that the qualitative findings, particularly the platform-specific disruption profiles identified in this study, be validated and generalised using quantitative methods such as surveys or structural equation modelling.

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