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## Enhancing Retail Brand Image: A Qualitative Study of Consumer Perception and Return Policy Implementation at PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk Bogor Branch

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### ABSTRACT

The rapid development of the retail industry has intensified competition among companies in delivering high-quality services to consumers. One important aspect of service quality in the retail sector is the implementation of return policies that guarantee consumer rights when products do not meet expectations. Return policies are considered an essential part of after-sales service because they reduce consumer risk and increase trust in the company. This study aims to analyze consumer perceptions and the implementation of return policies in shaping the brand image of PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk Bogor Branch. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving employees responsible for managing return processes. The results indicate that consumer perceptions toward return policies are influenced by the clarity of procedures, ease of the return process, and employee professionalism in handling consumer complaints. Furthermore, the effective implementation of return policies contributes positively to strengthening brand image and increasing consumer trust toward the company. Therefore, return policies not only function as operational procedures but also as strategic tools in improving customer satisfaction and maintaining company reputation in the retail industry.

**Keywords:** Return Policy, Consumer Perception, Brand Image, Retail Service

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The retail industry has experienced significant development in recent years as consumer demand for convenience, accessibility, and product variety continues to increase. Retail companies are required to provide not only quality products but also reliable services that ensure customer satisfaction. In a competitive retail environment, service quality has become one of the key factors that determine a company's ability to maintain consumer loyalty and long-term relationships with customers.

Customer satisfaction is influenced by various factors, including service quality, product quality, and company policies related to consumer protection. One of the policies that play an important role in ensuring consumer satisfaction is the return policy. Return policy refers to the regulations established by companies that allow consumers to return or exchange purchased products under certain conditions. According to (Rokonuzzaman et al., 2021), return policy leniency can significantly influence consumer purchase decisions because it reduces the perceived risk associated with purchasing products.

Consumers often consider the possibility of product defects, incorrect purchases, or dissatisfaction with the product when making purchasing decisions. When companies

provide flexible and transparent return policies, consumers feel more secure and confident in making purchases. In this regard, return policies function as a form of consumer protection that enhances trust between companies and customers. Research conducted by Sahgira et al., (2025) shows that return policy is one of the factors that influence repurchase intention because it provides assurance and reduces perceived risk for consumers.

In addition to return policies, consumer perception also plays an important role in shaping consumer behavior. Consumer perception refers to how individuals interpret and evaluate the services provided by a company. Positive consumer perceptions can lead to higher levels of satisfaction and loyalty. According to Herawaty (2022), consumer perceptions regarding service convenience and brand image significantly influence customer satisfaction in retail businesses.

Retail companies must also maintain a positive brand image in order to remain competitive in the market. Brand image refers to the perception that consumers have about a particular brand based on their experiences and interactions with the company. A strong brand image can influence purchasing decisions and increase consumer trust. Research conducted by Buchory & Putra (2024) indicates that brand image and brand trust have a significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions.

PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk, widely known through its Alfamart retail network, is one of the largest retail companies in Indonesia. The company operates thousands of retail outlets across the country and has established a strong presence in the Indonesian retail market. As a major retail company, PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk must ensure that its services meet consumer expectations.

One of the services provided by Alfamart is the implementation of return policies that allow consumers to return or exchange products under certain conditions. The effectiveness of this policy depends on how it is implemented and how consumers perceive the fairness and convenience of the return process. According to (Anggapratama & Irnawati, 2023), service convenience plays a significant role in shaping customer satisfaction because consumers prefer services that are simple and easy to access.

Previous studies have also highlighted the importance of brand image in influencing consumer behavior. Research conducted by Reynaldi & Nuvriasari (2024) shows that brand image and consumer perception significantly influence purchasing decisions. Similarly, Hariasih et al., (2024) explain that brand image, product quality, and service quality influence consumer purchase intention.

Based on the above considerations, it is important to analyze how consumer perceptions and the implementation of return policies influence brand image in retail companies. Therefore, this research aims to analyze consumer perceptions and the implementation of return policies in shaping the brand image of PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk Bogor Branch.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Return Policy***

Return policy is a company regulation that allows consumers to return or exchange purchased products under certain conditions. Return policies are implemented to protect consumers and maintain trust between companies and customers. According to Rokonzaman et al. (2021), return policy leniency can influence consumer purchase decisions because it reduces the perceived risk associated with purchasing products.

Return policies also play a role in maintaining customer satisfaction and loyalty. Research conducted by Sahgira et al., (2025) indicates that return policy fairness and transparency can increase consumer trust and encourage repurchase intentions.

In retail operations, return policies also affect inventory management and operational efficiency. Fauzan & Puspanikan (2025) explain that effective return management requires coordination between operational systems, human resources, and infrastructure to ensure that returned products are handled properly.

### ***Consumer Perception***

Consumer perception refers to the process through which consumers interpret information and experiences related to products or services provided by a company. Perception plays a crucial role in influencing consumer behavior because it determines how consumers evaluate and respond to marketing stimuli. According to (Herawaty, 2022), consumer perception toward service quality and brand image can significantly influence customer satisfaction and purchasing decisions.

Consumer perception is often influenced by cognitive and affective factors. Cognitive factors involve consumers' rational evaluations of products or services, while affective factors involve emotional responses to service experiences. Wiśniewska et al., (2025) explains that cognitive and affective processes are closely related to consumer decision-making because emotional experiences can influence consumer attitudes toward brands.

### ***Brand Image***

Brand image refers to the perception that consumers have about a brand based on their experiences and interactions with the company. A strong brand image can increase consumer trust and influence purchasing behavior. According to Buchory & Putra (2024), brand image and brand trust have a significant influence on purchasing decisions.

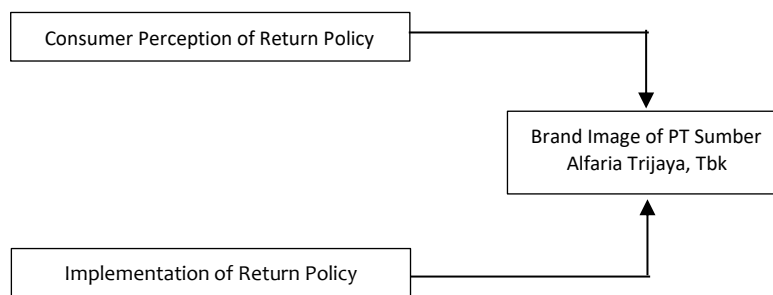
Research conducted by Reynaldi & Nuvriasari (2024) also shows that brand image and consumer perception influence consumer purchasing decisions. Companies that consistently provide high-quality services are more likely to develop positive brand images. Similarly, Hariasih et al., (2024) explain that brand image, product quality, and service quality significantly influence consumer purchase intention.

### **Retail Service**

The relationship between company policies and consumer behavior can be explained through the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model. According to Shamim et al., (2024), environmental stimuli such as marketing strategies or company policies influence consumers' internal psychological states and subsequently affect behavioral responses. In the context of this research, return policy functions as a stimulus that influences consumer perceptions and emotions. These perceptions then influence consumers' evaluations of the company's brand image.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Based on the theoretical review and previous studies, this research develops a conceptual framework that illustrates the relationship between consumer perception of return policy, the implementation of return policy, and the formation of brand image at PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk Bogor Branch. The conceptual framework of this study is presented in Figure below.



**Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study illustrates the relationship between consumer perception of return policy, implementation of return policy, and brand image of PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk. Consumer perception of return policy refers to how customers evaluate the fairness, convenience, and transparency of the return procedures provided by the company. Positive consumer perceptions toward return policies can increase trust and satisfaction with the company. Meanwhile, the implementation of return policy represents how the company applies the return procedures in practice, including employee responsiveness, adherence to standard operating procedures, and efficiency in handling returned products.

Effective implementation of return policies can improve service quality and strengthen customer confidence. Both consumer perception and implementation of return policy are expected to influence the brand image of PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk, which reflects the overall perception and reputation of the company in the minds of consumers. Therefore, the framework suggests that better consumer perceptions and effective implementation of return policies will contribute to strengthening the company's brand image.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a case study design. Qualitative research is suitable for examining social phenomena that require in-depth understanding of human experiences, behaviors, and perceptions. In this study, the qualitative approach is used to explore how return policies are implemented and how consumers perceive these policies in relation to the formation of brand image in PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk Bogor Branch.

Qualitative research allows researchers to obtain detailed insights into the experiences of participants and the operational practices of organizations. The focus of qualitative research is not only to measure relationships between variables but also to understand how and why certain phenomena occur in a particular context. According to Hafizah et al., (2025) , qualitative research relies on primary data obtained directly from research participants and emphasizes the interpretation of social phenomena through interviews, observations, and documentation.

The case study approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to examine a specific organizational phenomenon in detail. The phenomenon examined in this research is the implementation of return policies in PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk Bogor Branch and how these policies influence consumer perceptions and brand image formation.

The informants in this study consisted of employees directly involved in the return management process at PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk Bogor Branch. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, which allows researchers to choose participants based on their knowledge and experience related to the research topic. The participants included warehouse staff, operational supervisors, and employees responsible for handling product returns. Data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through interviews and observations, while secondary data were obtained from company documents, operational reports, and relevant literature related to consumer perception, return policy, and brand image.

Data collection in this research was conducted using three main techniques: interviews, observations, and document analysis. Interviews were carried out to obtain detailed information regarding the experiences and perspectives of employees involved in the return management process. Semi-structured interviews were used to allow flexibility in exploring participants' responses, focusing on return procedures, operational challenges, and the impact of return policies on consumer satisfaction and brand image. In addition, observations were conducted to understand the operational processes related to return management and to examine how employees handle returned products in practice.

Document analysis was also conducted by reviewing company policies, standard operating procedures (SOP), return reports, and inventory records to support the

research findings (Hafizah et al., 2025). The collected data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques. The analysis process involved organizing, interpreting, and categorizing the data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. The analysis was conducted through several stages, including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

During the data reduction stage, relevant information related to consumer perception, return policy implementation, and brand image formation was selected and organized. The data were then presented descriptively to identify patterns and relationships within the findings, which formed the basis for drawing research conclusions

#### **4. RESULTS**

##### ***Overview of the Research Object***

PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk is one of the largest retail companies in Indonesia that operates the Alfamart retail chain. The company has established a wide distribution network that supports the availability of products across thousands of retail outlets. The distribution center plays a crucial role in ensuring efficient logistics operations, including product distribution, inventory management, and return management. The return management process involves receiving returned products from retail outlets, verifying product conditions, and determining appropriate actions such as product replacement or disposal.

##### ***Consumer Perception Toward Return Policies***

Based on interviews conducted with employees and observations of operational activities, the research findings indicate that consumer perceptions toward return policies are influenced by several factors, including the clarity of procedures, ease of return processes, and employee professionalism.

Consumers tend to perceive return policies positively when the procedures are clearly communicated and easy to follow. The availability of clear guidelines regarding return conditions helps consumers understand their rights and responsibilities when returning products.

This finding supports the argument presented by Sahgira et al., (2025), who state that return policy transparency can increase consumer trust and encourage repurchase intentions. When consumers feel that their interests are protected by company policies, they are more likely to continue purchasing products from the company.

##### ***Implementation of Return Policies***

The implementation of return policies at PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk Bogor Branch generally follows the company's standard operating procedures. The return process typically involves several stages, including verification of purchase receipts, inspection of product conditions, and approval by authorized personnel.

Employees responsible for handling returned products must ensure that the products meet the return criteria specified by the company. These criteria include the condition of the product, the time limit for returns, and the availability of proof of purchase.

However, the research also found that certain operational challenges may arise during the implementation of return policies. These challenges include differences in employee experience, workload pressure, and variations in customer situations.

These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Fauzan & Puspanikan (2025), which identified operational factors such as human resources, system organization, and infrastructure as important determinants of return process efficiency.

#### ***Return Policy and Customer Satisfaction***

The research findings indicate that return policies contribute to customer satisfaction when implemented effectively. Consumers who experience smooth and efficient return processes tend to have positive perceptions toward the company.

Service convenience also plays an important role in shaping customer satisfaction. According to Anggapratama & Inawati (2023), service convenience significantly influences customer satisfaction because consumers prefer services that are simple and easy to access. When companies provide convenient and transparent return policies, consumers feel more confident in their purchasing decisions.

#### ***Return Policy and Brand Image***

The research findings also indicate that return policies contribute to the formation of brand image. Consumers who perceive return policies as fair and convenient tend to develop positive attitudes toward the brand.

This finding supports the study conducted by Reynaldi & Nuvriasari (2024), which found that brand image and consumer perception significantly influence purchasing decisions.

Similarly, Hariasih et al., (2024) explain that brand image is influenced by service quality and consumer experiences. Positive service experiences can strengthen brand image and increase consumer loyalty.

### **5. DISCUSSION**

The findings of this research indicate that consumer perception and return policy implementation play an important role in shaping the brand image of PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk Bogor Branch. The return policy implemented by the company is not merely an operational procedure for handling defective or unsuitable products but also functions as a strategic service mechanism that influences consumer trust and satisfaction.

#### ***Consumer Perception Toward Return Policy***

One of the key findings of this study relates to consumer perceptions regarding the return policy implemented by PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk Bogor Branch. Consumer perception is shaped by their experiences when interacting with company services, especially when encountering problems with purchased products. Consumers tend to evaluate the fairness and convenience of company policies based on their personal experiences during service interactions.

The findings show that consumers generally perceive return policies positively when the procedures are easy to understand and the process is handled efficiently by employees. Clear procedures and transparent information regarding return policies contribute to reducing consumer uncertainty and perceived risk during purchasing decisions. This finding supports the argument presented by Sahgira et al., (2025), who explain that return policies serve as a guarantee mechanism that reduces perceived risk and increases consumer trust in companies.

In addition to policy clarity, service convenience also plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions. According to Anggapratama & Irnawati (2023), service convenience significantly affects customer satisfaction because consumers prefer services that are easy to access and require minimal effort. When consumers feel that the return process is convenient and efficient, they are more likely to develop positive perceptions toward the company.

Consumer perception is also influenced by psychological factors involving both cognitive and affective responses. Cognitive responses relate to consumers' rational evaluations of service quality and policy fairness, while affective responses refer to emotional reactions experienced during service interactions. Wiśniewska et al. (2025) explains that cognitive and affective responses influence consumer decision-making because emotional experiences often shape consumer attitudes toward brands.

In the context of this research, positive emotional responses occur when employees treat consumers politely and provide helpful explanations regarding return procedures. Friendly communication and professional service behavior contribute to creating positive consumer experiences. These experiences strengthen consumer trust and encourage positive perceptions of the company.

### ***Implementation of Return Policy***

Another important aspect identified in this research is the implementation of return policies within the operational environment of PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk Bogor Branch. The findings indicate that the company has established standard operating procedures to regulate the return process. These procedures involve several steps, including transaction verification, product inspection, and approval from authorized personnel.

The implementation of return policies requires coordination between employees in retail outlets and the distribution center responsible for managing returned products. The distribution center functions as a central unit for processing returned products and ensuring that operational procedures are implemented consistently.

However, the research findings also reveal that operational challenges may occur during the implementation of return policies. These challenges include differences in employee experience, workload pressure, and variations in customer situations. These factors may affect the efficiency of return processes and the quality of service delivered to consumers. These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Fauzan & Puspanikan (2025), which identified several factors influencing the efficiency of return processes, including

human resources, operational systems, and supporting infrastructure. When operational systems are not well organized, return processes may become inefficient and negatively affect service quality.

In addition, research conducted by Mutiarani & Susilawati (2025) dures in managing retail inventory and return processes. Effective procedures help companies control product quality and reduce operational losses caused by defective or expired products.

Therefore, companies must ensure that employees receive adequate training and understand the return procedures clearly. Proper training can improve employee competence in handling return cases and ensure consistent implementation of company policies.

### ***Return Policy and Brand Image Formation***

Another significant finding of this research relates to the relationship between return policies and brand image formation. Brand image refers to the perception that consumers hold about a company based on their experiences and interactions with its products and services. The findings indicate that the implementation of return policies contributes to shaping the brand image of PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk. Consumers who experience fair and transparent return procedures tend to perceive the company as responsible and customer-oriented.

This finding supports the research conducted by Reynaldi & Nuvriasari (2024), which found that brand image and consumer perception significantly influence purchasing decisions. When consumers perceive a brand positively, they are more likely to choose the brand compared to competitors.

Similarly, (Buchory & Putra, 2024) explain that brand image and brand trust significantly influence purchasing decisions. Consumers who trust a brand are more likely to develop long-term relationships with the company.

Brand image is also influenced by service quality and consumer experiences. According to Hariasih et al., (2024), brand image is shaped by several factors, including product quality, service quality, and consumer lifestyle. Positive service experiences strengthen brand image and encourage consumer loyalty.

The research findings indicate that return policies can serve as an important component of service quality. When companies handle consumer complaints effectively, they demonstrate responsibility and commitment to customer satisfaction. This positive experience contributes to strengthening brand image.

The relationship between return policies, consumer perceptions, and brand image can also be explained using the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework. According

to Shamim et al., (2024), environmental stimuli influence consumers' internal psychological states, which subsequently lead to behavioral responses.

In the context of this research, return policies act as stimuli provided by the company to consumers. These policies influence consumers' internal evaluations, including perceptions of fairness, trust, and service quality. Consumers process these stimuli through cognitive and emotional mechanisms before generating responses such as satisfaction, trust, or dissatisfaction. When consumers perceive the return policy as fair and convenient, they tend to respond positively by developing favorable attitudes toward the company.

Conversely, if consumers encounter difficulties during the return process, they may develop negative perceptions that affect brand image. Therefore, companies must ensure that return policies are implemented consistently and effectively in order to maintain positive consumer perceptions.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that consumer perceptions and the implementation of return policies play an important role in shaping the brand image of PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk Bogor Branch.

Consumers tend to develop positive perceptions when return policies are implemented transparently and fairly. Clear procedures and convenient return processes contribute to improving customer satisfaction and strengthening consumer trust in the company. Furthermore, return policies function not only as operational procedures but also as strategic tools for maintaining service quality and brand reputation. Effective implementation of return policies demonstrates the company's commitment to protecting consumer rights and providing responsible service.

Therefore, PT Sumber Alfaria Trijaya Tbk Bogor Branch should continue improving the implementation of return policies by enhancing employee training, ensuring consistent procedures, and maintaining high service standards. By doing so, the company can strengthen its brand image and maintain long-term relationships with consumers.

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