

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE & MANAGEMENT

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GLOBAL BRANDS' LOCAL ACTIONS: COLLECTION CENTERS FOR RECYCLING AND REVERSE LOGISTICS

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ABSTRACT

In reverse logistics, 'Recycling' has become a term of great importance for the firms who want to communicate their environmentally friendly image to their consumers and stakeholders. Considered as a noticeable action on the waste generated, it enables them recovery of useable parts from used/ waste products; thus managing with resource constraints as well as satisfying demands of environmentally conscious consumers and stakeholders. Since firms with electronic product portfolio have been facing criticism for their waste generated at consumers' end, many of them have initiated multi-aimed actions for elimination/ reduction of waste. This study reviews the literature related to reverse logistics and aims to explore the reputed firms' actions related to collection and recycling of used electronic products. An interview-based study was conducted in collection centers in Mumbai (India) to develop a framework for the collection, recycling and reuse -related activities being undertaken by firms in the Indian market. The analysis reveals that reuse is identified as the main aim of such actions. It further explores the facts related to the arrangements made at collection centers for recycling activities, staff knowledge about the recycling process, incentive-related aspects, marketing and promotion, and customers' involvement in recycling activities.

KEYWORDS

collection centres, recycling, reverse logistics, global brands.

1. INTRODUCTION

The products such as mobile phones, computers and other new technology based electronic products, which have short life cycle and high disposal rate, have increased the relevance of reverse logistics in business operations at present (Lau and Wang, 2009; Chan and Chan, 2008; Tan and Kumar, 2006; Knemeyer *et al.*, 2002). The main objective of reverse logistics is value recovery and material reuse; using methods such as recycling, disassembly and remanufacturing. For the manufacturing companies, value recovery activities have emerged as a major focus in business operations (Kapetanopoulou and Tagaras, 2011). This paper makes an attempt to first understand the importance of reverse logistics and then, practically realize the e-waste collection activities by global brands at local levels.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW**Reverse logistics**

'Reverse Logistics' is defined as "the role of logistics in product returns, source reduction, recycling, materials substitution, reuse of materials, waste disposal, and refurbishing, repair, and remanufacturing" (Stock, 1998). Hence, reverse logistics is an umbrella term rather than a homogenous subject and encompasses a number of different operational contexts (Bernon *et al.*, 2011). According to Carter and Ellram (1998), it includes (i) Distribution planning (physical transportation of used products from first consumer back to a re-producer), (ii) Inventory management (sorting and management of used product by re-producer for conversion), and (iii) Production planning (actual conversion into marketable products). Rogers and Tibben-Lembke (2001) identified recycling, reusing, and remanufacturing as important functions of reverse logistics.

Recycle. As an important aspect of an effective and efficient solid waste management as well as reverse logistics, recycling is described as "the process through which materials previously used are collected, processed, remanufactured and reused" (Hu and Hsu, 2010; Tan and Kumar, 2006). It includes wide variety of activities, from cannibalizing entire sub-assemblies to extracting materials to resell as a commodity (Hazen *et al.*, 2011).

Reuse. It means injecting back into the supply chain the unused or less used products and reusable packaging or shipping materials which does not require to upgrade to return to new status (Hazen *et al.*, 2011).

Remanufacture. When direct reuse of returned products is infeasible or uneconomical, remanufacturing occurs. It involves improving the product from its current condition to that of a condition acceptable for reuse by repairing, refurbishing, or overhauling an item (Hazen *et al.*, 2011).

Further, Chan and Chan (2008) identified several drivers for implementing reverse logistics such as recapture value and recover assets (recovery of tangible assets for economic benefits such as remanufacturing, repackaging and reselling), strategic weapon (competitive advantage), and good corporate citizenship (social responsibility as a tool to gain publicity and for marketing incentive). In many of the markets, it is a legal binding for manufacturers and retailers to take back their products at the "end of life" for disposition activities such as recycling, destroying, refurbishing, land filling, maintenance, repairing and value recovery (Abraham, 2011; Bernon *et al.*, 2011; Skinner *et al.*, 2008). Value recovery involves two main activities: (i) Collection (for reprocessing), and (ii) Reprocessing (for making materials into substitutes for primary materials) (Flygansv  r *et al.*, 2008; Jahre, 1995a). To recover value from the used/ returned products, the collection is an important activity which is either carried out by the firms or by third parties (Kapetanopoulou and Tagaras, 2011).

The retailers and the customers have always been the key players in reverse logistics (Bernon *et al.*, 2011; Anderson and Brodin, 2005) because retailers who collect scrap from the customers; work as an interface between the customers and the companies, and customers are the ones who give back the used products to the companies through retailers. This accounts for other factors as well such as customers' awareness, ability and willingness to give back used products as well as to accept the incentives offered such as cash vouchers and rental contracts etc. (Canning, 2006).

Product reuse and recycling: A part of eco-design research

Over a long period of time, the literature on eco-design has been considered as a part of green supply chain. It includes product design elements such as easy to recycle, easy to decompose, designed to reuse, design for disassembly and design-for-remanufacturing (Zhu *et al.*, 2010; D'Souza *et al.*, 2006; Pujari and Wright, 1996; Wu and Dunn, 1995) and, the packaging design elements such as minimum packaging waste, reduced weight and reduced volume (Nunes and Bennett, 2010; Kassaye 2001; Mandaraka and Kormentza, 2000).

To cater to these design elements, many significant dimensions have emerged in the green supply chain literature such as lifecycle management, waste minimization, product recycling, product recovery and reuse, and environmental collaboration with customers and suppliers (Azevedo *et al.*, 2011; Caniato *et al.*, 2011; Hu and Hsu, 2010). For recycling and reuse purposes, product recovery and take-back program for used products and packaging materials at suppliers' and consumers' end are identified of great importance (Davis and Wolski, 2009; Andersen and Skjoett-Larsen, 2000; Beamon, 1999; Wu and Dunn, 1995). For this, companies have been collaborating with local recycling organizations so that the objectives of resource reduction, value recovery from used products and

reduction in disposal costs can be met (Hu and Hsu, 2010; Nunes and Bennett, 2010; Pun, 2006). Certain other actions in this direction include labeling information on product components for recycling, communicating the life expectancy of products, appropriate disposal instructions of used products, educating consumers for disassembly and offering product disassembly instructions/ manuals (Hu and Hsu, 2010; Davis and Wolski, 2009; Pun, 2006; Pujari and Wright, 1996).

Hence, the mechanism of product recovery seems taking shape of a closed loop; encompassing the entire supply chain from end customers back to the original suppliers of raw materials and thus, facilitating eco-design (Andersen and Skjoett-Larsen, 2000). This is a considerable advancement for developing an effective and sustainable reverse logistics.

3. METHODOLOGY

Over a long period of time, e-waste has been found as a major concern from the environmental perspective (Kapetanopoulou and Tagaras, 2011; Hu and Hsu, 2010; Davis and Wolski, 2009; Mandaraka and Kormentza, 2000). So, the companies who are in the business of electronic products are assumed to be responsible for the proper treatment of their products after their end-of-life and thus, the e-waste generated (Hu and Hsu, 2010). Keeping this viewpoint in mind, this research aims to study the e-waste treatment-related actions of the companies which have electronic products in product portfolio and are operating in the Indian market.

To begin with, an internet search of the companies for electronic consumer durables was done. These products include refrigerator, television, air-conditioner, high value audio equipments, washing machine, microwave oven and phone (Ong *et al.*, 2010; Rajagopal and Rajgopal, 2008; Sultan, 1999; Martinez *et al.*, 1998; Yoon and Kijewski, 1997; Martínez and Polo, 1996; Beier and Ardishvili, 1995).

In total, 33 companies were identified which have been reporting their environmental visions, long-term goals, short-term goals, actions and activities. The corporate websites of companies were thoroughly searched upon and studied to find their environmental actions and activities. From the reverse logistics perspective, it was learnt that the activities related to recovery of used products are being carried out by many of the companies in different parts of the globe and in the India as well. The purpose is to facilitate recycling, reuse, remanufacturing and re-processing, as identified in the literature related to reverse logistics. These companies are taking back electronic wastes such as PCs, notebooks, i-pod, i-phones, batteries, printers, printing materials, faxes, air conditioners, CRT televisions, waste plastic, refrigerators, freezers, washers, cell phones, paper, floppy disks, CDs, CD jewel box, cartridges, inkjet, hardware products, rechargeable batteries, mercury lamp assemblies, drum units, toner bottles and all-in-one devices, and of all the brands.

Fifteen of the websites mentioned that the collection of used products was being done either at collection centers of these companies or by 'home pick-up services' at different locations in several cities across the globe. It has been observed that companies have named some of their present retail outlets as collection centers. In India, these collection centers are available in cities such as Mumbai, New Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, Kolkata, Pune etc. Three of the companies have listed on their corporate websites the addresses, contact numbers and name(s) of contact person(s) of their collection centers.

For the purpose of the study, the list of these collection centers was retrieved from the three corporate websites. The information about the collection centers such as addresses, contact numbers, name of contact person and the route to reach to the place was also retrieved.

First intervention was done in the month of February 2012 and March 2012 to inquire about their facilities and services in collection centers in the Mumbai city (earlier known as Bombay), India. The city has three parts i.e. Mumbai suburban area, Mumbai town and Navi Mumbai area. This intervention was done in all the collection centers of Mumbai city, as mentioned on the corporate websites of the three companies. The initial enquiries in these collection centers were conducted as consumers (rather than researcher); with the aim of capturing the recycling related activities and facilities available. These initial enquiries were used to frame the research questions. These research question(s) are as follows:

1. How is recycling facilitated in the collection center(s)?
2. What are the promotional efforts to encourage consumers' participation in take-back program?

Also, it was identified that some of the retail outlets mentioned as collection centers had closed these recycling services. The retail outlets which are operating as collection centers, were selected for the study. The store manager(s) of these retail outlets were personally contacted and were made familiar with the objective(s) of the research. Those who agreed to participate in the research were approached for a suitable appointment in the months of March 2012 and May 2012 and were interviewed with certain research questions. For the study, the store manager(s) and their staff member(s) were interviewed.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

As per the details provided on the corporate websites of the three companies, the retail outlets (which are named as collection centers) were approached for the interview purpose.

For the first company, there is only one retail outlet operating as collection center in Mumbai. When manager of the retail outlet was contacted, he was found unaware that his retail outlet was named as collection center by the company and stated that recycling related services were not being offered in the outlet.

For the second company, the corporate website mentions that there are 18 retail outlets operating as collection centers in Mumbai. This company has named some of the outlets as collection centers and some of them as drop-off locations. Names of some of the outlets appeared on the website as collection center as well as drop-off location. When these retail outlets were contacted, store managers of most of the outlets were found unaware that their outlets are mentioned on the company website as collection center(s) and/or drop-off location(s) and stated that recycling related services were not being offered in their outlets. One of the outlet managers suggested to contact Mumbai zonal office for the purpose. Mumbai zonal office too did not have any such information and directed us to contact company head office in Noida. Contacting head office was out of the scope of this study.

Response from the third company was valuable for the study. Out of the 17 retail outlets operating as collection centers in Mumbai (as mentioned on the corporate website), 5 of them were not operating as collection centers anymore. Out of the remaining 12, the interviews were conducted with 9 of the outlets.

Hence, the analysis in the study is based on the interviews conducted in the retail outlets of the third company.

The analysis of the interviews yielded the following facts:

(i) Purpose(s) of take-back program

Many purposes of take-back program are identified. Reuse is identified as the main objective of the program. The used products are collected from the consumers and are sent to the factories of the company. These products are disassembled there and the usable parts are separated. The usable parts are sent to the manufacturing and assembly of new piece(s) of the product(s).

Re-sale is identified as another objective of the take-back program. Some of the products which are returned by the consumers under the take-back program but are in usable stage, are sold at lower prices. The prices of these products are based on bargaining between the seller(s) and the customer(s).

(ii) The take-back program showcase

The showcase contains a plastic bin of dimensions as '48 inches * 12 inches * 12 inches' and it has a steel lid of '4 inches * 4 inches' which is used to drop the used products in the bin. Its look has been made attractive by using unique calligraphy and style of writing the process of recycling on its walls. This bin is placed at one corner of the reception counter. Also, a booklet is kept at the reception desk on the side where the bin is kept. This booklet contains the information related to recycling, its importance for the environment and some interesting related facts. It also contains the contact information of the company representative(s) for the program. This booklet is accessible to the customers.

(iii) Incentive-related issues

Incentives under the take-back program are offered when the used products are returned in bulk quantity. It also depends upon the existing value of the used product. It varies from 5% to 10% of the original or current value of the product. For example, if the product can be resold, the value offered is more compared to if it can only be sent for recycling.

(iv) *Marketing efforts and promotion*

The recycling program and its campaign are endorsed by the celebrities as well as literature (leaflets and brochures) available in the retail outlets. Also, the service centers promote the program by insisting customers to hand over their product(s) if it is not suitable for further use and if its maintenance cost quite high.

(v) *Customers' involvement and response*

When consumers walk in to the collection center(s) and enquire about the program, their queries are entertained by the staff member(s) and replied to the suitable extent. They are introduced to the take-back program through the leaflets and are shown the showcase that facilitate the recycling program. The booklet and brochures available in the collection centers are given to the customers to read and any further queries raised are also entertained by the staff. The complete process of recycling and its impact on the environment as well as the role of an individual customer are also explained by the staff in detail. The customers are also informed about the company website and the related link(s) to get the detailed information. The customer(s) are also requested to leave their contact details in the visitors' book available in the collection center(s).

On an average, 2 to 10 consumers per month visit collection center to enquire about the program and a few come back with their used product(s) for recycling.

5. CONCLUSION

From the interviews, it can be understood that the recycling is considered as a responsible activity in the Mumbai city and take-back program is able to facilitate it in the right direction. The noticeable fact is that the existing retail outlets and the service centers of the companies are assigned the responsibility of take-back program and thus are named as 'collection center'. This way, companies have not invested to set up new outlets as 'collection center' and also, the consumers are familiar with these existing outlets in their areas. Thus, it can be inferred that familiarity of the consumers with the stores and their staff members is an important factor under consideration for promoting the 'take-back' program.

The incentive for returning bulk amount of used products has triggered the program but the response rate is quite low. Further, it can also be inferred that incentive for only bulk amount has reduced the scope of participation from individual consumers. In other words, the participation of individual customers is solely dependent upon their sense of environmental responsibility and they do not seek great benefits in participating in take-back program which may discourage a large segment of the consumers. So, the policies and regulations are required to set up structure so that all are equally benefited and a balanced system of recycling can be developed.

The study has witnessed some structural differences in the city. The collection centers in the town area of the city such as Grand Road, Colaba and Churchgate are more organized, bigger in size, have presentable showcase (recycling bin), more number of staff members than those in suburban areas such as Dadar, Mulund, and Bandra. For example, the recycling bin in the collection centers in town area was kept at one corner of the reception desk and was visible from the entrance so that customers can notice it as soon as they enter in the premises. The staff knowledge and their willingness to explain the related information were high in collection centers in the town area, and with more appropriate communication skills. Hence, presentation of the facilities, staff knowledge, staff willingness and their communication skills are other considerable factors.

Further work can be done to highlight upon the disposal of non-usable part(s) of used products and why certain outlets have closed down their services for recycling.

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