

Consumer Return Intention in Online Platforms: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

The growth of e-commerce has increased product returns, creating financial, operational, and environmental challenges. This systematic literature review synthesises 41 empirical studies (2021–2025) to identify key antecedents, mediators, and moderators influencing consumer return intention in online platforms. Results show that return intention is shaped by consumer traits (impulse buying, post-purchase dissonance, wardrobing), product factors (quality mismatches, misleading descriptions), platform and policy conditions, situational triggers, environmental considerations, cultural norms, and fairness perceptions. Cognitive dissonance, perceived quality, and trust act as mediators, while environmental efficacy, flow consciousness, and cultural context moderate effects. Impulse buying, product quality mismatch, and policy design emerge as dominant predictors, underscoring the need for context-specific strategies to reduce returns while maintaining customer trust and satisfaction.

Keywords: Return Intention, E-Commerce Returns, Impulse Buying, Post-Purchase Dissonance, Return Policy, Live Streaming Commerce

Introduction

The rapid rise of e-commerce has reshaped consumer purchasing behaviour, offering greater convenience, variety, and accessibility. Yet, this growth has also brought a surge in product returns, creating significant financial, operational, and environmental challenges for retailers (Fernandez-Lores et al., 2024; Vijayakumar & Sasikumar, 2023). Returns increase reverse logistics costs and contribute to waste, inefficiency, and resource depletion (Lv & Liu, 2022). Understanding consumer return intention, or the decision-making process behind sending purchased goods back, is crucial for improving profitability, sustaining customer satisfaction, and advancing sustainable retail practices (Altug, Aydinliyim, & Jain, 2021). Consequently, research has increasingly examined behavioural, cognitive, and situational factors influencing return intention in online contexts, with particular focus on emerging formats like live streaming commerce (Kumar & Taneja, 2024; Zhang, Cheng, & Huang, 2023).

Despite substantial scholarly attention, research findings remain fragmented across contexts and disciplines. Studies have identified key antecedents such as impulse buying (Huang & Suo,

2021; Lv & Liu, 2022), post-purchase dissonance (Wang, Yu, & Chen, 2023), product quality perception (Das & Kunja, 2024), and return policy leniency (Gäthke, Gelbrich, & Chen, 2022), but results often differ. Mediators like cognitive dissonance and perceived quality, along with moderators including environmental efficacy (Fernandez-Lores et al., 2024) and cultural norms, further shape these relationships. However, the interplay of these factors has not been systematically integrated. Without a consolidated understanding, it is challenging to develop strategies that reduce unnecessary returns while preserving loyalty. This review addresses that gap by synthesising recent empirical evidence, mapping dominant drivers, and examining mediating and moderating mechanisms to inform both theoretical development and practical intervention.

Problem Statement

Product returns in online retail have reached unprecedented levels, with return rates ranging from 15 to 40 percent of all purchases, depending on the product category (Cheng et al., 2024; Patel et al., 2021). This escalating trend imposes substantial costs on retailers, disrupts supply chain efficiency, and contributes to environmental waste through discarded products and additional transportation (Fernandez-Lores et al., 2024; Prayogo et al., 2024). While return policies aim to enhance customer satisfaction, lenient conditions can unintentionally encourage higher return intentions, especially in cases of impulse buying and post-purchase dissonance (Chen et al., 2023; Rashid et al., 2025). Moreover, inconsistent findings in empirical research hinder the development of coherent strategies to address the issue (Vilaisri et al., 2023; Gäthke et al., 2022). Understanding the drivers, mediators, and moderators of return intention is therefore urgent for online platforms seeking to reduce costs, maintain competitiveness, and promote sustainable consumption practices.

Limitations

This literature review is limited to empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals and indexed in recognised academic databases, which may exclude relevant insights from industry reports or grey literature. The scope is restricted to online platform contexts, meaning findings from offline retail or hybrid models are not considered. Only studies published in English are included, which may omit valuable research in other languages. The review also synthesises existing findings without conducting new primary data collection, so its conclusions depend on the quality and methodological rigour of the included studies. While the synthesis provides a comprehensive overview, it may not capture rapidly emerging trends or the most recent unpublished research in this fast-evolving field.

Literature Review

Conceptualising Return Intention in Online Platforms

Return intention refers to a consumer's predisposition to return a purchased product after completing the initial transaction, and it is a central behavioural construct in online retail research (Wang, Yu, & Chen, 2023; Chen, Chen, & Lin, 2023). The online shopping environment restricts physical product evaluation prior to purchase, increasing the likelihood of expectation disconfirmation and generating both cognitive and emotional dissonance (Fernandez-Lores et al., 2024; Lv & Liu, 2022). These post-purchase evaluations often lead to an intention to return, particularly when consumers experience mismatch between product expectations and reality. Several studies situate this construct within established theoretical frameworks, such as Expectation Disconfirmation Theory, which explains dissatisfaction

arising from unmet expectations (Wang, Yu, & Chen, 2023), and Cognitive Dissonance Theory, which addresses psychological discomfort following inconsistent experiences (Fernandez-Lores et al., 2024). In parallel, the Theory of Planned Behaviour has been applied to highlight attitudinal, normative, and control-related influences on returning behaviour (Vilaisri, Chamchang, & Kumar, 2023).

Other perspectives expand the understanding of return intention by linking it to impulse buying and subsequent regret, drawing on the Stimulus–Organism–Response model to explain how external triggers and internal states interact to form return-related decisions (Kumar & Taneja, 2024; Zhang, Cheng, & Huang, 2023). Signalling Theory and Justice Theory have also been used to explain the role of return policy clarity and fairness in shaping customer perceptions and subsequent return-related intentions (Hao et al., 2024). These theoretical foundations demonstrate that return intention is a multidimensional construct, influenced by psychological processes, behavioural predispositions, and contextual variables that are uniquely amplified in online retail settings (Confente et al., 2021; Gäthke, Gelbrich, & Chen, 2022)

Antecedents of Return Intention

Return intention in online platforms is influenced by a complex set of interrelated consumer, product, policy, situational, environmental, cultural, technological, and fairness-based factors. On the consumer side, impulse buying is one of the most consistently reported drivers. Studies show that unplanned purchases often result in post-purchase dissonance, prompting a higher likelihood of returns (Chen, Chen, & Lin, 2023; Kumar & Taneja, 2024; Lv & Liu, 2022). Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model explains how online stimuli such as visual appeal and interactive features increase pleasure and arousal, triggering impulsive purchases and subsequent returns (Zhang, Cheng, & Huang, 2023; Li, Wang, & Cao, 2022). In live streaming environments, heightened social presence and flow states intensify these impulses, often leading to regret that directly fuels return intentions (Kumar & Taneja, 2024; Huang & Suo, 2021). Opportunistic behaviours like wardrobing also emerge, influenced by cultural attitudes and prior familiarity with return policies (Phau et al., 2022).

Service quality dimensions are found to strengthen customer–brand relationships among Generation Z, with customer perception serving as a key mediator between service quality and brand satisfaction (Polas, Juman, Karim, Tabash, & Hossain, 2020). In the e-banking sector of Bangladesh, customer perceived value plays a mediating role in linking service quality with overall customer satisfaction (Bashir, Ali, Wai, Hossain, & Rahaman, 2020). Effective customer care service management is critical for achieving sustainable customer retention and enhancing brand loyalty across industries (Afshar, Polas, Imtiaz, & Saboor, 2019).

Product-related determinants are equally significant. Poor quality, inaccurate product descriptions, and misrepresentations during live streaming presentations are frequent causes for returns (Das & Kunja, 2024; Prayogo, Domanski, & Golinska-Dawson, 2024). Delivery errors, damaged goods, and unmet expectations increase dissatisfaction, further motivating returns (Vijayakumar & Sasikumar, 2023; Rintamäki et al., 2021). Information overload exacerbates these problems by impairing decision-making and fostering impulse-driven purchases likely to end in regret (Lv & Liu, 2022). Negative or inconsistent online reviews can heighten cognitive and emotional dissonance, further influencing the decision to return

(Wang, Yu, & Chen, 2023; Cheng, Krikon, & Murdock, 2024). Customer perceived value strongly influences satisfaction, which in turn supports the sustainability and competitiveness of hypermarkets in Malaysia (Polas, Imtiaz, Saboor, Hossain, Javed, & Nianyu, 2019). Online customer reviews, particularly on Facebook, affect consumers' food purchase behaviour in cloud kitchens, with product knowledge moderating this relationship (Islam, Hossain, Saleh, Kumar, & Konar, 2024).

Platform and policy conditions strongly affect return intention. Lenient return policies can build purchase confidence but may also encourage opportunistic behaviour, including temporary product use before return (Altug, Aydinliyim, & Jain, 2021; Martínez-López et al., 2023). Deterrents such as return credits can reduce free-return exploitation without significantly harming satisfaction (Martínez-López et al., 2023; Liu, 2024). Instant refund systems enhance the return experience and satisfaction, though their direct effect on return intention appears limited (Martínez-López et al., 2022). Policies that increase effort or reduce convenience can lower return rates in some markets but not others, highlighting cultural differences in consumer responses (Gäthke, Gelbrich, & Chen, 2022). Clear and accessible return policies consistently enhance trust and positive post-purchase evaluations, even when return rates remain stable (Prayogo, Domanski, & Golinska-Dawson, 2024).

Situational and promotional factors play a substantial role in triggering return intentions. Time-limited promotions, flash sales, and deep discounts heighten emotional arousal and encourage impulse purchases that frequently end in regret (Martaleni et al., 2022; Rani & Rex, 2023). In live streaming commerce, sales promotions combined with persuasive streamer interactions amplify buying urges, with returns often following when reality fails to meet expectations (Li, Wang, & Cao, 2022; Lin et al., 2023). Urgency-inducing tactics may reduce risk perception during purchase but increase returns when disconfirmation occurs (Huang & Suo, 2021).

Environmental and sustainability considerations also influence consumer behaviour. High perceived environmental efficacy can reduce return intentions, even when dissonance is present, as consumers weigh the environmental harm of returns (Fernandez-Lores et al., 2024; Lv & Liu, 2022). Where environmental concern is low, convenience and policy leniency take precedence. Cultural and institutional contexts further moderate these patterns, with effort-restrictive policies reducing returns in Western markets but having less effect in Eastern contexts (Gäthke, Gelbrich, & Chen, 2022). Customer-oriented institutional environments can paradoxically increase return rates by reinforcing consumer rights (Confente et al., 2021). Adoption of electronic commerce among Malaysian SMEs is influenced by various organizational and environmental factors, shaping their digital transformation journey (Ong, Teh, Kasbun, Mahroeian, & Hossain, 2020).

Technological and informational elements are increasingly relevant antecedents. In live streaming commerce, mismatches between verbal descriptions, visuals, and demonstrated use predict higher return rates (Xu et al., 2023). Machine learning models applied to customer reviews effectively identify potential return reasons, underscoring the value of transparent and accurate product information (Cheng, Krikon, & Murdock, 2024). Conversely, overly complex or contradictory information fosters uncertainty and regret, contributing to return likelihood (Lv & Liu, 2022). Functional, social, and psychological antecedents significantly

shape user attitudes toward chatbot usage in emerging markets (Nur, Sahabuddin, Hossain, & Ismail, 2024).

Trust and fairness perceptions, as explained by Justice Theory, influence returns through the perceived fairness of return processes, clarity of policies, and quality of interpersonal treatment (Hao et al., 2024). In omnichannel contexts, positive in-store return experiences, supported by loyalty programs, can mitigate the negative relationship between returns and repurchase intentions (Hao et al., 2024). Entrepreneurial retailers have found that moderately lenient return policies improve customer review quality and loyalty, though benefits plateau at high levels of leniency (García-Dastugue et al., 2024).

In summary, the antecedents of return intention are multifaceted and interactive, involving psychological triggers, product realities, structural conditions, situational influences, environmental and cultural considerations, technological accuracy, and fairness perceptions. These determinants do not operate in isolation; rather, they form a network of influences that can either amplify or mitigate return behaviour.

Mediators and Moderators in Return Intention

Mediators explain the processes linking antecedents to return intention. Cognitive dissonance, the discomfort from unmet expectations, is a central mechanism, often intensified by emotional dissonance from regret or dissatisfaction (Wang, Yu, & Chen, 2023; Chen, Chen, & Lin, 2023; Fernandez-Lores et al., 2024). In live streaming, impulse buying sequentially mediates the relationship between flow states and return intention, with process and outcome regret acting as parallel mediators (Kumar & Taneja, 2024). Information overload can create a chain mediation pathway through impulsive purchases and dissonance, raising return likelihood (Lv & Liu, 2022). In addition, perceived quality and trust also function as mediators. When perceived product quality meets expectations, return intentions decrease, whereas quality shortfalls heighten dissatisfaction (Prayogo, Domanski, & Golinska-Dawson, 2024; Das & Kunja, 2024). Trust in policies and platform reliability mediates the influence of policy clarity and service quality on return behaviour, with customer-friendly policies reducing the desire to return (Vilaisri, Chamchang, & Kumar, 2023; Hao et al., 2024). In omnichannel retail, perceived fairness of the return process, as explained by Justice Theory, mediates the link between in-store experiences and repurchase intentions, even when returns occur (Hao et al., 2024).

Apart from that, moderators shape the strength or direction of these relationships. Perceived environmental efficacy weakens the effect of post-purchase dissonance on returns, as environmentally conscious consumers avoid returning despite dissatisfaction (Fernandez-Lores et al., 2024; Lv & Liu, 2022). Flow consciousness amplifies the link between flow experiences and regret, intensifying negative emotions that drive returns (Kumar & Taneja, 2024). Cultural context influences how effort restrictiveness or customer-oriented institutions impact returns, with patterns differing between Western and Eastern markets (Gäthke, Gelbrich, & Chen, 2022).

In summary, mediators such as cognitive dissonance, emotional dissonance, impulse buying, regret, perceived quality, and trust help explain why certain antecedents influence return

intention. Moderators including environmental efficacy, flow consciousness, and cultural context shape how these relationships manifest across consumer segments and markets.

Gaps in the Literature

Although substantial research has examined antecedents of return intention, findings remain fragmented across theoretical approaches and market contexts (Wang, Yu, & Chen, 2023; Gäthke, Gelbrich, & Chen, 2022). Many studies focus on single drivers such as impulse buying, policy leniency, or product quality without integrating these into a unified model (Chen, Chen, & Lin, 2023; Prayogo, Domanski, & Golinska-Dawson, 2024). Mediators and moderators are often examined in isolation, limiting understanding of how multiple mechanisms interact to influence returns (Kumar & Taneja, 2024; Lv & Liu, 2022). Cross-cultural comparisons remain scarce despite evidence that institutional environments and cultural norms shape return behaviours (Phau et al., 2022; Gäthke, Gelbrich, & Chen, 2022). Furthermore, limited research consolidates online platform-specific drivers across diverse retail formats, including live streaming and omnichannel settings (Xu et al., 2023; Hao et al., 2024). This gap underscores the need for a systematic synthesis that unites these variables into an integrated, context-sensitive framework.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the primary antecedents identified in empirical studies that significantly influence consumer return intention in online platforms?

RQ2: What mediating and moderating mechanisms have been empirically examined to explain how these antecedents affect consumer return intention in online platforms?

Research Objectives

RO1: To analyse empirical evidence on the key antecedents influencing consumer return intention in online platforms, including consumer, product, policy, situational, and contextual factors.

RO2: To evaluate the mediating and moderating mechanisms reported in existing studies that explain the relationship between these antecedents and consumer return intention in online platforms

Research Methodology

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) to synthesise recent empirical evidence on consumer return intention in online platforms. The process adheres to established SLR protocols to ensure transparency, replicability, and academic rigour (Nightingale, 2009). Peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2021 and 2025 were sourced from reputable databases such as Scopus and Web of Science using a combination of keywords including “return intention,” “online platforms,” “e-commerce returns,” “reverse logistics,” “impulse buying,” and “post-purchase dissonance.” Boolean operators and truncation techniques were applied to refine search results, and inclusion criteria required studies to explicitly address return intention or behaviour in online retail contexts with empirical data derived from qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method designs. Studies focusing solely on offline retail, conceptual discussions, or non-peer-reviewed sources were excluded.

From the search process, 41 empirical studies met the inclusion criteria. Data extraction recorded author details, publication year, research design, theoretical framework, sample characteristics, and key findings. The literature was examined through thematic analysis to group findings into antecedents, mediators, and moderators, ensuring alignment with the research objectives and questions. Each study was interpreted within its theoretical context to identify methodological strengths and limitations, allowing for the construction of a conceptual framework that addresses current gaps in knowledge.

Data Analysis Plan

The analysis focuses on synthesising empirical evidence published between 2021 and 2025 to ensure the review captures the most recent developments in research on return intention in online platforms. All selected studies from literature review will be examined to compare and integrate findings relating to antecedents, mediators, and moderators, identifying where conceptual convergence and divergence occur across different retail formats, theoretical approaches, and consumer contexts.

A thematic synthesis strategy will be used in two stages. First, coded data from each study will be categorised into thematic clusters such as consumer-related, product-related, policy-related, situational, and contextual factors. Mediators and moderators will then be mapped against these clusters to illustrate how they explain or modify the relationship between antecedents and return intention. Second, comparative analysis will be conducted to assess the relative prominence and consistency of each theme across studies, highlighting platform-specific patterns and cross-cultural variations. This process will produce a consolidated, evidence-based view of the most influential factors shaping return intention, directly informing the findings and supporting the development of a theoretically grounded conceptual framework.

Findings and Conclusion

The synthesis of studies from 2021 to 2025 reveals that return intention in online platforms is driven by a multifaceted set of antecedents across consumer, product, policy, situational, environmental, cultural, technological, and fairness domains. Consumer-related factors, particularly impulse buying, post-purchase dissonance, and wardrobing, consistently emerge as dominant influences (Chen, Chen, & Lin, 2023; Kumar & Taneja, 2024; Phau et al., 2022). In China, live streaming commerce heightens social presence and flow states, increasing impulsive purchases and regret-driven returns (Zhang, Cheng, & Huang, 2023; Huang & Suo, 2021). Wardrobing, often influenced by cultural familiarity with return policies, is observed in both Eastern and Western contexts, although lenient policy environments in the West can further enable opportunistic returns (Altug, Aydinliym, & Jain, 2021). Product-related drivers such as quality mismatches, misleading descriptions, and delivery errors are strongly linked to returns (Das & Kunja, 2024; Prayogo, Domanski, & Golinska-Dawson, 2024), with studies in Indonesia identifying product quality as the most critical determinant (Prayogo et al., 2024). Inconsistent online reviews also intensify cognitive and emotional dissonance, elevating return likelihood (Wang, Yu, & Chen, 2023; Cheng, Krikon, & Murdock, 2024).

Platform and policy conditions demonstrate region-specific effects. In Eastern markets such as China, customer-oriented environments may unintentionally increase returns (Gäthke, Gelbrich, & Chen, 2022), whereas Western markets benefit from effort-restrictive policies

that reduce returns. Instant refunds in China have improved satisfaction without necessarily raising return intention (Martínez-López et al., 2022). Situational triggers, including flash sales, time-limited promotions, and heavy discounting, particularly in Southeast Asia, stimulate emotional arousal and impulsive purchases (Martaleni et al., 2022). In India, persuasive live streaming interactions amplify purchase urges, often leading to dissatisfaction when expectations are unmet (Li, Wang, & Cao, 2022; Lin et al., 2023). Environmental efficacy moderates return decisions; in China, consumers with high environmental concern return fewer products despite dissatisfaction (Fernandez-Lores et al., 2024), whereas in less environmentally aware contexts, convenience and policy leniency prevail (Lv & Liu, 2022).

From a mechanism perspective, cognitive dissonance, emotional dissonance, impulse buying, regret, perceived quality, and trust function as key mediators. Impulse buying mediates between flow experiences and regret in China and India (Kumar & Taneja, 2024), while perceived quality mediates product effects in Indonesia and Poland (Prayogo et al., 2024; Das & Kunja, 2024). Moderators such as environmental efficacy, flow consciousness, and cultural context influence these mechanisms, with flow consciousness intensifying regret in India (Kumar & Taneja, 2024) and cultural differences shaping policy effectiveness (Gäthke et al., 2022). Overall, impulse buying, product quality mismatch, and return policy design emerge as the most significant predictors, interacting with psychological and cultural mechanisms that require context-specific management strategies.

Table 1

Synthesis of Empirical Findings

R Q	Theme	Key Factors Identified	Relevant Studies
R Q 1	Consumer-Related	Impulse buying, wardrobing, post-purchase dissonance	Chen et al. (2023); Kumar & Taneja (2024); Lv & Liu (2022); Phau et al. (2022)
	Product-Related	Quality mismatch, misleading descriptions, delivery errors, negative reviews	Das & Kunja (2024); Prayogo et al. (2024); Vijayakumar & Sasikumar (2023); Wang et al. (2023); Cheng et al. (2024)
	Platform / Policy-Related	Lenient policies, instant refunds, effort restrictiveness, policy clarity	Altug et al. (2021); Martínez-López et al. (2023); Liu (2024); Gäthke et al. (2022); Prayogo et al. (2024)
	Situational / Promotional	Flash sales, time-limited promotions, discounts, persuasive live streaming	Martaleni et al. (2022); Rani & Rex (2023); Li et al. (2022); Lin et al. (2023); Huang & Suo (2021)
	Environmental / Sustainability	Perceived environmental efficacy	Fernandez-Lores et al. (2024); Lv & Liu (2022)
	Cultural / Institutional	Norms, institutional trust, consumer rights orientation	Gäthke et al. (2022); Confente et al. (2021)
	Technological / Informational	Misleading visuals, anchor speech mismatches, review mining	Xu et al. (2023); Cheng et al. (2024); Lv & Liu (2022)

	Trust / Fairness	Justice in returns, staff treatment, loyalty programs	Hao et al. (2024); García-Dastugue et al. (2024)
RQ2	Mediators	Cognitive dissonance, emotional dissonance, impulse buying, regret, perceived quality, trust	Wang et al. (2023); Fernandez-Lores et al. (2024); Kumar & Taneja (2024); Prayogo et al. (2024); Vilaisri et al. (2023); Hao et al. (2024)
	Moderators	Environmental efficacy, flow consciousness, cultural context	Fernandez-Lores et al. (2024); Lv & Liu (2022); Kumar & Taneja (2024); Gächke et al. (2022)

Refer to Table 1, for **RQ1**, the synthesis reveals that return intention in online platforms is shaped by a wide range of antecedents, including consumer traits, product attributes, platform and policy conditions, situational and promotional triggers, environmental considerations, cultural norms, technological cues, and perceptions of trust and fairness. For **RQ2**, the review shows that these relationships are often mediated by psychological and relational factors such as cognitive dissonance, emotional dissonance, impulse buying, regret, perceived quality, and trust, while moderators like environmental efficacy, flow consciousness, and cultural context influence the strength and direction of these effects across different contexts.

In conclusion, the most significant predictors of return intention, i.e. impulse buying, product quality mismatch, and return policy design, are consistently reinforced or moderated by psychological and cultural mechanisms.

Recommendation

The review confirms that return intention in online platforms is shaped by interconnected consumer, product, policy, situational, environmental, cultural, technological, and fairness-related factors, mediated by cognitive dissonance and trust, and moderated by environmental efficacy and cultural norms (Fernandez-Lores et al., 2024; Hao et al., 2024; Lv & Liu, 2022). Theoretically, this suggests that return behaviour models should integrate Stimulus–Organism–Response theory for impulse triggers (Zhang, Cheng, & Huang, 2023), Justice Theory for fairness perceptions (Hao et al., 2024), and Expectation–Confirmation Theory for post-purchase evaluation (Wang, Yu, & Chen, 2023). Extending these models with environmental and cultural moderators (Fernandez-Lores et al., 2024; Gächke, Gelbrich, & Chen, 2022) will strengthen cross-market applicability and capture both psychological and contextual influences.

For live streaming platforms, social presence, persuasive interaction, and time-limited promotions drive impulsive purchases followed by regret (Kumar & Taneja, 2024; Huang & Suo, 2021). Practically, platforms should mandate verified product demonstrations, transparent specifications, and realistic usage scenarios to minimise expectation gaps (Li, Wang, & Cao, 2022). AI-based behavioural analytics can flag high-risk orders and trigger review prompts before final purchase. Theoretically, Flow Theory should guide platform design, but with built-in “flow disruptors” at key decision points to temper excessive engagement and reduce cognitive dissonance (Lv & Liu, 2022). For fashion products, which frequently face returns due to fit or quality mismatches (Das & Kunja, 2024; Prayogo, Domanski, & Golinska-Dawson, 2024), retailers should use advanced fit prediction tools, interactive sizing guides, and multi-angle product imagery. Fit feedback loops from retained purchases can enhance recommendation accuracy, aligning with Signalling Theory to reduce uncertainty (Rintamäki et al., 2021).

From a policy perspective, overly lenient return terms can encourage opportunism (Martínez-López et al., 2023). Retailers should adopt calibrated return credits, restocking fees for habitual returners, and partial refunds for non-defective returns while keeping a customer-oriented approach. Environmental costs of returns should be clearly communicated to activate consumer responsibility (Fernandez-Lores et al., 2024), consistent with Norm Activation Theory. Sustained improvement requires longitudinal tracking of return patterns, satisfaction, and policy effects. Collaborative academic–industry field experiments can test variations in cues, policies, and presentation formats, ensuring interventions remain evidence-based, adaptable, and relevant to evolving online retail behaviours.

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