

A sustainability rationale: Getting consumers on board with strict online return policies

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Abstract

The product return process creates billions of pounds of waste, as well as financial and operational losses. Yet consumers expect the convenience of free, fast returns, and react negatively to policies restricting returns. This research examines how brands may increase acceptance of stricter return policies by implementing a sustainability return rationale. Three studies demonstrate that when a warm brand stereotype employs a sustainability return rationale, high environmental identifiers report increased consumer evaluations while low environmental identifiers report decreased evaluations; and these effects are mediated by fairness perceptions. No differences emerge for competent stereotyped brands. Further, competent brands can effectively employ a sustainability return rationale by invoking science due to its alignment with perceived competence. The research has implications for retailers and adds to the understanding of how firms can help consumers accept stricter return policies.

Subject Areas: *Branding, Consumer Behaviour, Retailing*

Track: Social Responsibility & Ethics