

## **Influential Article Review - Product Returns and Package Handling Procedure**

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*This paper examines consumer behavior. We present insights from a highly influential paper. Here are the highlights from this paper: High product return rates are an increasingly pressing challenge for many e-retailers around the world. To address this problem, this paper offers a new perspective by focusing on the critical moment of the package-opening process. Going beyond previous research, which has primarily focused on website information and the product itself, we examine the effects of the outside appearance (i.e., the color of the delivery package) and contents of the delivery package (i.e., extra gifts, coupons, and preprinted return labels) on consumer return behavior. Our findings across two experimental studies and an observational field study show that a well-considered package design, including colorful packaging and extra gifts, significantly lowers consumers' return intentions and actual returns. We also explore the process of consumers' cognitive-affective reactions after opening a delivery package. During this two-stage reaction process, pleasure plays a crucial role in the consumer's return choice. For our overseas readers, we then present the insights from this paper in Spanish, French, Portuguese, and German.*

*Keywords: Online purchase, Consumer return behavior, Color, Delivery packages, Free gifts*

### **SUMMARY**

- Previous research has acknowledged that various factors, working through a cognitive reaction process, can significantly impact consumer return behavior during the two-stage decision process of online purchasing. However, no study has yet examined how consumer return decisions are influenced by a delivery package's appearance and contents, or the affective action process. To close these gaps and identify useful packaging strategies, we combined the synergistic properties of two controlled experiments and an observational field study, which together offer robust insights into how the delivery package affects return intentions.
- To the best of our knowledge, this paper is the first to examine the entire chain of the two-stage, «high-road» cognitive-affective reaction process in the context of consumer return behavior, which contributes an integrated and holistic perspective to the return behavior research field. In prior studies, researchers have mainly focused on the cognitive process at the neglect of the affective process. In this study, we confirm that perceived utility has an impact on return intention, but more in an indirect way, i.e. via satisfaction. However, the «high-road» affective reaction, rather than

the cognitive reaction, is directly responsible for consumers' return decisions. Moreover, the hedonic utility which with utilitarian utility constitutes an integral part of the perceived utility has an indirect impact on return intention only via pleasure.

- Given our key findings, we suggest that e-retailers focus on the delivery package design to lower consumers' return intentions. Choosing a suitable color for delivery packages and offering extra gifts can potentially mitigate return rate problems. With respect to cost efficiency, colorful packages seem more promising because they are cheaper to implement than extra gifts. Specifically, the price of a colorful packaging carton is around 0.136 Euro . There is no difference between normal cartons and colorful ones when the order quantity exceeds 1000.
- This study comes with several limitations. First, although we carefully chose the products in our experiment—a jersey of the German national football team and a chocolate bar—we cannot easily generalize their effects to all other products. However, because we compared relative differences across the experimental groups, this limitation should not constitute a severe problem for our analyses.
- Second, the controlled experiments only included one hue for the colorful package and two gifts , which limits their generalizability. For example, the PLS results showed no significant relationship between a blue package and consumers' perceived hedonic utility, but the result might change for a yellow package. Moreover, even the same hue might have different effects in different cultures. Future research could explore these possibilities in greater detail. Still, our study provides significant evidence that a well-designed delivery package can positively influence consumer return intention.

## HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL ARTICLE

We used the following article as a basis of our evaluation:

Zhou, W., Hinz, O., & Benlian, A. (2017). The impact of the package opening process on product returns. *Business Research*, 11(2), 279–308.

This is the link to the publisher's website:

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40685-017-0055-x#Sec27>

## INTRODUCTION

Rising online return rates pose a serious threat to e-retailers around the world. One recent survey showed that 36.1% of German e-retailers selling fashion and accessories experienced a return rate of 20% or more in 2014 (Institut für Demoskopie Köln 2015). In the United States, the average return rate reached 33% in 2012 and is projected to increase even further in the future (Banjo 2013). To compound matters, 72% of e-retailers bear the costs of delivery and/or the extra labor and management costs for handling the returns, which can ultimately render a lenient return policy very expensive. Researchers and managers are currently seeking ways to mitigate this problem, but our understanding of what drives high return rates remains limited.

Researchers agree that online purchasing can be viewed as a two-stage decision process (Wood 2001): the decision to order (the purchase decision) and the decision to keep or return the ordered product (the post-purchase decision). The purchase decision itself is more time-consuming than the post-purchase decision: Consumers typically spend a great deal of time collecting and processing information from several e-retailers and comparing different products, brands, and prices. In contrast, they usually make the post-purchase decision quickly, sometimes within a few seconds after opening the package. Therefore, it is critical to determine the factors that influence the post-purchase decision during this brief yet decisive period.

A vast array of literature on consumer return behavior pertains to website information and the product itself (see Fig. 1), primarily using signaling (Janakiraman and Ordóñez 2012), utility (Wood 2001), and expectation (Bechwati and Siegal 2005) theories. In general, research indicates that a good reputation (Zhou and Hinz 2016), a high review score (Sahoo et al. 2015), and higher-quality products (Anderson et al. 2009) can reduce consumer return intentions by increasing perceived utility and signaling higher quality. Other studies show that a lenient return policy can increase returns because of lower return costs for the consumer (Wood 2001), while an accurate product description on purchase websites can decrease return intentions by narrowing consumers' expectation gap (Heiman et al. 2001).

However, because of the time delay between purchasing and receiving a product ordered online, consumers may not clearly remember all the purchase details at the moment of receipt and may not visit the respective website or check old emails to reacquaint themselves with actual purchase information or return policies. As a result, above and beyond purchase details, delivery package cues are likely one of the last opportunities for e-retailers to influence consumers' product return behavior (Garretson and Burton 2005). The information carried by the delivery package is probably clearer and fresher than what remains in consumers' memories (i.e., the stimuli shown at the moment of purchase). Thus, to address the problem of high return rates, both e-retailers and researchers need to recognize the importance of delivery package design, even though little, if any, extant research has done so.

The composition of the delivery package design includes the outside appearance (e.g., color, shape, size) and its contents (e.g., extra gifts, coupons, return labels, fillers, and receipts). We focus on color, extra gifts, coupons, and return labels as the four most critical aspects in our study, because they do not heavily rely on the characteristics of ordered products (i.e., we do not consider shape, size, and fillers) and can potentially influence consumer behavior (see Sect. 2). Moreover, e-retailers can easily manipulate all these factors.

Against this background, we pose the following research question: How does the package-opening process influence consumers' return decision and why? The question includes two parts: consumers' responses to external stimuli (i.e., the delivery package design) at the moment of opening the package and their reaction process when they make return decisions. Answering these questions is crucial for research and practice alike. Theoretically, the study advances research on the drivers of consumer return behavior and sheds more light on the return decision process. A new perspective on the package-opening process would also aid in analyzing other consumer post-purchase decisions. Practically, addressing this research question identifies several controllable factors that e-retailers can alter to reduce return rates.

This article proceeds as follows: In Sect. 2, we review the literature on consumer return behavior, as well as the potential impact that designed packages can have on consumer behavior. In Sect. 3, we present an experiment (wherein we imitate the purchasing and package-opening process using stop-motion videos) that tests the impact of package design on consumers' return intentions (Study 1). We further apply partial least squares (PLS) regressions to understand consumers' cognitive and affective reactions during the opening process. Section 4 describes Study 2, which serves as a robustness test and extends the analysis to real return behavior in an experimental setting. In Sect. 5, we use transactional data from China's largest online platform (Taobao.com) to examine the relationship between package design and a web shop's return rates (Study 3). Section 6 concludes with a discussion of the implications and future research avenues.

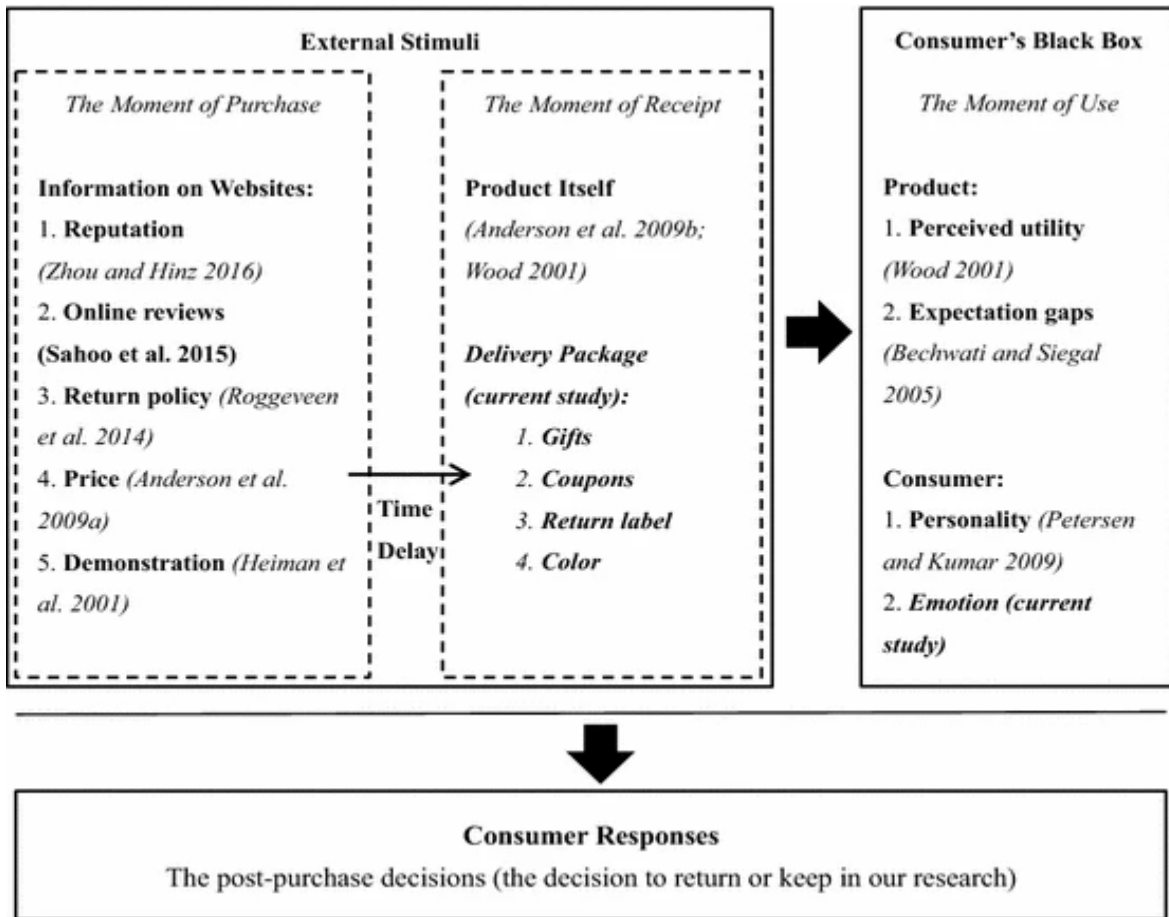
## CONCLUSION

Table 9 shows the regression results, which reveal that extra gifts and colorful packages have significant and negative impacts on shops' return rates ( $\gamma_1 = -.721, p < .05$ ;  $\gamma_3 = -.843, p < .01$ ). In other words, a well-designed delivery package can help reduce return intentions. However, our estimation results indicate that coupons do not significantly reduce return rates ( $\gamma_2 = .049, n.s.$ ). We surmise that coupons may only be related to consumers' repurchase decisions and not to their return decisions. Another possible explanation is that the prevalence of e-coupons on the Internet makes

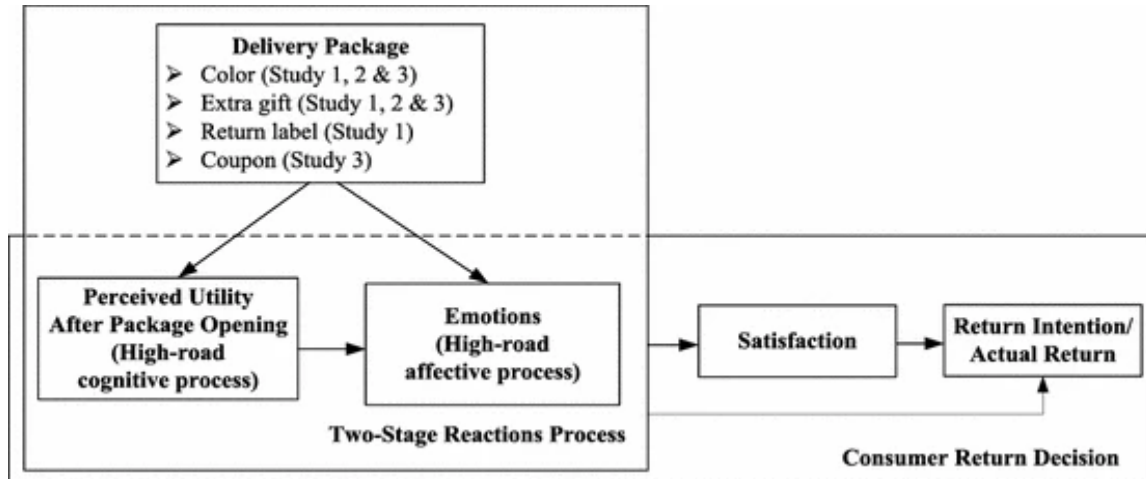
coupons less useful. In addition, the data show that improving service and product quality ( $\gamma_5 = -2.417, p < .1$ ) is the most effective way for e-retailers to decrease return rates.

**APPENDIX**

**FIGURE 1**  
**FACTORS THAT CAN INFLUENCE THE POST-PURCHASE DECISIONS IN DIFFERENT MOMENTS**



**FIGURE 2**  
**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

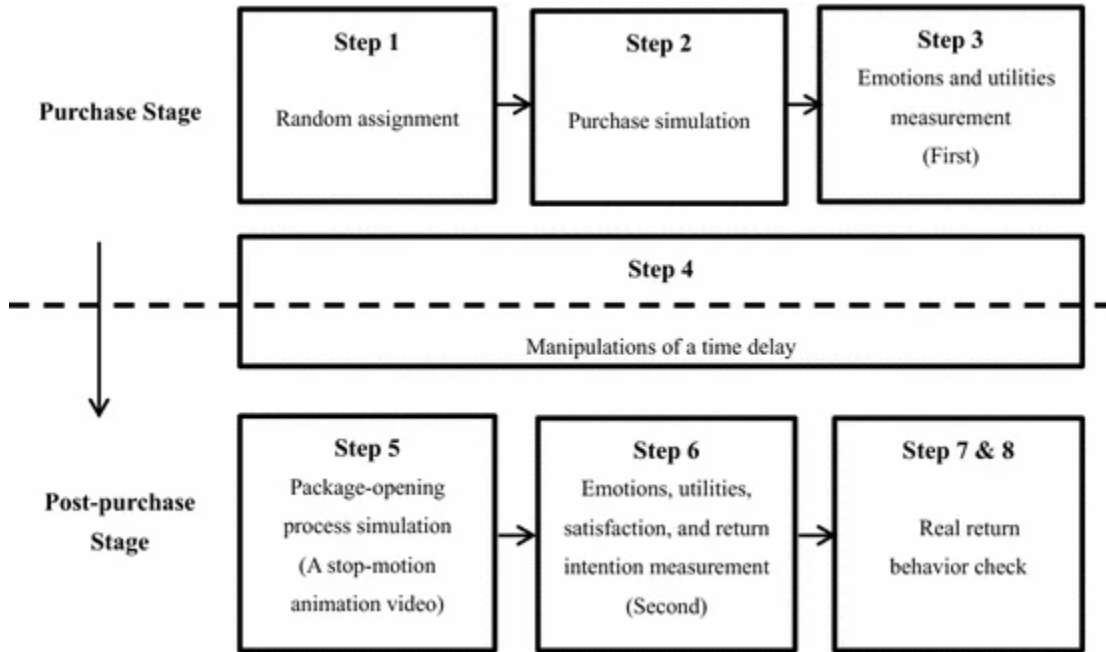


**FIGURE 3**  
**PRODUCT AND PACKAGE STIMULI IN STUDY 1**

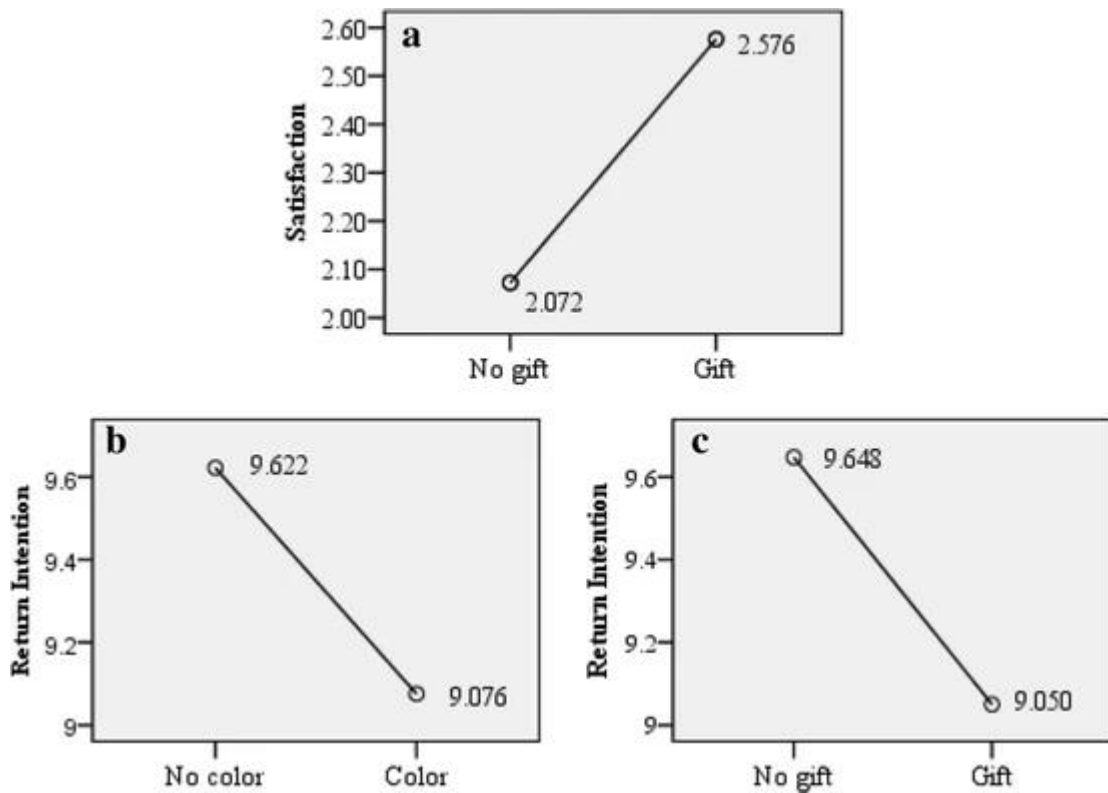


**FIGURE 4**

### EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE OF STUDY 1

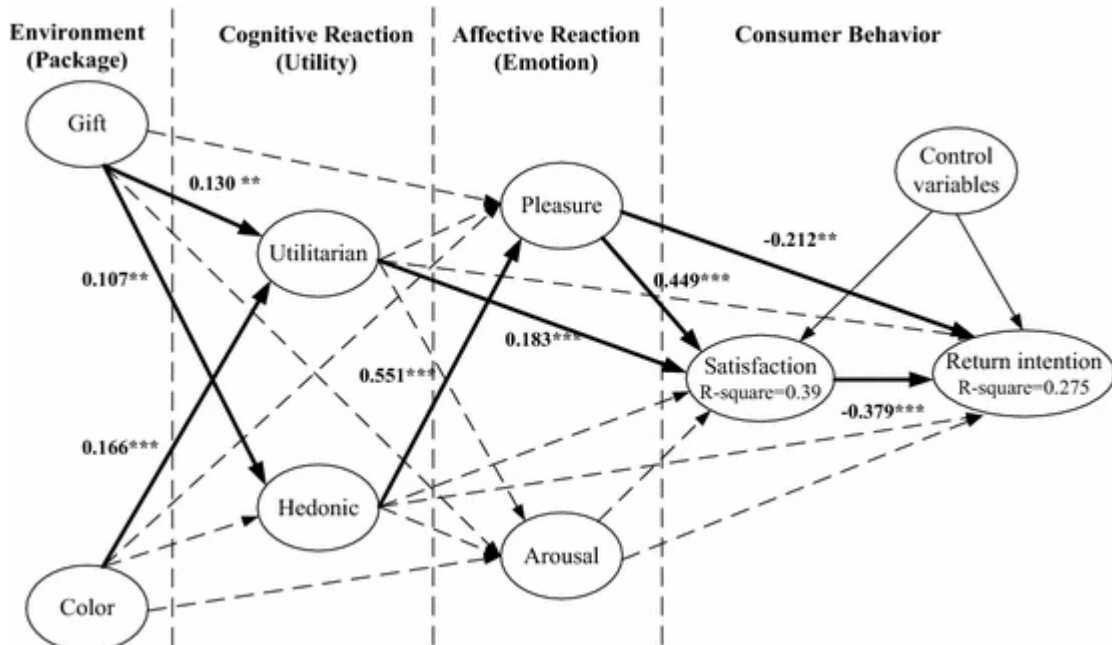


**FIGURE 5**  
**INFLUENCES OF THE PACKAGE DESIGN ON CONSUMERS' SATISFACTION AND RETURN INTENTIONS**



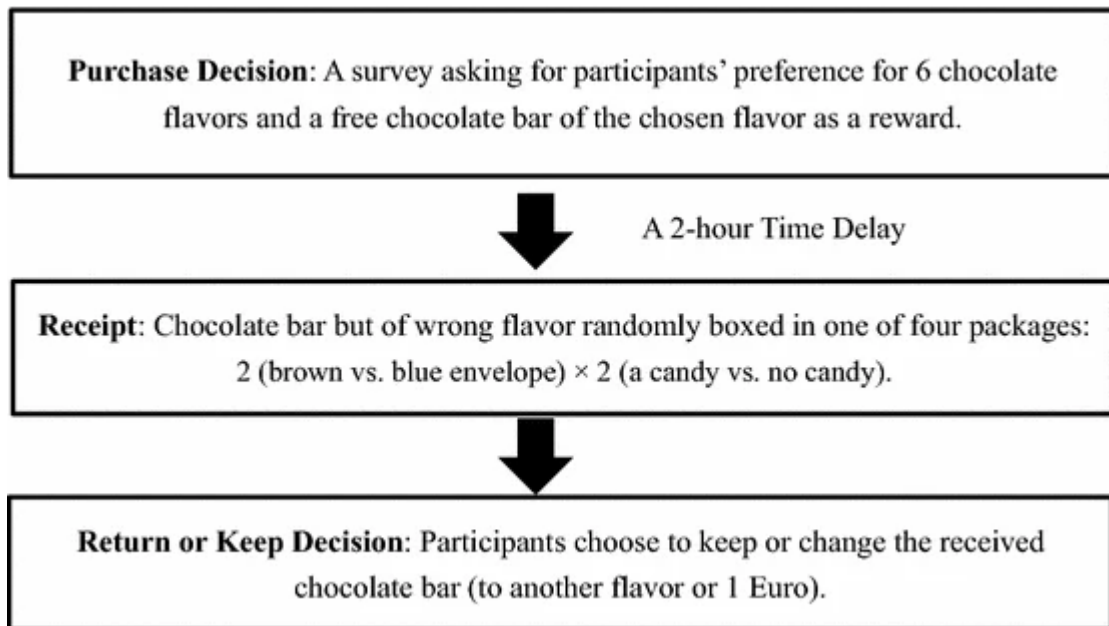
**FIGURE 6**

## PLS MODEL AND RESULTS



\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01; solid arrows indicate significant paths, while dashed arrows indicate insignificant paths

**FIGURE 7  
EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE OF STUDY 2**



**TABLE 1  
DETAILS OF THE STOP-MOTION ANIMATION VIDEO**

Manipulation	Number of photos	Display time (s)
Colorful package	60	25 s
Extra gift	10	5 s
Preprinted return label	10	5 s
Dirty-stained jersey	30	10 s (5 s for the dirty stain)
Total	80 <sup>a</sup>	Approximately 30 s <sup>a</sup>

a Some photos include more than one stimulus (e.g., participants saw the extra gift in the colorful package)

**TABLE 2**  
**SCALE ITEMS**

Construct	Item	Cronbach's $\alpha$	CR	AVE
<b>Utility</b>				
Utilitarian utility	Ineffective/effective	.929	.949	.824
	Helpful/unhelpful			
	Functional/not functional			
	Practical/impractical			
Hedonic utility	Fun/not fun	.918	.948	.859
	Delightful/not delightful			
	Enjoyable/unenjoyable			
<b>Emotion</b>				
Pleasure	Happy/unhappy	.941	.962	.895
	Pleased/annoyed			
	Contented/melancholic			
Arousal	Relaxed/stimulated	.749	.846	.648
	Calm/excited			
	Dull/jittery			
<b>Satisfaction</b>				
	I feel comfortable with the package.	.943	.963	.898
	The package is satisfying to me.			



	The package is worth the time and money I spent on it.			
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**TABLE 3  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

	Percentage (%)	SD
Age (years)		
16–24	22.5	10.21
25–34	31.8	
35–44	25.6	
45–54	20.0	
Number of online shopping experiences in the past 6 months		
0	.93	.77
1–3	22.50	
4–10	41.88	
> 10	34.69	
Individual return rate after online shopping		
0–5%	34.06	.84
5–10%	45.31	
10–20%	15.00	
> 20%	5.63	

**TABLE 4  
RESULTS OF ANOVA AND ANCOVA**

Variables	ANOVA		ANCOVA	
	Satisfaction <i>F</i> value	Return intention <i>F</i> value	Satisfaction <i>F</i> value	Return intention <i>F</i> value
Color (C)	1.787	3.124*	1.764	3.660*
Gift (G)	9.607***	5.036**	10.685***	4.417**
Return label (R)	.360	.940	.274	.994

C × R	2.147	.005	1.822	.000
C × G	1.577	.687	1.529	.659
G × R	.181	1.430	.265	1.004
C × G × R	.047	.018	.041	.001
Covariates				
Gender			2.339	.224
Age			.018	1.297
Extraversion			4.157**	1.815
Agreeableness			5.622**	7.516***
Conscientiousness			4.414**	.002
Neuroticism			3.802**	1.148
Openness			.228	.223
Soccer preference			.199	.400
<i>F</i> value	2.230***	1.593	2.568***	1.788**
R-square	.048	.034	.112	.081

\*  $p < .1$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .01$ ;  $N = 320$

**TABLE 5**  
**INDIRECT EFFECTS**

Indirect effects	Coefficient	SD	<i>T</i> value
Gift → Utilitarian → Satisfaction	.020	.014	1.375
Gift → Hedonic → Pleasure	.072**	.033	2.204
Color → Utilitarian → Satisfaction	.030*	.016	1.869
Utilitarian → Satisfaction → Return intention	– .073**	.032	– 2.194
Hedonic → Pleasure → Return intention	– .111**	.048	– 2.454
Pleasure → Satisfaction → Return intention	– .171***	.047	– 3.534

\*  $p < .1$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .01$

**TABLE 6**  
**PARTICIPANTS IN STUDY 2 AND THEIR RETURN BEHAVIOR**

	Returns	Participants	Return rate (%)
Brown envelope without gift	22	51	43.1
Brown envelope with gift	14	45	31.1
Blue envelope without gift	14	50	28.0
Blue envelope with gift	12	49	24.5
Total	62	195	31.8

**TABLE 7**  
**REGRESSION RESULTS OF STUDY 2**

Return behavior (0/1)	Measurement	Without interaction			With interaction		
		Coef.	Odds ratio	SE of Coef.	Coef.	Odds ratio	SE of Coef.
Intercept	0/1	.677	1.969	.785	.892	2.439	.797
Color	0/1	− .456	.634	.192**	− .789	.454	.209***
Gift	0/1	− .462	.630	.067***	− .819	.441	.303***
Color* gift	0/1				.737	2.089	.476
Gender	0/1	− .082	.921	.342	− .034	.967	.362
Like	Degree of liking chocolate (scale 1–5)	− .179	.836	.134	− .216	0.806	.133
Variance	SD of six Flavors' scores	.123	1.130	.775	.167	1.181	.729
Gap	$\frac{\text{Score}_{\text{choose}} - \text{Score}_{\text{received}}}{\text{range}}$ (range 0–4)	.103	1.108	.087	.104	1.109	.094
Chocolate chosen	Categorical variable						
Flavor A		Fixed	1		Fixed	1	
Flavor B		− .285	.752	.111**	− .305	.737	.104***

Flavor C		– .97 4	.378	.258***	– 1.0 44	.352	.266***
Flavor D		– .71 7	.488	.629	– .77 8	.459	.676
Flavor E		– .78 5	.456	.794	– .74 3	.476	.785
Flavor F		– 1.6 12	.200	1.187	– 1.5 11	.221	1.208
Chocolate Offered	Categorical variable						
Flavor A		Fixed	1		Fixed	1	
Flavor B		– 2.1 90	.112	.438***	– 2.2 67	.104	.480***
Flavor C		– .70 5	.494	.723	– .74 0	.477	.732
Flavor D		– 1.2 39	.290	.929	– 1.3 09	0.270	1.002
Flavor E		.243	1.275	.555	.265	1.303	.536
Flavor F		– .14 9	.862	.345	– .20 2	.817	.305
Pseudo R-square		.117			.122		

**TABLE 8**  
**DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE VALID SAMPLE IN STUDY 3**

Variable (unit)	Return rate (%)	Guarantee money (Chinese Yuan)	Service score (range 1–5)	
Mean	6.33	65,400	4.77	
SD	9.29	38,663	.083	
		Gift	Coupon	Colorful package
Number of shops with gift/coupon/colorful package		64	15	28
Number of shops without gift/coupon/colorful package		44	93	80

N = 108

**TABLE 9**  
**RESULTS OF REGRESSION MODEL FOR FRACTIONAL RESPONSE VARIABLES**

Return rate	Coef.	Odds ratio	SE of Coef.	$p >  z $
Intercept	7.759	2341.707	6.217	0.212
Gift	– .721**	0.486	0.317	0.023
Coupon	.049	1.050	0.327	0.882
Color	– .843***	0.430	0.242	0.000
Guarantee money	– .00001	1.000	0.000	0.167
Review score	– 2.417*	0.089	1.340	0.071
Industry return rate	.282***	1.326	0.058	0.000
Market	.573	1.775	0.554	0.301
Pseudo R-square	0.0765			

N = 108. \*  $p < .1$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .01$

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## **TRANSLATED VERSION: SPANISH**

Below is a rough translation of the insights presented above. This was done to give a general understanding of the ideas presented in the paper. Please excuse any grammatical mistakes and do not hold the original authors responsible for these mistakes.

## **VERSION TRADUCIDA: ESPAÑOL**

A continuación se muestra una traducción aproximada de las ideas presentadas anteriormente. Esto se hizo para dar una comprensión general de las ideas presentadas en el documento. Por favor, disculpe cualquier error gramatical y no responsabilite a los autores originales de estos errores.

## **INTRODUCCIÓN**

El aumento de las tasas de retorno en línea representa una grave amenaza para los minoristas electrónicos de todo el mundo. Una encuesta reciente mostró que el 36,1% de los minoristas electrónicos alemanes que vendían moda y accesorios experimentaron una tasa de retorno del 20% o más en 2014 (Instituto de Demoskopie k'ln 2015). En los Estados Unidos, la tasa media de rentabilidad alcanzó el 33% en 2012 y se prevé que aumente aún más en el futuro (Banjo 2013). Para componer asuntos, el 72% de los minoristas electrónicos asumen los costos de entrega y/o los costos adicionales de mano de obra y gestión para manejar las devoluciones, lo que en última instancia puede hacer que una política de devolución indulgente sea muy costosa. Los investigadores y gerentes están buscando maneras de mitigar este problema, pero nuestra comprensión de lo que impulsa las altas tasas de retorno sigue siendo limitada.

Los investigadores están de acuerdo en que la compra en línea puede considerarse como un proceso de decisión en dos etapas (Wood 2001): la decisión de ordenar (la decisión de compra) y la decisión de



conservar o devolver el producto solicitado (la decisión posterior a la compra). La decisión de compra en sí es más lenta que la decisión posterior a la compra: los consumidores suelen dedicar una gran cantidad de tiempo a recopilar y procesar información de varios minoristas electrónicos y comparar diferentes productos, marcas y precios. Por el contrario, por lo general toman la decisión posterior a la compra rápidamente, a veces dentro de unos segundos después de abrir el paquete. Por lo tanto, es fundamental determinar los factores que influyen en la decisión posterior a la compra durante este breve pero decisivo período.

Una amplia gama de literatura sobre el comportamiento de retorno de los consumidores se refiere a la información del sitio web y el producto en sí (véase la Fig. 1), utilizando principalmente la señalización (Janakiraman y Ordóñez 2012), la utilidad (Wood 2001) y las teorías de la expectativa (Bechwati y Siegal 2005). En general, la investigación indica que una buena reputación (Zhou e Hinz 2016), una puntuación de revisión alta (Sahoo et al. 2015), y productos de mayor calidad (Anderson et al. 2009) pueden reducir las intenciones de retorno del consumidor al aumentar la utilidad percibida y la señalización de mayor calidad. Otros estudios muestran que una política de retorno indulgente puede aumentar los rendimientos debido a los menores costos de retorno para el consumidor (Wood 2001), mientras que una descripción precisa del producto en los sitios web de compra puede disminuir las intenciones de retorno al reducir la brecha de expectativa de los consumidores (Heiman et al. 2001).

Sin embargo, debido al retraso de tiempo entre la compra y recepción de un producto pedido en línea, los consumidores pueden no recordar claramente todos los detalles de la compra en el momento de la recepción y no pueden visitar el sitio web respectivo o comprobar los correos electrónicos antiguos para volver a familiarizarse con la información de compra real o las políticas de devolución. Como resultado, más allá de los detalles de compra, las señales de paquetes de entrega son probablemente una de las últimas oportunidades para que los minoristas electrónicos influyan en el comportamiento de retorno de productos de los consumidores (Garretson y Burton 2005). La información transportada por el paquete de entrega es probablemente más clara y fresca que lo que queda en la memoria de los consumidores (es decir, los estímulos mostrados en el momento de la compra). Por lo tanto, para abordar el problema de las altas tasas de retorno, tanto los minoristas electrónicos como los investigadores deben reconocer la importancia del diseño del paquete de entrega, aunque la investigación existente, si la hubiera, lo haya hecho.

La composición del diseño del paquete de entrega incluye la apariencia exterior (por ejemplo, color, forma, tamaño) y su contenido (por ejemplo, regalos adicionales, cupones, etiquetas de devolución, rellenos y recibos). Nos centramos en el color, los regalos adicionales, los cupones y las etiquetas de devolución como los cuatro aspectos más críticos de nuestro estudio, porque no dependen en gran medida de las características de los productos ordenados (es decir, no consideramos la forma, el tamaño y los rellenos) y pueden influir potencialmente en el comportamiento del consumidor (véase la sección 2). Además, los minoristas electrónicos pueden manipular fácilmente todos estos factores.

En este contexto, planteamos la siguiente pregunta de investigación: ¿Cómo influye el proceso de apertura de paquetes en la decisión de retorno de los consumidores y por qué? La pregunta incluye dos partes: las respuestas de los consumidores a estímulos externos (es decir, el diseño del paquete de entrega) en el momento de abrir el paquete y su proceso de reacción cuando toman decisiones de devolución. Responder a estas preguntas es crucial tanto para la investigación como para la práctica. Teóricamente, el estudio avanza en la investigación sobre los impulsores del comportamiento de retorno de los consumidores y arroja más luz sobre el proceso de decisión de retorno. Una nueva perspectiva sobre el proceso de apertura de paquetes también ayudaría a analizar otras decisiones de los consumidores después de la compra. Prácticamente, abordar esta cuestión de investigación identifica varios factores controlables que los minoristas electrónicos pueden alterar para reducir las tasas de retorno.

Este artículo procede de la siguiente manera: En la sección 2, revisamos la literatura sobre el comportamiento de retorno del consumidor, así como el impacto potencial que los paquetes diseñados pueden tener en el comportamiento del consumidor. En la sección 3, presentamos un experimento (en el que imitamos el proceso de compra y apertura de paquetes mediante vídeos stop-motion) que pone a prueba el impacto del diseño de paquetes en las intenciones de retorno de los consumidores (Estudio 1). Además, aplicamos regresiones parciales de mínimos cuadrados (PLS) para comprender las reacciones cognitivas y

afectivas de los consumidores durante el proceso de apertura. La Sección 4 describe el Estudio 2, que sirve como una prueba de robustez y extiende el análisis al comportamiento real de retorno en un entorno experimental. En la sección 5, utilizamos datos transaccionales de la plataforma en línea más grande de China (Taobao.com) para examinar la relación entre el diseño de paquetes y las tasas de retorno de una tienda web (Estudio 3). La sección 6 concluye con un debate sobre las implicaciones y las futuras vías de investigación.

## **CONCLUSIÓN**

El Cuadro 9 muestra los resultados de la regresión, que revelan que los regalos adicionales y los paquetes coloridos tienen impactos significativos y negativos en las tasas de retorno de las tiendas ( $\gamma 1$  a .721,  $p < .05$ ;  $\gamma 3$  a .843,  $p < .01$ ). En otras palabras, un paquete de entrega bien diseñado puede ayudar a reducir las intenciones de devolución. Sin embargo, nuestros resultados de estimación indican que los cupones no reducen significativamente las tasas de retorno ( $\gamma 2$  a .049, n.s.). Suponemos que los cupones sólo pueden estar relacionados con las decisiones de recompra de los consumidores y no con sus decisiones de retorno. Otra posible explicación es que la prevalencia de cupones electrónicos en Internet hace que los cupones sean menos útiles. Además, los datos muestran que mejorar la calidad del servicio y del producto ( $\gamma 5$  x 2,417,  $p < .1$ ) es la forma más eficaz para que los minoristas electrónicos reduzcan las tasas de retorno.

## **TRANSLATED VERSION: FRENCH**

Below is a rough translation of the insights presented above. This was done to give a general understanding of the ideas presented in the paper. Please excuse any grammatical mistakes and do not hold the original authors responsible for these mistakes.

## **VERSION TRADUITE: FRANÇAIS**

Voici une traduction approximative des idées présentées ci-dessus. Cela a été fait pour donner une compréhension générale des idées présentées dans le document. Veuillez excuser toutes les erreurs grammaticales et ne pas tenir les auteurs originaux responsables de ces erreurs.

## **INTRODUCTION**

La hausse des taux de retour en ligne constitue une grave menace pour les détaillants en ligne du monde entier. Une enquête récente a montré que 36,1 % des e-commerçants allemands vendant de la mode et des accessoires ont connu un taux de rendement de 20 % ou plus en 2014 (Institut für Demoskopie Köln 2015). Aux États-Unis, le taux de rendement moyen a atteint 33 % en 2012 et devrait encore augmenter à l'avenir (Banjo 2013). Pour compliquer les choses, 72 % des détaillants en ligne assument les coûts de livraison et/ou les coûts supplémentaires de main-d'œuvre et de gestion pour la gestion des rendements, ce qui peut en fin de compte rendre une politique de retour clémente très coûteuse. Les chercheurs et les gestionnaires cherchent actuellement des moyens d'atténuer ce problème, mais notre compréhension de ce qui motive les taux de rendement élevés demeure limitée.

Les chercheurs conviennent que l'achat en ligne peut être considéré comme un processus décisionnel en deux étapes (Wood, 2001) : la décision de commander (la décision d'achat) et la décision de conserver ou de retourner le produit commandé (la décision postérieure à l'achat). La décision d'achat elle-même prend plus de temps que la décision post-achat : les consommateurs passent généralement beaucoup de temps à recueillir et à traiter des informations auprès de plusieurs détaillants en ligne et à comparer différents produits, marques et prix. En revanche, ils rendront habituellement la décision post-achat rapidement, parfois quelques secondes après l'ouverture du paquet. Par conséquent, il est essentiel de déterminer les facteurs qui influencent la décision post-achat au cours de cette brève période, mais décisive.

Un vaste éventail de documents sur le comportement des consommateurs se rapporte à l'information sur le site Web et au produit lui-même (voir fig. 1), principalement en utilisant des théories de signalisation (Janakiraman et Ordóñez 2012), d'utilité (Wood 2001) et d'attente (Bechwati et Siegal 2005). En général, la recherche indique qu'une bonne réputation (Zhou et Hinz 2016), un score d'examen élevé (Sahoo et al. 2015) et des produits de meilleure qualité (Anderson et al., 2009) peuvent réduire les intentions de rendement des consommateurs en augmentant l'utilité perçue et en signalant une meilleure qualité. D'autres études montrent qu'une politique de retour clémente peut augmenter les rendements en raison de la baisse des coûts de rendement pour le consommateur (Wood, 2001), tandis qu'une description précise du produit sur les sites Web d'achat peut réduire les intentions de rendement en réduisant l'écart d'attente des consommateurs (Heiman et coll., 2001).

Toutefois, en raison du délai entre l'achat et la réception d'un produit commandé en ligne, les consommateurs ne se souviennent pas clairement de tous les détails d'achat au moment de la réception et ne peuvent pas visiter le site Web respectif ou vérifier les anciens courriels pour se familiariser avec les informations d'achat réelles ou les politiques de retour. Par conséquent, au-delà des détails d'achat, les indices des colis de livraison sont probablement l'une des dernières occasions pour les détaillants en ligne d'influencer le comportement des consommateurs en matière de retour de produits (Garretson et Burton, 2005). L'information transportée par le colis de livraison est probablement plus claire et plus fraîche que ce qui reste dans la mémoire des consommateurs (c.-à-d. Les stimuli montrés au moment de l'achat). Ainsi, pour résoudre le problème des taux de rendement élevés, les détaillants en ligne et les chercheurs doivent reconnaître l'importance de la conception des colis de livraison, même si peu, voire aucun, y a-t-il fait.

La composition de la conception du colis de livraison comprend l'apparence extérieure (p. Ex., couleur, forme, taille) et son contenu (p. Ex., cadeaux supplémentaires, coupons, étiquettes de retour, charges et reçus). Nous nous concentrons sur la couleur, les cadeaux supplémentaires, les coupons et les étiquettes de retour comme les quatre aspects les plus critiques de notre étude, parce qu'ils ne reposent pas fortement sur les caractéristiques des produits commandés (c.-à-d. Que nous ne considérons pas la forme, la taille et les charges) et peuvent potentiellement influencer le comportement des consommateurs (voir sect. 2). De plus, les e-commerçants peuvent facilement manipuler tous ces facteurs.

Dans ce contexte, nous posons la question de recherche suivante : comment le processus d'ouverture des paquets influence-t-il la décision de retour des consommateurs et pourquoi? La question comprend deux parties : les réponses des consommateurs aux stimuli externes (c.-à-d. La conception du colis de livraison) au moment de l'ouverture de l'emballage et leur processus de réaction lorsqu'ils prennent des décisions de retour. Répondre à ces questions est crucial pour la recherche et la pratique. Théoriquement, l'étude fait progresser la recherche sur les moteurs du comportement de retour des consommateurs et jette plus de lumière sur le processus de décision de retour. Une nouvelle perspective sur le processus d'ouverture des paquets aiderait également à analyser d'autres décisions des consommateurs après l'achat. En pratique, le fait de répondre à cette question de recherche identifie plusieurs facteurs contrôlables que les détaillants en ligne peuvent modifier pour réduire les taux de rendement.

Cet article se déroule comme suit: Dans la secte 2, nous passons en revue la littérature sur le comportement de retour des consommateurs, ainsi que l'impact potentiel que les paquets conçus peuvent avoir sur le comportement des consommateurs. Dans Sect. 3, nous présentons une expérience (dans laquelle nous imitons le processus d'achat et d'ouverture des paquets à l'aide de vidéos en stop-motion) qui teste l'impact de la conception des emballages sur les intentions de retour des consommateurs (étude 1). Nous appliquons en outre des régressions partielles des moindres carrés (PLS) pour comprendre les réactions cognitives et affectives des consommateurs pendant le processus d'ouverture. La section 4 décrit l'étude 2, qui sert de test de robustesse et étend l'analyse au comportement de retour réel dans un contexte expérimental. Dans Sect. 5, nous utilisons les données transactionnelles de la plus grande plate-forme en ligne de Chine (Taobao.com) pour examiner la relation entre la conception des paquets et les taux de retour d'une boutique en ligne (étude 3). La section 6 se termine par une discussion sur les implications et les avenues de recherche futures.

## CONCLUSION

Le tableau 9 montre les résultats de régression, qui révèlent que les cadeaux supplémentaires et les emballages colorés ont des répercussions significatives et négatives sur les taux de rendement des magasins ( $\gamma 1 = -0,721$ ,  $p < 0,05$ ;  $\gamma 3 = -0,843$ ,  $p < .01$ ). En d'autres termes, un colis de livraison bien conçu peut aider à réduire les intentions de retour. Toutefois, nos résultats d'estimation indiquent que les coupons ne réduisent pas de façon significative les taux de rendement ( $\gamma 2 = 0,049$ , n.s.). Nous soupçons que les coupons ne peuvent être liés qu'aux décisions de rachat des consommateurs et non à leurs décisions de retour. Une autre explication possible est que la prévalence des coupons électroniques sur Internet rend les coupons moins utiles. En outre, les données montrent que l'amélioration de la qualité des services et des produits ( $\gamma 5 = -2,417$ ,  $p < .1$ ) est le moyen le plus efficace pour les détaillants en ligne de réduire les taux de rendement.

### **TRANSLATED VERSION: GERMAN**

Below is a rough translation of the insights presented above. This was done to give a general understanding of the ideas presented in the paper. Please excuse any grammatical mistakes and do not hold the original authors responsible for these mistakes.

### **ÜBERSETZTE VERSION: DEUTSCH**

Hier ist eine ungefähre Übersetzung der oben vorgestellten Ideen. Dies wurde getan, um ein allgemeines Verständnis der in dem Dokument vorgestellten Ideen zu vermitteln. Bitte entschuldigen Sie alle grammatikalischen Fehler und machen Sie die ursprünglichen Autoren nicht für diese Fehler verantwortlich.

### **EINLEITUNG**

Steigende Online-Rücklaufquoten stellen eine ernste Bedrohung für E-Einzelhändler auf der ganzen Welt dar. Eine aktuelle Umfrage ergab, dass 36,1 Prozent der deutschen E-Einzelhändler, die Mode und Accessoires verkaufen, 2014 eine Rendite von 20 % oder mehr verzeichneten (Institut für Demoskopie Köln 2015). In den Vereinigten Staaten erreichte die durchschnittliche Rendite 2012 33 % und dürfte in Zukunft noch weiter steigen (Banjo 2013). Hinzu kommt, dass 72 % der E-Einzelhändler die Kosten für die Lieferung und/oder die zusätzlichen Arbeits- und Managementkosten für die Abwicklung der Rücksendungen tragen, was eine nachsichtige Rückgabepolitik letztlich sehr teuer machen kann. Forscher und Manager suchen derzeit nach Wegen, dieses Problem zu mildern, aber unser Verständnis dessen, was hohe Renditen antreibt, bleibt begrenzt.

Die Forscher sind sich einig, dass der Online-Kauf als zweistufiger Entscheidungsprozess angesehen werden kann (Wood 2001): die Entscheidung zur Bestellung (die Kaufentscheidung) und die Entscheidung, das bestellte Produkt zu behalten oder zurückzugeben (die Entscheidung nach dem Kauf). Die Kaufentscheidung selbst ist zeitaufwändiger als die Entscheidung nach dem Kauf: Verbraucher verbringen in der Regel viel Zeit damit, Informationen von mehreren E-Händlern zu sammeln und zu verarbeiten und verschiedene Produkte, Marken und Preise zu vergleichen. Im Gegensatz dazu treffen sie die Entscheidung nach dem Kauf in der Regel schnell, manchmal innerhalb weniger Sekunden nach dem Öffnen des Pakets. Daher ist es entscheidend, die Faktoren zu bestimmen, die die Entscheidung nach dem Kauf in dieser kurzen, aber entscheidenden Phase beeinflussen.

Eine breite Palette von Literatur über das Verhalten von Konsumenten-Rückgabe bezieht sich auf Website-Informationen und das Produkt selbst (siehe Abb. 1), in erster Linie mit Signalisierung (Janakiraman und Ordéez 2012), Nützlichkeit (Wood 2001), und Erwartung (Bechwati und Siegal 2005) Theorien. Im Allgemeinen zeigen Untersuchungen, dass ein guter Ruf (Zhou und Hinz 2016), ein hoher

Bewertungswert (Sahoo et al. 2015) und qualitativ hochwertigere Produkte (Anderson et al. 2009) die Renditen der Verbraucher reduzieren können, indem sie den wahrgenommenen Nutzen erhöhen und eine höhere Qualität signalisieren. Andere Studien zeigen, dass eine milde Rückgabepolitik die Renditen aufgrund niedrigerer Rückgabekosten für den Verbraucher erhöhen kann (Wood 2001), während eine genaue Produktbeschreibung auf Kauf-Websites die Renditeabsichten verringern kann, indem sie die Erwartungslücke der Verbraucher verringert (Heiman et al. 2001).

Aufgrund der Zeitverzögerung zwischen dem Kauf und dem Erhalt eines online bestellten Produkts können sich verbrauchernahe Verbraucher jedoch nicht alle Kaufdetails zum Zeitpunkt des Erhalts genau merken und die entsprechende Website nicht besuchen oder alte E-Mails überprüfen, um sich mit den tatsächlichen Kaufinformationen oder Rückgabegerichtlinien vertraut zu machen. Infolgedessen sind Lieferpakethinweise über die Kaufdetails hinaus wahrscheinlich eine der letzten Möglichkeiten für E-Einzelhändler, das Produktrückgabeverhalten der Verbraucher zu beeinflussen (Garretson und Burton 2005). Die Informationen, die das Lieferpaket mit sich bringt, sind wahrscheinlich klarer und frischer als das, was in den Erinnerungen der Verbraucher verbleibt (d. H. Die Beim Kauf gezeigten Reize). Um das Problem der hohen Rücklaufquoten anzugehen, müssen sowohl E-Einzelhändler als auch Forscher die Bedeutung des Entwurfs von Lieferpaketen erkennen, auch wenn dies nur wenig, wenn überhaupt, noch vorhanden ist.

Die Zusammensetzung des Lieferpaketdesigns umfasst das äußere Erscheinungsbild (z. B. Farbe, Form, Größe) und deren Inhalt (z.B. Extrageschenke, Coupons, Rücksendeetiketten, Füllstoffe und Quittungen). Wir konzentrieren uns auf Farbe, zusätzliche Geschenke, Coupons und Rücksendeetiketten als die vier wichtigsten Aspekte unserer Studie, da sie nicht stark auf den Eigenschaften bestellter Produkte beruhen (d. H. Wir berücksichtigen Form, Größe und Füllstoffe nicht) und potenziell das Verbraucherverhalten beeinflussen können (siehe Abschnitt 2). Darüber hinaus können E-Einzelhändler all diese Faktoren leicht manipulieren.

Vor diesem Hintergrund stellen wir folgende Forschungsfrage: Wie beeinflusst der Paketöffnungsprozess die Rückentscheidung der Verbraucher und warum? Die Frage umfasst zwei Teile: die Antworten der Verbraucher auf externe Reize (d. H. Das Design des Lieferpakets) zum Zeitpunkt des Öffnens der Verpackung und ihren Reaktionsprozess bei der Rücksendeentscheidung. Die Beantwortung dieser Fragen ist für Forschung und Praxis gleichermaßen von entscheidender Bedeutung. Theoretisch fördert die Studie die Forschung zu den Treibern des Verbraucherrücklaufverhaltens und wirft mehr Licht auf den Rückführungsprozess. Eine neue Perspektive auf den Paketöffnungsprozess würde auch bei der Analyse anderer Entscheidungen der Verbraucher nach dem Kauf helfen. In der Praxis werden in der Behandlung dieser Forschungsfrage mehrere kontrollierbare Faktoren identifiziert, die E-Einzelhändler ändern können, um die Rücklaufquoten zu senken.

Dieser Artikel geht wie folgt vor: In Abschnitt 2 überprüfen wir die Literatur über das Rücksendeverhalten von Verbrauchern sowie die potenziellen Auswirkungen, die entworfene Pakete auf das Verbraucherverhalten haben können. In Abschnitt 3 stellen wir ein Experiment vor (wobei wir den Kauf- und Paketöffnungsprozess mit Stop-Motion-Videos imitieren), das die Auswirkungen des Verpackungsdesigns auf die Rückgabeabsichten der Verbraucher testet (Studie 1). Darüber hinaus wenden wir partielle Regressionen (PLS) an, um die kognitiven und affektiven Reaktionen der Verbraucher während des Öffnungsprozesses zu verstehen. Abschnitt 4 beschreibt Studie 2, die als Robustheitstest dient und die Analyse auf das reale Rückgabeverhalten in einer experimentellen Umgebung ausdehnt. In Abschnitt 5 verwenden wir Transaktionsdaten von Chinas größter Online-Plattform (Taobao.com), um die Beziehung zwischen Paketdesign und den Rücksenderaten eines Webshops zu untersuchen (Studie 3). Abschnitt 6 schließt mit einer Diskussion über die Implikationen und künftigen Forschungswege.

## **SCHLUSSFOLGERUNG**

Tabelle 9 zeigt die Regressionsergebnisse, die zeigen, dass zusätzliche Geschenke und bunte Pakete erhebliche und negative Auswirkungen auf die Rücklaufquoten der Shops haben ( $\gamma_1 = .721$ ,  $p < .05$ ;  $\gamma_3 = 0,843$ ,  $p < 0,01$ ). Mit anderen Worten, ein gut gestaltetes Lieferpaket kann dazu beitragen, die

Reseklamatabsichten zu reduzieren. Unsere Schätzergebnisse deuten jedoch darauf hin, dass Coupons die Renditen nicht signifikant senken ( $\gamma_2 = .049$ , n.s.). Wir gehen davon aus, dass Coupons nur mit Rückkaufentscheidungen der Verbraucher und nicht mit ihren Rückgabeentscheidungen zusammenhängen dürfen. Eine weitere mögliche Erklärung ist, dass die Verbreitung von E-Coupons im Internet Coupons weniger nützlich macht. Darüber hinaus zeigen die Daten, dass die Verbesserung der Service- und Produktqualität ( $\gamma_5 = 2,417$ ,  $p < .1$ ) für E-Einzelhändler die effektivste Möglichkeit ist, die Rücklaufquoten zu senken.

## **TRANSLATED VERSION: PORTUGUESE**

Below is a rough translation of the insights presented above. This was done to give a general understanding of the ideas presented in the paper. Please excuse any grammatical mistakes and do not hold the original authors responsible for these mistakes.

## **VERSÃO TRADUZIDA: PORTUGUÊS**

Aqui está uma tradução aproximada das ideias acima apresentadas. Isto foi feito para dar uma compreensão geral das ideias apresentadas no documento. Por favor, desculpe todos os erros gramaticais e não responsabilize os autores originais responsáveis por estes erros.

## **INTRODUÇÃO**

O aumento das taxas de retorno online representa uma séria ameaça para os retalhistas em todo o mundo. Uma pesquisa recente mostrou que 36,1% dos retalhistas alemães que vendiam moda e acessórios experimentaram uma taxa de retorno de 20% ou mais em 2014 (Institut für Demoskopie Köln 2015). Nos Estados Unidos, a taxa média de retorno atingiu os 33% em 2012 e prevê-se que aumente ainda mais no futuro (Banjo 2013). Para compensar as questões, 72% dos retalhistas eletrônicos suportam os custos de entrega e/ou os custos adicionais de mão de obra e gestão para lidar com as devoluções, o que pode, em última análise, tornar uma política de devolução tolerante muito dispendiosa. Os investigadores e gestores estão atualmente à procura de formas de mitigar este problema, mas a nossa compreensão do que impulsiona as elevadas taxas de retorno continua a ser limitada.

Os investigadores concordam que a compra online pode ser encarada como um processo de decisão em duas fases (Wood 2001): a decisão de ordenar (a decisão de compra) e a decisão de manter ou devolver o produto encomendado (a decisão pós-compra). A decisão de compra em si é mais morosa do que a decisão pós-compra: Os consumidores normalmente passam muito tempo a recolher e processar informações de vários retalhistas eletrônicos e a comparar diferentes produtos, marcas e preços. Em contraste, geralmente tomam a decisão pós-compra rapidamente, às vezes em poucos segundos após abrir o pacote. Por conseguinte, é fundamental determinar os fatores que influenciam a decisão pós-compra durante este breve período, mas decisivo.

Uma vasta gama de literatura sobre o comportamento de retorno do consumidor diz respeito à informação do site e ao próprio produto (ver Fig. 1), principalmente utilizando a sinalização (Janakiraman e Ordóñez 2012), a utilidade (Wood 2001) e as teorias da expectativa (Bechwati e Siegal 2005). Em geral, a investigação indica que uma boa reputação (Zhou e Hinz 2016), uma pontuação de alta revisão (Sahoo et al. 2015), e produtos de maior qualidade (Anderson et al. 2009) podem reduzir as intenções de retorno dos consumidores, aumentando a utilidade percebida e sinalizando uma maior qualidade. Outros estudos mostram que uma política de devolução indulgente pode aumentar os retornos devido aos custos de retorno mais baixos para o consumidor (Wood 2001), enquanto uma descrição precisa do produto nos websites de compra pode diminuir as intenções de retorno, reduzindo o fosso das expectativas dos consumidores (Heiman et al. 2001).

No entanto, devido ao atraso de tempo entre a compra e a recepção de um produto encomendado online, os consumidores podem não se lembrar claramente de todos os detalhes da compra no momento da recepção e não podem visitar o respectivo website ou verificar e-mails antigos para se reencontrarem com informações reais de compra ou políticas de devolução. Como resultado, para além dos detalhes da compra, as pistas do pacote de entrega são provavelmente uma das últimas oportunidades para os retalhistas de e-retailers influenciarem o comportamento dos consumidores no retorno dos produtos (Garretson e Burton 2005). A informação transportada pelo pacote de entrega é provavelmente mais clara e fresca do que a que resta na memória dos consumidores (isto é, os estímulos apresentados no momento da compra). Assim, para resolver o problema das elevadas taxas de retorno, tanto os retalhistas eletrónicos como os investigadores têm de reconhecer a importância da conceção do pacote de entregas, embora pouca, se é que alguma, a investigação anterior o tenha feito.

A composição do design do pacote de entrega inclui a aparência exterior (por exemplo, cor, forma, tamanho) e o seu conteúdo (por exemplo, presentes extra, cupões, etiquetas de devolução, encheimentos e recibos). Focamo-nos na cor, presentes extra, cupões e rótulos de retorno como os quatro aspetos mais críticos do nosso estudo, porque não dependem fortemente das características dos produtos encomendados (ou seja, não consideramos forma, tamanho e enchimento) e podem potencialmente influenciar o comportamento do consumidor (ver Seita. Além disso, os retalhistas eletrónicos podem manipular facilmente todos estes fatores.

Neste contexto, colocamos a seguinte questão de investigação: como é que o processo de abertura de pacotes influencia a decisão de regresso dos consumidores e porquê? A questão inclui duas partes: as respostas dos consumidores aos estímulos externos (isto é, o desenho do pacote de entrega) no momento da abertura do pacote e o seu processo de reação quando tomam decisões de regresso. Responder a estas questões é crucial para a investigação e a prática. Teoricamente, o estudo avança a investigação sobre os condutores do comportamento de retorno dos consumidores e lança mais luz sobre o processo de decisão de retorno. Uma nova perspetiva sobre o processo de abertura de pacotes também ajudaria na análise de outras decisões de consumo pós-compra. Na prática, abordar esta questão da investigação identifica vários fatores controláveis que os retalhistas eletrónicos podem alterar para reduzir as taxas de retorno.

Este artigo prossegue da seguinte forma: Em Seita. 2, revemos a literatura sobre o comportamento de retorno do consumidor, bem como o impacto potencial que os pacotes desenhados podem ter no comportamento do consumidor. Na Seita. 3, apresentamos uma experiência (em que imitamos o processo de compra e abertura de pacotes utilizando vídeos stop-motion) que testa o impacto do design de pacotes nas intenções de retorno dos consumidores (Estudo 1). Aplicamos ainda regressões parciais de menos quadrados (PLS) para compreender as reações cognitivas e afetivas dos consumidores durante o processo de abertura. A secção 4 descreve o Estudo 2, que serve como um teste de robustez e alarga a análise ao comportamento real de retorno num ambiente experimental. Em Seita. 5, usamos dados transacionais da maior plataforma online da China (Taobao.com) para examinar a relação entre o design de pacotes e as taxas de retorno de uma loja web (Estudo 3). A secção 6 termina com uma discussão sobre as implicações e as futuras vias de investigação.

## CONCLUSÃO

O quadro 9 mostra os resultados da regressão, que revelam que presentes extra e pacotes coloridos têm impactos significativos e negativos nas taxas de retorno das lojas ( $\gamma_1 = - .721$ ,  $p < .05$ ;  $\gamma_3 = - .843$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Por outras palavras, um pacote de entrega bem desenhado pode ajudar a reduzir as intenções de retorno. No entanto, os nossos resultados de estimativa indicam que os cupões não reduzem significativamente as taxas de retorno ( $\gamma_2 = .049$ , n.s.). Supomos que os cupões só podem estar relacionados com as decisões de recompra dos consumidores e com as suas decisões de regresso. Outra explicação possível é que a prevalência de cupões eletrónicos na Internet torna os cupões menos

úteis. Além disso, os dados mostram que melhorar a qualidade do serviço e do produto ( $\gamma_5 = -2.417$ ,  $p < .1$ ) é a forma mais eficaz de os retalhistas reduzirem as taxas de retorno.