Post-purchase selfies could reduce level of returns - research

By Sandra Halliday - July 15, 2022

As the rate of fashion returns rises and many e-stores start charging to take goods back, a new study claims that including more post-purchase photos and videos from other customers could help to reduce the problem.

Research conducted in the UK and US shows 61% of consumers saying that if they see visual user-generated content (UGC) from other customers, it could reduce the number of fashion items they send back.

These shoppers want to see the items they’re thinking of buying on “real people”, and 59% also say they’d like to see virtual try-on tech through which they could picture themselves in the garments.

The research comes from Nosto, a commerce experience platform, used by fashion brands such as Patagonia, Paul Smith, Pangaia, and Todd Snyder.

It spoke to just over 2,000 British and American consumers at a time when major fashion retailers such as Zara, ASOS and Boohoo are reporting a surging volume of online returns that in many cases are denting profits.

In fact, in the US, average e-commerce return rates jumped to 20.8% last year, with an estimated $671 billion worth of goods being sent back.

Returns were relatively low during the pandemic as the kind of comfort clothing consumers bought to wear at home had fewer fit issues than much of what’s being bought for more ‘normal’ lifestyles today.

The study said e-commerce returns add as much as 21% to costs per product, driving up warehouse expenses and also negatively impacting the environment. That’s partly caused by more delivery vehicles being on the road, extra packaging, as well as eco issues to do with over-production.
“Fashion retail brands are also increasingly conscious that performing poorly on sustainability and protecting the environment can damage their credibility,” Nosto said, adding that respondents to the survey were more than twice as likely to agree that returns are bad for the environment than disagree (49% v 17%) on the basis that returns waste fuel, packaging and other resources.

“Polished, studio imagery has been the default way to show clothes off on e-commerce stores. But supplementing this with customers’ own imagery gives shoppers a more accurate reflection of how products are worn in everyday situations, and by ‘everyday people’ who also own the items,” said Damien Mahoney, Chief Strategy Officer.

Separate research conducted last year by Stackla, the visual UGC platform that Nosto now owns, also indicated that 58% of consumers would let fashion retailers use their post-purchase selfies.

Interestingly, although companies have been criticised for adding returns fees, 49% of respondents said charging would make them think more carefully about whether they’re likely to keep a product before they place an order.

And two-thirds of consumers also called for e-tailers to do more to give them confidence they’re buying something they might keep by ensuring online information is clear, accurate and detailed, orders aren't damaged before being sent, and that correct items are packed.

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