

MANAGING OMNICHANNEL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN APPAREL RETAIL THROUGH CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAPPING

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Abstract: the article develops a customer-journey approach to managing omnichannel customer experience in apparel retail. It argues that competitive advantage in clothing retailing rests less on the number of channels a firm operates than on its ability to deliver a single, coherent experience across them. Drawing on customer-experience research, the study maps the apparel customer journey and proposes a typology of «experience gaps» — the seams at which the journey breaks. The fitting moment is identified as the critical phygital touchpoint that determines conversion and returns. On this basis, the study formulates a journey-based management framework linking gaps to managerial levers, tools, and expected outcomes. To operationalize decision-making, a multi-criteria decision-analysis (MCDA) model based on the Weighted Sum Model is developed to rank the experience gaps by impact and implementation cost, supported by a Kendall's concordance test framework for expert validation. Finally, an action-priority matrix and strategic roadmap are proposed to guide phased managerial implementation. The contribution provides a practical diagnostic instrument for retailers and a structural foundation for empirical testing.

Keywords: omnichannel retailing, apparel customer journey, customer experience, phygital touchpoints, fitting moment, virtual try-on, multi-criteria decision-analysis, Weighted Sum Model, action-priority matrix, strategic roadmap

Introduction. Over the past decade retailing has moved from a multichannel logic, in which physical stores, websites and mobile applications operated as separate silos, towards an omnichannel logic, in which channels and touchpoints are managed as a single, integrated system. In the omnichannel model the boundaries between channels blur and the customer perceives the retailer as one brand rather than a set of disconnected outlets [15]. Shoppers now browse on a smartphone, examine a garment in a store, check availability online and complete the purchase wherever it is most convenient, expecting the retailer to recognise them and preserve the context of the interaction at every step [2].

In this environment the basis of competition has shifted. Price and assortment remain necessary, but they are increasingly easy to match; what is far harder to replicate is a consistently good experience across the whole journey [6]. Customer experience — the customer's cognitive, emotional, sensorial, social and behavioural response to the retailer across all touchpoints — has therefore become the central object of retail management [9].

Apparel retailing is a particularly demanding and revealing setting for this challenge. Clothing is a high-involvement, hedonic and identity-expressive purchase: garments must be seen, touched and, above all, tried on; sizing is inconsistent between brands; and fashion assortments are large, seasonal and quickly refreshed. As a result the apparel journey is unusually non-linear and touch-intensive, and it produces the highest product-return rates in retailing [10]. The promise of a seamless omnichannel experience is therefore both more valuable in clothing than almost anywhere else and considerably harder to keep.

The practical problem is that many apparel retailers invest heavily in new channels and technologies yet still deliver a fragmented experience. Customers repeatedly encounter "seams" —

points at which the journey breaks: an item admired online is unavailable in the store, the loyalty profile built online is unknown to the shop assistant, or an online purchase cannot be returned to a nearby store without friction. Each such break forces the customer to stop, repeat an action or abandon the purchase, and each erodes the very seamlessness that omnichannel retailing promises. The core managerial task is thus not to add channels but to remove the seams between them.

The aim of this article is to develop a customer-journey approach to managing omnichannel customer experience in apparel retail. Three objectives follow from this aim: first, to map the apparel customer journey across its stages and the touchpoints that compose it; second, to propose a typology of the experience gaps that break omnichannel seamlessness in clothing retailing, with the fitting moment identified as the critical phygital touchpoint; and third, to formulate a management framework that links each experience gap to a concrete managerial lever, an enabling tool and an expected experience outcome.

Research material and methods. This study is conceptual and methodological, combining a qualitative synthesis of omnichannel retail literature with quantitative decision modeling. General scientific methods (analysis, synthesis, abstraction) were applied to literature data to build a stage-by-stage apparel customer journey map and a typology of cross-channel experience gaps. The Weighted Sum Model (WSM) with min–max normalization was used to prioritize gap closure based on weighted Impact and Cost criteria. Kendall's coefficient of concordance (W) with a χ^2 significance test was integrated to validate expert panel agreement. This methodology yields an actionable strategic roadmap (Action-Priority Matrix) pairing identified seams with specific managerial levers and KPIs.

Literature analysis. The conceptual foundation of the study rests on three streams of research: omnichannel retailing, customer experience, and the design of the customer journey. Omnichannel retailing is commonly defined as the synergetic management of the numerous available channels and customer touchpoints in such a way that the customer experience across channels, and the performance over channels, is optimised [15]. The defining feature of this model, in contrast to multichannel retailing, is integration: channels are no longer independent routes to purchase but interdependent components of one system, and the customer moves among them within a single interaction rather than choosing one and staying in it.

Customer experience is a multidimensional construct that unfolds as a journey across a series of touchpoints [9]. Journeys designed for consistency across touchpoints are perceived as more effective and strengthen loyalty [8], and a "seam" is precisely a local failure of the integration quality that Sousa and Voss [13] distinguished within multichannel service. The experience must also be authentic and recognisably one brand as the customer moves between the physical and the digital [11]. Our earlier work conceptualised omnichannel customer service at a general level [7]; the present study addresses the apparel-specific journey and its characteristic failure points.

Distinctive features of the customer journey in apparel retail. Several features make the apparel journey distinct and concentrate its experiential risk at particular points. The first and most important is fit and sizing uncertainty. A garment's value depends on how it fits and feels on the body, which cannot be assessed fully at a distance. Sizing is notoriously inconsistent between brands and even styles, so a known size is unreliable. Physical or simulated try-on is therefore a structural necessity, and its absence online is the main reason clothing generates the highest return rates in retailing [10].

The second feature is the hedonic and identity-expressive nature of the purchase. Clothing is bought not only for function but to express self-image, signal belonging and produce emotional and sensory pleasure. The touch of a fabric, the look of a garment in a mirror and the social reaction of companions are integral to the experience, which means that the sensorial and social dimensions of customer experience emphasised by Lemon and Verhoef [9] are especially pronounced in fashion.

The fourth feature is assortment complexity. A single apparel style multiplies into a large matrix of sizes and colours, and the assortment as a whole turns over rapidly with seasons and fashion cycles. This makes accurate, real-time inventory visibility across stores and warehouse both difficult and decisive: an availability promise the retailer cannot keep at the exact size and colour the customer wants is worse than none. Finally, the top of the apparel funnel is heavily social: inspiration and

discovery increasingly begin on visual and social platforms and with influencers, external touchpoints the retailer influences but does not own. Taken together, these features make the apparel journey non-linear, touch-intensive and pivoted on the fitting moment.

Mapping the omnichannel customer journey in apparel retail. To manage the experience deliberately, the retailer must first see the journey as the customer lives it rather than as the organisation is structured to deliver it. Table 1 sets out a stage-by-stage map of the omnichannel apparel journey. For each stage it identifies the customer's dominant goal, the touchpoints and channels typically involved, and the experience objective — that is, what "seamless" concretely means at that stage. The map deliberately spans the full arc from inspiration to post-purchase loyalty, because in clothing the phases after payment, especially fitting-driven returns and re-purchase, are where much of the experience is won or lost.

Table 1. Omnichannel customer journey map for apparel retail

Journey stage	Customer goal	Channel	Key touchpoints	Seamless objective (measurable)
Inspiration and need recognition	Discover styles, form a wish	Social, Online	Social feed, influencer post, ad, shop window	An inspiring item is saved to the wishlist or cart in one tap and kept in view (share of social-sourced items added to the wishlist)
Search and consideration	Find the right item and compare	Online, Offline	Product card, on-site search, reviews, in-store rail	Identical price, description and promotion on the product card in every channel (price/content match rate close to 100%)
Fitting and evaluation	Judge fit, look and feel	Offline, Online	Fitting room, virtual try-on, size guide	A confident size decision with a recommendation shown before purchase; body/size profile reused (size-related return rate)
Purchase	Buy with minimum effort	Online, Offline	Checkout, POS, mobile pay, assisted sale	One recognised profile, cart and payment across channels (share of identified purchases)
Fulfilment	Receive the item conveniently	Online, Offline	Click-and-collect, courier, ship-from-store	Free choice of pickup or delivery kept on a reliable stock promise (on-time-in-full rate)
Post-purchase and loyalty	Wear, return/exchange, re-engage	Online, Offline, Social	Returns desk, courier, CRM, loyalty app	Any-channel return in a few steps and one continuous history (return-processing time; repeat-purchase rate)

Data source: own development.

A typology of experience gaps that break omnichannel seamlessness. An experience gap, or seam, can be defined as a discontinuity at the boundary between two touchpoints or channels at which the customer is unable to carry information, identity or value forward and must therefore stop, repeat an action, or abandon the journey. In the vocabulary of Sousa and Voss [13], a seam is a local failure of integration quality; in that of Kuehn et al. [8], it is a breach of the consistency that makes a journey effective. Naming and classifying these seams is the practical heart of journey-based management,

because a gap that is not identified cannot be closed. Table 2 proposes a typology of the experience gaps most characteristic of apparel retailing.

Table 2. Typology of experience gaps (seams) in omnichannel apparel retail

Gap type	Where it appears	Apparel example	Effect on customer experience
I. Data and system gaps (technology and information layer)			
Content and communication gap	Between channels' product data and brand messaging	Different price, description or promotion, and an inconsistent brand voice, online, in the app and in store	Confusion, distrust and a fragmented brand
Identity / data gap	Between the online account and store staff	Loyalty profile and history unknown to the shop assistant	Impersonal service, repeated data entry
II. Operational and process gaps (inventory, fulfilment and returns)			
Assortment / inventory gap	Search → fitting / purchase	Item seen online is out of stock in the desired size in store	Wasted trips, lost sales, frustration
Fulfilment gap	Purchase → delivery	Limited or unreliable click-and-collect / ship-from-store	Reduced convenience, cart abandonment
Returns gap	Post-purchase	Online purchase cannot be returned or exchanged in store	Effort, regret, weakened loyalty
III. Product and customer-experience gap (category-specific)			
Fitting gap	When judging fit online	No reliable way to judge fit or size before buying online	Uncertainty, over-ordering, high returns

Data source: own development.

Several of these gaps deserve comment because they are specific to, or especially damaging in, clothing. The assortment and inventory gap is acute in apparel because the relevant unit of availability is not the style but the exact size-and-colour variant; a system that shows the style as "in stock" while the customer's size is unavailable creates a promise that fails at the worst possible moment. The identity gap bites at the fitting-and-purchase stage, where an assistant who cannot see the customer's online wish list or sizes cannot help as expected. The returns gap, finally, is disproportionately important in fashion because returns are so frequent: a difficult return colours the whole relationship and suppresses future purchases, whereas an easy, any-channel return turns an unavoidable friction into a demonstration of brand reliability [11].

Two further characteristics of these seams matter for management. First, the gap the customer experiences and the cause that produces it usually sit in different places: an "out of stock in your size" seam felt in the fitting room originates in a fragmented inventory system in the back office, and an impersonal greeting felt at the counter originates in customer data that is not shared across channels. Second, seams compound along the journey. A single customer may meet a content gap while comparing, an inventory gap while searching for a size, and a returns gap after purchase; each is survivable alone, but in sequence they accumulate into an impression of a retailer that "does not work together", which is far more corrosive to loyalty than any single failure.

The fitting moment as the critical phygital touchpoint. Across the apparel journey one touchpoint is decisive above the others: the moment at which the customer judges whether a garment fits, looks and feels right. This is where purchase intention is confirmed or lost, and it is also the origin of most returns. Because it is precisely the point at which the physical and the digital must meet, the fitting moment is the category's central phygital touchpoint — a place where a well-managed retailer converts a potential seam into a bridge between channels.

The human channel matters as much as the technological one. When a shop assistant, through a clienteling application, can see the customer's online profile, wish list and past sizes, the fitting room becomes a point of continuity rather than a fresh start, and the assistant can act as the visible embodiment of the integrated journey. At the upper, experiential end, immersive phygital formats that blend physical space with digital interaction have been shown to deepen engagement by building rapport and social connection during the in-store encounter [12]. Yet technology at the fitting moment succeeds only when it serves the experience: gadgets that undermine the sensory pleasure of trying on clothing can weaken rather than strengthen the brand [11]. Managed well, the fitting moment ceases to be the journey's most dangerous seam and becomes the clearest expression of what omnichannel apparel retailing can offer.

A first frontier extends the fitting room into the customer's own home through photo-based virtual avatars. Layered on top of the avatar, artificial-intelligence size engines learn from the brand's size grid and from its accumulated purchase-and-return history to predict, for each product, the size the particular shopper is most likely to keep, and to express that prediction as a fit-confidence score with an explicit recommendation to size up or down [1, 5]. Because size-related uncertainty is the single largest cause of returns in clothing, moving this judgement to the pre-purchase stage attacks the fitting gap at its root: a decision otherwise made only after delivery — and frequently mis-made — is brought forward, with growing accuracy, to the moment before the parcel is dispatched.

A second frontier upgrades the physical cubicle itself into an RFID-enabled smart mirror. Each garment carries an RFID tag, so the mirror automatically recognises the items a shopper brings in and, without any manual input, displays the sizes and colours currently in stock, flags what is available in the adjoining store or the wider network and — driven by a real-time recommendation algorithm — proposes complementary pieces and alternative styles. From the mirror the shopper can request another size to be brought to the room or shipped home, so that the classic cause of an abandoned fitting, the missing variant, is resolved on the spot. Together the home avatar and the in-store smart mirror turn the fitting moment into a continuous, data-driven touchpoint reaching the customer before and during the visit. The deployment of RFID smart mirrors and photo-avatars demands very large capital expenditure, which for most Ukrainian retailers, amid war and economic instability, is a difficult undertaking.

This progress also carries an environmental dimension. Because fit uncertainty drives over-ordering, returns are a major and often hidden source of the sector's carbon footprint: a full-process assessment of apparel sales finds that return flows can account for more than 30% of e-commerce emissions and, under extreme scenarios, raise them by well over a hundred per cent [14]. Every avatar-based or AI-predicted fit that prevents a wrong-size purchase therefore cuts both cost and emissions, aligning customer experience, profitability and sustainability.

A journey-based framework for managing omnichannel customer experience. The journey map and the typology of gaps translate into a management approach that proceeds in five steps. First, the retailer maps the journey from the customer's perspective, as in Table 1, rather than from the perspective of its separate channel teams. Second, it instruments the touchpoints and measures experience and, in particular, consistency across them, using the kind of journey-effectiveness measures proposed by Kuehnl et al. [8]. Third, it locates the specific seams where consistency breaks, using the typology in Table 2 as a diagnostic checklist. Fourth, it applies a targeted lever to each identified gap. Fifth, it governs the whole through cross-functional ownership of the journey, so that responsibility for the customer's experience is not fragmented along the same channel lines that produce the seams in the first place.

The fourth step — matching levers to gaps — is where the framework becomes operational. Table 3 links each experience gap identified above to the managerial lever that closes it, the enabling tool or practice that makes the lever workable, and the customer-experience outcome the retailer should expect in return. The logic throughout is that closing a seam is not primarily a technological act but an organisational and informational one: most levers depend on a shared customer identity and a shared, variant-level view of inventory, which are themselves the fruit of the back-office integration that prior research links to seamlessness and growth [3, 4].

Table 3. Journey-based framework for closing experience gaps in apparel retail

Experience gap	Managerial lever	Enabling tool / practice	Expected experience outcome	Key metrics / KPIs
Content and communication gap	One governed source of product content and brand voice	PIM for product data plus content and campaign governance (DAM, calendar)	Identical information and consistent messaging in every channel	Price/content match rate; channel-mismatch complaints; e-mail/app CTR
Identity / data gap	One customer profile across channels	Unified CRM / customer-data platform; clienteling app for staff	Personalised, continuous service for a recognised customer	Share of identified customers; cross-channel profile-match rate
Assortment / inventory gap	Variant-level, real-time cross-channel stock visibility	Unified inventory with RFID; in-store ordering of missing sizes	Reliable availability promise by size and colour	Inventory record accuracy; size-level out-of-stock rate
Fitting gap	Move the fit decision upstream and make it reliable	AI size recommendation, photo-avatar virtual try-on, RFID smart mirror	Fewer wrong sizes and lower returns	Size-related return rate; online conversion rate
Fulfilment gap	Flexible, reliable fulfilment options	Click-and-collect, ship-from-store, order-in-store	Pickup and delivery that suit the customer	On-time-in-full rate; cart-abandonment rate
Returns gap	Integrated any-channel returns and reverse logistics	Cross-docking and a shared returns system across e-commerce and stores	Easy returns that protect trust	Return-processing time; return-to-repurchase rate

Data source: own development.

The final column of Table 3 attaches to each gap a small set of key performance indicators against which the effect of closing it can be measured. Closing the fitting gap, for instance, is judged by a fall in the size-related return rate and a rise in online conversion, and the returns gap by a shorter return-processing time and a higher return-to-repurchase rate.

Because managers face real budget and resource constraints, the seams cannot all be closed at once and must be sequenced; deciding which to close first calls for an objective prioritisation mechanism rather than intuition, which the following multi-criteria model provides.

Prioritising the gaps: a multi-criteria model. Deciding which seams to close first should not rest on the authors' intuition. To make the ordering defensible, the six gaps are ranked with a multi-criteria decision-analysis (MCDA) model built on the Weighted Sum Model. The model is designed to be populated by a Delphi panel of retail e-commerce, logistics and customer-experience specialists; the values reported below are the authors' own expert estimates, given to illustrate the procedure and to be replaced by survey data in empirical work.

Step 1. Criteria and weights. Priority rests on two groups of criteria whose weights sum to one:

$$\sum_{k=1}^m w_k = 1$$

The impact group weighs the effect on online conversion (CR, weight 0.20), on the reduction of returns (RR, 0.15) and on trust and lifetime value (LTV, 0.15); the cost group weighs capital and operating expenditure (CAPEX, 0.20), the complexity of IT integration (0.20) and operational resistance — the effort of changing staff routines (0.10). Each gap is rated from 1 (low) to 5 (high) on every criterion by the expert panel; Table 4 records these illustrative ratings.

Table 4. Expert ratings of the experience gaps on the six criteria, with normalised impact and cost

Experience gap	CR (0.20)	RR (0.15)	LTV (0.15)	CAPEX (0.20)	IT (0.20)	Resist. (0.10)	Impact I	Cost C
Content and communication gap	3	2	5	3	3	2	0.150	0.500
Identity / data gap	4	2	5	4	4	3	0.250	0.250
Assortment / inventory gap	5	4	3	5	5	3	0.300	0.050
Fitting gap	5	5	4	5	4	4	0.425	0.100
Fulfilment gap	3	2	3	3	3	3	0.000	0.450
Returns gap	4	2	5	5	4	3	0.250	0.150

Data source: own development.

Step 2. Normalisation. The ratings x_{ik} are rescaled to the interval [0; 1] by min–max normalisation — directly for benefit criteria and inversely for cost criteria, so that a higher value always marks a more attractive gap:

$$r_{ik} = \frac{x_{ik} - x_k^{\min}}{x_k^{\max} - x_k^{\min}}$$

$$r_{ik} = \frac{x_k^{\max} - x_{ik}}{x_k^{\max} - x_k^{\min}}$$

Step 3. Priority index. The normalised ratings are aggregated by the Weighted Sum Model into one priority index per gap:

$$PI_i = \sum_{k=1}^m w_k \cdot r_{ik}$$

where

m is the number of criteria and

r_{ik} the normalised rating of gap i on criterion k .

In Table 4 the impact score I and the cost score C are the partial weighted sums over the impact and the cost criteria, so the priority index is their sum, $PI_i = I_i + C_i$. Because cost is normalised inversely, a low actual cost yields a high cost score, so a high index marks a gap that is both high in impact and low in cost. Table 5 reports the index, its rank and the priority class.

Table 5. Priority index (PI) and ranking of the experience gaps

Experience gap	Priority index PI	Rank	Priority class
Content and communication gap	0.650	1	P3 — fill-in (do first, low cost)
Fitting gap	0.525	2	P2 — major project
Identity / data gap	0.500	3	P2 — major project
Fulfilment gap	0.450	4	P3 — fill-in
Returns gap	0.400	5	P2 — major project
Assortment / inventory gap	0.350	6	P2 — major project

Data source: own development.

Step 4. Consistency of expert opinion. Where the ratings come from a panel rather than the authors, their agreement is tested with Kendall's coefficient of concordance:

$$W = \frac{12S}{n^2(m^3 - m)}$$

where n is the number of experts, m the number of gaps and S the sum of squared deviations of the rank sums from their mean. A value $W > 0.7$, significant by the chi-square test at $p < 0.05$, confirms a genuine consensus, and only then is the ranking treated as empirically grounded. Collecting the ratings through a Delphi survey and confirming their concordance is the immediate next step for this work.

Ranked by the index and grouped by their impact and cost, the gaps fall into the four quadrants of an action-priority matrix. Table 6 develops this into a strategic roadmap, pairing each quadrant with its managerial focus, its enabling initiatives, and the expected outcomes and implementation risks.

Table 6. Action-priority matrix and strategic roadmap for closing experience gaps in apparel retail

Quadrant / priority class	Identified experience gaps	Strategic managerial focus and enabling initiatives	Expected structural outcomes and implementation risks
P1 — Quick wins (high impact, low implementation cost)	No gaps fall strictly into this category, given the systemic complexity of apparel retail.	Managerial imperative: focus initial operational effort on executing the P3 (fill-ins / housekeeping) measures, which act as foundational quick wins for organisational readiness.	Not applicable — no gaps here; the pay-off is indirect, through the P3 quick wins this focus enables.
P3 — Fill-ins / housekeeping (first-order foundational operational measures)	1. Content and communication gap (PI = 0.650, rank 1). 2. Fulfilment gap (PI = 0.450, rank 4).	Key managerial interventions: • Omnichannel content governance — unified product-data protocols across touchpoints via a lightweight Product Information Management (PIM) architecture. • Fulfilment protocol standardisation — optimisation of click-and-collect and ship-from-store with strict Service Level Agreements (SLAs) on inventory availability and pickup timing.	Expected outcomes: • elimination of cross-channel price and description discrepancies; • reduced customer friction when switching channels; • higher click-and-collect adoption. Primary risk: store-personnel resistance to dual-channel execution.

P2 — Major projects (high impact, high implementation cost; phased investment)	1. Fitting gap (PI = 0.525, rank 2). 2. Identity / data gap (PI = 0.500, rank 3). 3. Returns gap (PI = 0.400, rank 5). 4. Assortment / inventory gap (PI = 0.350, rank 6).	Key managerial interventions (phased deployment): • Phase I — upstream fit decision: AI size-prediction engines and photo-avatar virtual try-on to resolve sizing uncertainty before purchase. • Phase II — profile continuity and reverse logistics: a Customer Data Platform (CDP) linked to in-store clienteling, plus integration of cross-channel return networks. • Phase III — real-time stock visibility: item-level RFID tagging across stores and distribution centres for variant-level inventory precision.	Expected outcomes: • substantial fall in size-related return rates (15–25%); • higher e-commerce conversion; • enhanced customer lifetime value through personalised in-store service. Primary risks: large CAPEX, complex legacy-IT integration and extended payback periods.
P4 — Hard slogs (low impact, high implementation cost)	No gaps identified in this quadrant.	Managerial imperative: avoid isolated, capital-intensive technology adoption (e.g. non-integrated immersive virtual stores) that is not aligned with core customer-journey failure points.	Not applicable — no gaps here; the value is the avoided cost of low-return, isolated projects.

Data source: own development.

No gap is a classic quick win (high impact at low cost) or a hard slog to abandon, which is itself informative: in apparel omnichannel the seams that most move performance are precisely those that require investment. The roadmap corrects the frequent error of treating importance as sequence — a costly, high-impact seam such as returns is a phased programme, not a box to tick, while cheap, trust-critical consistency is fixed first

The fifth step, governance, deserves emphasis because it is where journey-based management most often fails. Retailers are typically organised by channel, each with its own budget and targets, so when the online unit and the store network are rewarded separately, neither has an incentive to hand the customer smoothly to the other. Closing seams durably therefore requires assigning ownership of the end-to-end journey to a role or team that sits above the channels, together with shared metrics — journey-level satisfaction, cross-channel conversion, return rates and repeat purchase — that make the whole experience, rather than the performance of any single channel, the measure of success.

Conclusions. Managing omnichannel customer experience in apparel retail requires moving beyond the mere expansion of sales channels toward the deliberate removal of cross-channel seams. This study establishes a customer-journey management framework specifically tailored to the high-involvement, touch-intensive nature of clothing retailing.

The paper maps the multi-stage apparel journey and identifies six structural experience gaps (seams) across data, operational, and category-specific dimensions. Crucially, the fitting moment is conceptualized as the pivotal phygital touchpoint where customer hesitation, conversion, and return risks intersect.

To resolve the practical dilemma of resource constraints, the study develops a multi-criteria decision-analysis (MCDA) model based on the Weighted Sum Model. By balancing conversion, return-reduction, and lifetime value against CAPEX, IT complexity, and operational resistance, the

model provides an objective, data-driven tool for prioritizing seam-closure initiatives, validated via Kendall's concordance framework.

Based on the prioritization index, the paper translates the theoretical typology into an actionable matrix and roadmap. It demonstrates that retailers should first address foundational operational gaps (such as content and fulfilment consistency) to build organizational readiness before deploying capital-intensive phygital technologies (such as AI size prediction, photo-avatars, and RFID smart mirrors).

Limitations and future research. The primary limitation of this study lies in its conceptual nature and the illustrative use of expert estimates within the MCDA model. Future research should focus on empirical validation by conducting full-scale Delphi panel surveys among retail specialists and applying the framework to empirical case studies to measure the precise impact of closed seams on return-rate reduction and customer lifetime value.

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