



Research Article

# An Analysis of Product Return Behaviour and Post-Purchase Dissonance Among Buy Now Pay Later Users in E-Commerce: A Systematic Literature Review Using PRISMA Framework

Prof. Sunil Kumar <sup>1\*</sup> Nishant Kumar <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Professor, Department of Commerce, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya College, University of Delhi, India

<sup>2</sup> Dissertation Scholar, B. Com (H), Department of Commerce, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya College, University of Delhi, India

Corresponding Author: \* Prof. Sunil Kumar

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## Abstract

The retail landscape has evolved from physical stores to digital ecosystems, transforming payment methods from cash to “Buy Now Pay Later” (BNPL) services. The existing literature on BNPL focused as sales-driver and impulse buying behaviour of Gen Z by offering interest-free credit, that covers purchase aspect of the customers. A significant research gap exists regarding the post-purchase experience. Specifically, previous studies neglect the role of Post-Purchase Dissonance such as financial anxiety or regret and how it influences product return behaviour, particularly within the Indian market.

This study aims to conduct systematic literature review on the topic of “impact of BNPL usage intensity on product return frequency among Gen Z consumers” along with mediating role of post-purchase dissonance (product dissatisfaction versus financial anxiety). The literature review was performed using the Scopus database, screening by using keywords related to consumer behaviour, impulsive buying, and digital payments.

The analysis was executed on 71 records using R-Studio and the Biblioshiny web interface. Out of 71 initial records, 17 core studies were selected via the PRISMA framework for a rigorous thematic review. The analysis generated geographic visualizations (identifying India as a rising leader in research output), author productivity rankings, and thematic maps.

The present study utilizes concept mapping to visualize the interactions between BNPL service attributes, motivational factors, and consumer behaviour risks. A conceptual framework was developed which identified variables such as risk perception and impulsive buying as mediators.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The perception of consumers has undergone a transformative change due to advancement in the technological environment. The reach of shops and physical stores are extended to online and virtual platforms. It was easy for vendors and customers to build a strong relationship between them due to proximity and direct interaction with each other. This feature of the brick-and-mortar system often provide product or services on informal credit to the customers. But such shops had limitations in product variety and quantity which forced customers to search for other outlets. The drawbacks of traditional shops are plug up by big supermarkets and malls having separate stores of different brands which allow customers to explore variety in the mall and buy products as per their requirements. To build a healthy relationship with customers, the supermarkets introduced attractive options like entertainment, food courts, and branded stores which made shopping a social activity. Such strategies shifted the intent of consumption from need-based buying to desire-based expenditure on the part of the customer.

In late 20<sup>th</sup> century, a major transformation taken place in market i.e., teleshopping. There were channels e.g, Naaptol, HomeShop18, Teleshop and others which started to demonstrate products; this brought a new dimension for retailers by allowing the customer to directly buy products from the comfort of their homes. This proved that the consumer could shop remotely without physical visits but had limited product variety. The orientation of marketing strategy and payment related issues were catered through a revolutionary change taken place in the early 2000's i.e., e-commerce, and companies like Flipkart, Amazon, and others started to deliver products to the doorstep. These new e-commerce facilities provided the consumers with a variety of products and the access to browse the platform with filters based on price, colour, quality, and rating of the product. These platforms introduced a model of shopping that is speed-driven, convenient, and based on data backed recommendations, which became central to the global marketplace.

Parallel to the transformation in retail format, the payment systems have also evolved significantly. The shift from cash and on the counter payment to plastic money especially credit card which allows customers to have short-term borrowing replacing credit sales offered under earlier system. The use of plastic money eases the customer such as avoiding carrying cash, restricting black money, and encouraging reward-based spending. The credit card also introduced the facility of Equated Monthly Instalments (EMIs), which enable customers to break larger transactions into smaller and more manageable payments especially in case of high value goods.

The introduction of digital wallets and online payments backed by debit and credit cards gave users the convenience to pay with no extra effort. The card has revolutionized how people paid. With the widespread use of the internet and pan-India internet user expansion in the years 2015–2016, the National Payments Corporation of India introduced and tested the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) on April 11, 2016 and later on August 25, 2016 it was launched for general people<sup>1</sup>, which

allowed people with mobile numbers linked to their bank accounts to use apps like Paytm, PhonePe, GPay, and others to make payments with no extra cost. This reduced the dependence on cash. The UPI system has been providing facilities like interoperability, security features, and support for banks across the country. Fintech transformed this into an innovative payment method in daily life. The Quick Response (QR) code integrated with banking apps created an ecosystem where making a payment was as easy as scanning a QR code.

## 2. Buy-Now-Pay-Later

Despite these advancements, new technology has emerged as an option for payment, “Buy Now Pay Later” (BNPL). Although the idea is not new, traditionally, in a cash-based economy, informal store credit and credit cards offered such benefits. BNPL facilitates a reimagined, tech-enabled approach for the digital age. The popularity of BNPL has been seen because of the rapid growth of e-commerce. Earlier, credit cards used to provide this option, but they often charged high interest and convenience fees, and had strict criteria, which proved to be an unfamiliar situation for people who shop on credit while having a conscious budget. BNPL gives the option of zero percent interest rate credit for a specific period of time and allows its users to check various options like repayment schedules and tracking payments, and provides the facility of ease of use, which encourages people, especially Gen Z, to adopt the facility.

BNPL services today are integrated both offline and online. This also provides the option to split the payment into small payments without a credit card. Companies like Klarna, Afterpay and Indian platforms like Simpl, LazyPay, flipkart pay later, amazon pay later and others have established themselves into the digital shopping experience. One often encounters BNPL as payment along with UPI, credit cards, digital wallet shows its rapid growth and expansion. This BNPL has not only influenced the customer but also reshaped the merchant's strategy. Big e-commerce platforms like Flipkart and Amazon are also providing the facility of BNPL by signing agreements with banks and NBFCs to provide short-term loans in order to increase the conversion rate and average order value.

## 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

BNPL is an emerging technology and attraction for research in fintech based payment system for e-commerce transactions. The key objective of the study to explore the BNPL domain in detail in order to find out major factors stimulating its adoption among customers. In addition, to syntheses the key workings of the researchers across the globe, by drawing a concept map for BNPL.

**Objective 1:** To conduct a systematic literature review on the buy-now-pay-later theme.

**Objective 2:** To track major contributors (countries and authors) in the BNPL literature.



Indonesia jumping from zero articles in 2022 to an estimated articles of 19 by 2026. The most unexpected change occurred in India, which recorded almost zero articles till 2024, at which point it introduced 12 and is expected to make a dataset as high as 30 articles by 2026. On the contrary, the USA and Poland showed stagnant growth, both peaking at 9 articles in the last projected years. Collectively, the data suggests a global shift or a specific field of study that gained significant international spotlight in the mid-2020s, with India and Australia taking the place as global leaders in terms of volume.

**5.1.3 Author-wise Analysis:** The bar chart, Fig. 3, identifies the most productive researchers in the dataset based on the number of published documents. At the top of the list is Waliszewski K, who is followed by other authors with productivity levels along the same line. It is important to understand and identify the key contributors to fully get who is shaping the present academic conversation flow.

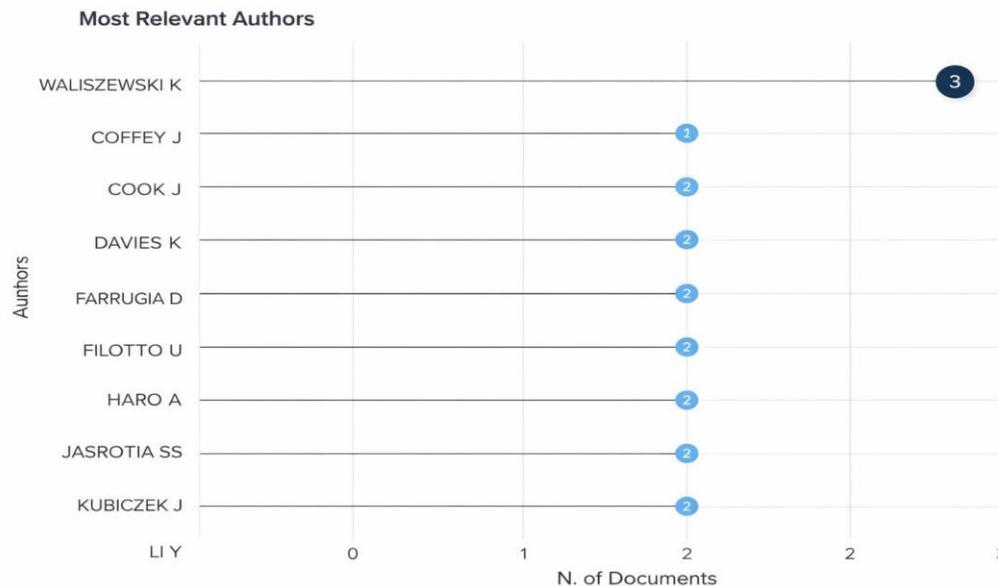


Figure 3: Ranking of most relevant authors by document count

Table 2: Top authors' production over time

Author	2023		2024		2025		TCPY
	TP	TC	TP	TC	TP	TC	
COFFEY, JULIA E.	1	21	1	14	0	0	7
COOK, JULIA ANNE	1	21	1	14	0	0	7
DAVIES, KATE	1	21	1	14	0	0	7
FARRUGIA, DAVID	1	21	1	14	0	0	7
FILOTTO, UMBERTO	0	0	1	4	1	5	5
HARO, ADRIANA	1	21	1	14	0	0	7
JASROTIA, SAHIL SINGH	0	0	2	45	0	0	22.5
KUBICZEK, JAKUB	0	0	2	10	0	0	5
NIEDZIÓŁKA, PAWEŁ	0	0	1	8	1	0	4
WALISZEWSKI, KRZYSZTOF	0	0	2	10	1	0	5

Source: R-Studio, Biblioshiny Output

Note: TP=Total Production, TC=Tota Citation

Table 2 states the research output and the citations of the most prominent authors from 2023-2025, which shows the frequency, total citations in parentheses each year and the average citation per year. Several authors like Coffey, Cook, Davies, Farruggia, and Haro show the same pattern as they published 1 paper in 2023 and 2024, having total citations (21

and 14) in 2023 and 2024, respectively, which shows the same pattern again. It can also be noticed that Sahil Singh Jasrotia has the highest citation impact with 2 papers published in the year 2024 and got a total 1 of 45 citations, which accounts for 22.5 per year. Apart from this, Jasrotia, who didn't publish in the year 2023 and 2025, but worked really well in the year 2024 with 45 citations.

5.1.4 Conceptual Structure

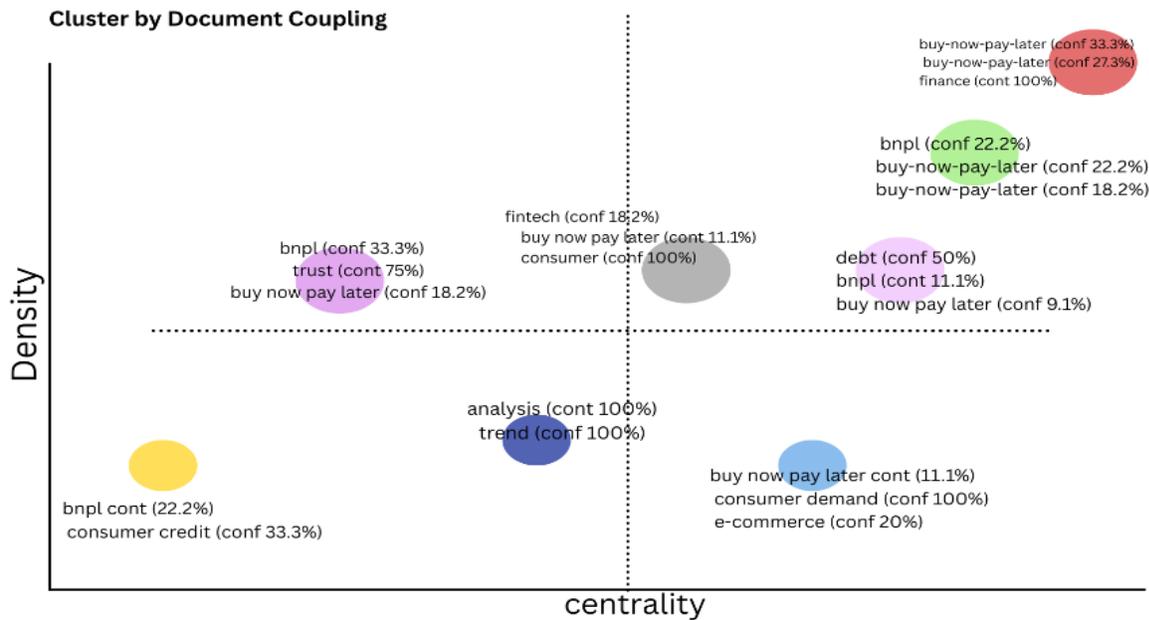


Figure 4: Thematic map based on document coupling clusters.

Figure 4 explains the paper on how each paper are connected. It shows the importance of the topic and the level of impact they have on the study. This map puts everything into four parts, in which the top right part shows the strongest topic means these are the once which is very significant on BNPL and Finance and on the other hand, the bottom left part shows that these are the topics which are now emerging like consumer credit and trust.

**5.2. The PRISMA Framework:** To ensure transparency and replicability, this review adopted the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol. The literature search was conducted using Scopus and total of 71 papers found in the records. After the Identification, the paper was further scanned based on the document types and subject areas. Inclusion and exclusion area adopted to filter the data relevant to the present research presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion	Exclusion
Document Type: article, conference paper, review. (Result= 63 articles)	Subject: not related to management, commerce and decision science (like energy, medicine, engineering, mathematics, environment, earth and planetary sciences). (Result=48 articles).
Publication stage: Full paper, final stage and articles in press. (Result=42 articles)	Keywords: Islamic finance, data mining, crypto assets, cost accounting, carbon emission. (Result =17 articles)

Finally, after all the, the open access filter was used to explore full text availability for full analysis. The 17 papers were finalised for the thematic study for the literature review.

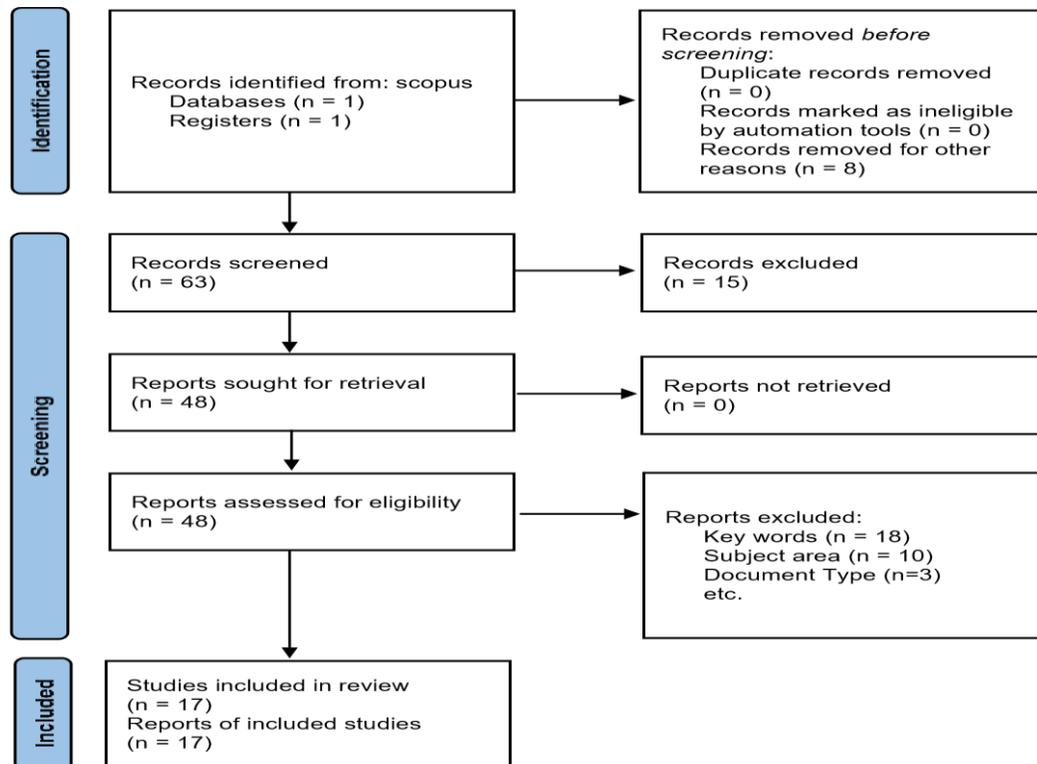


Figure 5: PRISMA Framework Diagram of Study Selection

**5.3 Micro-Analysis: Thematic Literature Review:** The Multidimensional Impact of Buy-Now-Pay-Later (BNPL) on Consumer Behaviour is conducted in the following section of the study.

#### Theme 1: Psychological Mechanics of Impulsivity and Spending Intentions

Various studies suggested that BNPL pushed people mentally and emotionally to make unplanned purchases. Ashby et al. (2025) highlighted the numerosity effect, in which they basically talked about the instalment part. They stated that the shopkeeper fixated on a small instalment of a larger amount (\$25 paid for 4times), a smaller amount instead of a \$100 payment for one time. This creates an illusion of less expensive with respect to the product one buys and creates the urge to have the product right now. Djamhari et al. (2024) suggested that BNPL acts as a booster for sales, especially when non-cash deals are merged with "Buy One Get One Free, making people impulse-buy to escape the fear of missing out.

Furthermore, Kumar et al. (2024) found observable data that, because of BNPL adoption, they have witnessed an overall 6.42% increase in online order size, driven by low-ticket orders placed by the younger generation and low-income demographics. "Putra et al. (2026) indicated that for Generation Z, a fast fashion lifestyle often ignores the concept of rational financial literacy, as the emotional excitement for instant pleasure outweighs the cognitive awareness of financial risk. This aligns with "Fauzana et al. (2025), who highlighted

that conspicuous consumption, the drive for social status, significantly facilitates the adoption of BNPL, even when the purchases exceed the consumer's planned budget."

#### Theme 2: Socio-Cultural, Religious, and Spiritual Determinants

Research has increasingly examined how external social structures and internal belief systems shape BNPL usage. Aisjah (2024) highlighted the protective role of financial parenting, stating that parents who actively discuss money management can reduce a student's intention to use BNPL by building their financial self-efficacy. However, this study also noted that high social media intensity can negate these parental influences, exposing students to peer-driven norms that favour debt for lifestyle maintenance. From a religious perspective, Aji et al. (2024) indicated that knowledge of Riba (usury) and perceived religious risk are significant deterrents for Muslim consumers in Indonesia and Malaysia, noting that if the service is perceived as religiously unethical, the consumer's commitment to the provider drops. Parallel to this, Mappadang et al. (2025) introduced the God locus of financial control, stating that students who believe a higher power manages their finances report higher levels of well-being and lower impulsivity, though this effect is weakened by a high tendency for social comparison with peers.

**Theme 3: Financial Wellbeing and the Temporal Experience of Debt**

The literature also explores the long-term consequences of BNPL on a consumer's stability and their subjective experience of time. Powell et al. (2023) states that adopting Recommended Financially Responsible Behaviours (RFRBs), such as budgeting and reading terms and conditions, is directly correlated with higher financial wellbeing, particularly for users under age 25 who are otherwise at risk of instability. Conversely, Davidsson and Eriksson (2025) explored the lived temporalities of debt, arguing that over-indebtedness shifts a person's life rhythm from the "rush" of borrowing to a state where life feels "set on pause" or "on repeat" due to the weight of enforcement. These risks are compounded by the findings of Guttman-Kenney et al. (2023), who indicated that nearly 20% of users charge BNPL transactions to high-interest credit cards, potentially triggering a debt spiral by moving interest-free debt into high-interest products with decades-long amortisation schedules.

**Theme 4: Technological Adoption and Systemic Agency**

A group of studies uses the model like UTAUT and SOR to understand what actually encourages people to use the BNPL, for instance, a study by Kutbi et al. (2024) explained the factors that perform and how easy it is for general people to understand and adopt it with the help of apps which support these methods of payment. Nguyen et al. (2024) highlighted the main reason behind Gen Z in Vietnam adopting such a platform for payment as it gives assurance of both trust and simplicity as well. But this type also raises privacy concerns, the researchers discovered. Nekling and Ruwanpathi (2025) found that BNPL takes the help of algorithmic tactics that further influence the user to spend more, which eventually increases the spending

behaviour of the consumer to buy more products for value capture in the market. And lastly, Waliszewski et al. (2024) showed that even in a situation like pandemic, the BNPL services provided credit to those in need when traditional credit institutions banks tighten their credit process and eligibility for the loan.

**5.4. Research Gap: The Neglected Role of Post-Purchase Dissonance**

It is very clear now, after reviewing the existing studies, that many researchers have identified the reason with respect to BNPL and its adoption in impulse buying, even with financial difficulties. Among all studies, the studies by Kumar (2024) and Ashby (2025) focussed till the part of purchasing, which opens the gap for post purchase experiences. These experiences include impulse purchases made with the help of BNPL, and on the other side, product return, feelings of regret after purchasing the product, and the satisfaction level of the customer. This type of gap is easily visible in the context of the Indian market. The main aim of this dissertation is to address this gap.

**5.5. Extractions of Variables or Constructs**

The detailed systematic literature review has already been conducted, and based on this, approximately 7-8 proposed variables will be shortlisted on the basis of further relevance and suitability of the studies. These variables will broadly represent influencing factors like BNPL Service Attributes, Purchase/Return Behaviour, Risk Perception, Impulsive Buying, BNPL Usage, Financial Consciousness, Social Comparison Tendencies, and External Locus of Control. Hypothesis will be developed after establishing theoretical and empirical relationships among selected constructs.

**Table 4:** classification of constructs and their nature of variables

Constructs	Nature Of Variables
BNPL Service Attributes	Independent Variables
Purchase/ Return Behaviour	Dependent Variables
Risk Perception	Mediating
Impulsive Buying	Mediating
BNPL Usage	Mediating
Financial Consciousness	Moderating
Social Comparison Tendencies	Moderating
External Locus of Control	Moderating

## 5.6 Concept Map

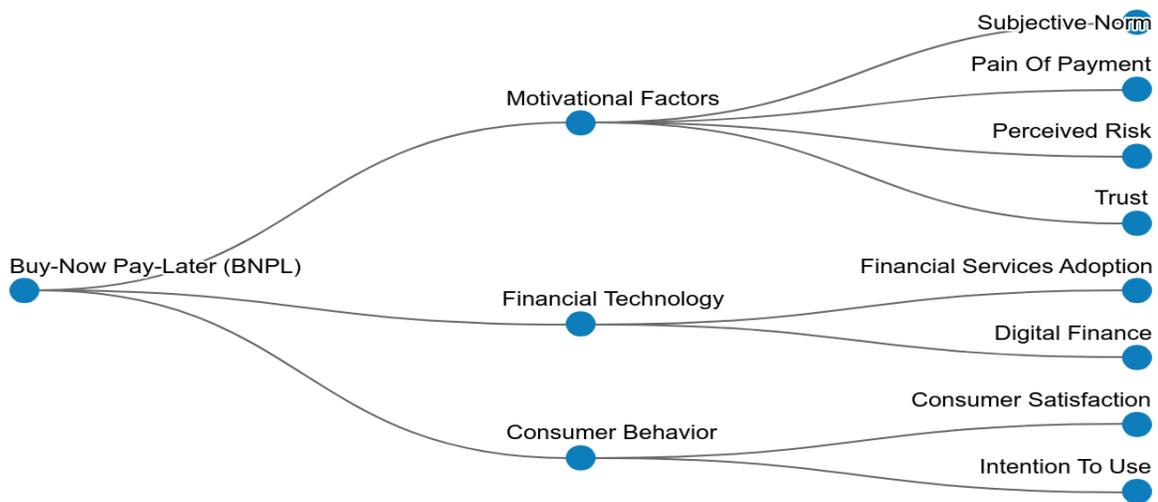


Figure 6 shows the conceptual map of BNPL

## 6. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The adoption of Buy Now, Pay Later has significantly evolved over the time, influencing the impulse buying and the online shopping habits. This often talks about cognitive awareness of financial risk among younger generations. However, the existing literature review neglects the post purchase experience. This is the research gap regarding how impulse buying through BNPL lead to post purchase dissonance and the influence product return behaviour, particularly within the Indian e-commerce market. The suggestion is that currently we have only one database, if someone wants to do further study, they can conduct it using more than one database. Primary research can be carried over after this literature review and the future research can be performed keeping it as the base study.

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**About the corresponding author**

**Prof. Sunil Kumar** is a Professor in the Department of Commerce at Deen Dayal Upadhyaya College, University of Delhi, India. He specialises in commerce and business studies, with extensive experience in teaching, research, and academic mentoring. His work contributes to advancing scholarly inquiry and student development in higher education.