UX RESEARCH REPORT

Analysing consumer behaviour
in the fast fashion sector

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a JAYWING agency

What does the fast fashion audience look for when shopping online?

In Epiphany's research lab - Mindseye - we conducted research into how the target demographic for the fast fashion sector looks for certain items online, delving into how the strength of a brand plays a part and what elements contribute best to a conversion.

We welcomed 12 participants to Mindseye and tracked the same shopping journeys on each, on desktop (we'll soon be releasing the same test results for mobile).

In line with the fast fashion target demographic, we tested females between the ages of 21-24.

Testing theory: Nielsen Norman Group suggest that testing just five people in a usability study is adequate and will reveal as many usability problems as you would usually find in a larger sample size.

So, what shopping journeys did we set them on?

We set our participants the following tasks:

1. Please get started as you normally would to find an outfit for your event. Don't forget to think out loud as you go.

   a. Let user browse for a bit, stopping them after a while or if they find an outfit they would like to purchase.

2. [Return to Google] You also have a wedding coming up, which you need to buy a blush midi dress for. Please search for a suitable dress, and don't forget to think out loud as you go.

3. [Return to Google] A week later, your dress has arrived and you realise you need a pair of nude or gold heeled sandals to wear with your dress. Please search for a suitable pair of shoes. Don't forget to think out loud as you go.

4. [Return to Google] Now you need a nude or gold coloured bag to go with your dress and shoes. Please use Google Shopping to search for a suitable bag.

5. [Return to Google] Finally, you'd like a pair of gold hoop earrings to wear. Please navigate through the listings on the search results page to find a suitable pair.

The results: what key themes did we uncover?

At the end of our research, we uncovered the following key marketing themes around the way in which users engage with fast fashion websites and brands, and the elements they do and don't find helpful towards conversion.

In addition, for each key theme, our experts have analysed the results and given their top tips you can take to optimise your online presence for conversion.

92% of users navigated straight to a brand they were familiar with when asked to start looking for an outfit for an occasion they had coming up

The importance of brand

Whilst we already knew being a recognised brand is important when attracting new customers and maintaining a loyal customer base; our research found that this is particularly important when users had no specific outfit in mind.

Each of our users was largely drawn to the brands they already knew and have shopped with before, these included ASOS, Zara, PrettyLittleThing, Boohoo, H&M, Topshop and Shein.

However, research revealed that some users do buy from unfamiliar brands for the right products or price, or as a result of certain trust signals.

These trust signals include friends who have used the same brands, reviews, a good returns policy or as a result of seeing them on social media.

Our users found brands such as Shein and Wish through social media. These lesser known brands are more trusted if users have seen them on Instagram. One user commented that she often looks at a brand's Instagram account to judge whether she can trust them. Official looking Instagram accounts with large followings are often more trusted.

25% of our participants revealed that they wouldn't buy clothes from Amazon or eBay

We found that users visit different brands for different purposes. Sites such as PrettyLittleThing or other fast fashion stores tend to be used for outfits for nights out but users are willing to pay more for important events such as weddings.

What action can you take now?

Being a recognised and importantly, a trusted brand, is likely to increase both your paid and organic click-through rates as well as on-site conversion rates. Search engines want to provide users with the results they want to see and more often than not, brands are the results they want (and expect) to see.

Here are a few things you can implement within your paid and organic strategies now to start building trust and becoming a recognised brand online:

1. Be consistent with key messages

Make sure that across all channels and each stage of the user journey, your audience is seeing consistent marketing messaging to promote higher ad recall.

2. Integrate campaigns

For the best results, you should always be looking to build relationships with your audience rather than always looking for a quick sale. You should integrate your campaigns to build frequency across channels, devices and creative to ensure you become more recognised and, most importantly, trusted.

3. Think about your 'trust indicators'

From an on-site perspective it's important to ensure trust signals are prominently displayed and clearly communicated.

However, it's not necessarily enough to just add a padlock icon on to your checkout pages or display a Trustpilot rating on your homepage.

Through AB testing, we've seen interesting results relating to trust signals which suggest you need to get the messaging and positioning right and not doing so can have the opposite of the desired effect. As such, we'd recommend continuous, iterative testing of your trust messaging and indicators, including reviews, delivery and returns policies and checkout security.

4. Use visual search campaign types

As a traditionally text heavy format, the Google SERP can be challenging for brand creativity. Recent products such as Gallery Ads and Showcase Shopping Ads have provided brands with the opportunity to incorporate image-based branding into their PPC ads. These visual ad formats can be used tactically to provide brand recall.

5. Go after longer tail searches

If you're not well known yet, capitalise on user search behaviour and go after longer tail searches. If searchers don't choose you for "dresses", they might choose you for "blush midi dresses", so make sure you're covering more than just top level pages in an effective, search friendly way.

6. Use appropriate KPIs to measure brand recognition

Move away from dated last-click models which do not place any value on awareness driving, upper-funnel ad clicks which help to drive brand growth. It's important to use a data-driven approach which fairly attributes credit across the journey.

Engagement with Google's shopping carousel

Over half (58%) of our users interacted with the Google Shopping carousel, despite not many of them using the Google Shopping tab.

We identified the carousel being used in a number of different ways but mostly - when users were looking for a specific product such as "a pink dress". Some users also use it to get an idea of the type of products on offer as a way to get into specific brand websites, rather than an interest in the specific product shown.

50% of users commented that they used the carousel imagery as inspiration for the next step in their shopping journey.

Nearly all of the users who interacted with the carousel also expanded it to the right. We also found that the right-hand side carousel appeared less often but received less attention when it did appear.

Some users didn't appear to know that the carousel results are ads.

What action can you take now?

1. Use Shopping campaign priority settings

You should consider the Google Shopping carousel as a shop window to entice customers to your website.

Most retailers have a "hero product" within each category, which draws in interest or is a top-seller. Either way, having a campaign containing these products with 'high priority' enabled will ensure that these are given precedence in the auction over your similar products.

2. Add custom labels to your feed

If you want to go a step further, segment your shopping campaigns tactically using custom labels. This will add an extra layer of reporting and optimisation capability to your campaign set up.

Up to five custom labels can be used and we have found the following examples useful for fashion retailers:

- Season (Winter, Summer, Autumn)
- Profit Margin (Low, Medium, High)
- Promotional (Clearance, On Sale)

For maximum benefit, combine custom label segmentation with campaign prioritisation settings to give precedence in the auction to the products you want to promote the most.

Google Shopping tab

Our users commented that Google Shopping looked unfinished, spammy or like an advert like Ebay and not somewhere you would buy clothes.

One user even mentioned that she uses the tab for buying items where quality is less important.

Many of our users (33%) had never used the google shopping tab before

Many brands have different imagery styles which makes the Google Shopping results less appealing to users. This leads to a low level of trust with Google Shopping, meaning that users still turn to the brands they recognise even when given a range of other options.

In addition, we found a lack of relevancy with Google Shopping on some occasions with a perception from users that Google Shopping is Google searching the web for the most relevant products, rather than the results coming from advertisers.

What action can you take now?

Customers will use the Google Shopping tab to compare your products to other retailers. You should always enrich your feed with as much information as possible to make this a smooth experience for your customers.

Ensure that the Google Product Specification is adhered to in your feed. Although some fields may be 'optional', fill in as much information as possible in order to give your products the best chance of showing.

Product titles are the single most important field within the product feed and should be concise. However, they should also contain all key attributes of the products such as colour and size.

Always remember that product titles will match a user's search query, so always choose the names of your products carefully. Anything obscure will be a missed opportunity for traffic and sales.

The impact of imagery

Several of our users liked fashion products to be displayed on a model as well as on a plain background to provide an idea of how it might look and for scale, especially for items such as jewellery. Our users didn't like brands that displayed products - particularly accessories - only on a plain background.

Our users had a much stronger preference for model imagery, and we found this to be essential for drawing users in, particularly on product pages as most users spend a huge amount of time looking at imagery and videos of the product before they make a purchase.

Eight out of 12 users mentioned that they like to see images of accessories on models as well as plain backgrounds

On the other hand; sites such as Zara which has large imagery on the category pages are negatively perceived as it takes much longer to view all of the products on offer.

Some users also dislike sites displaying a variety of different brands (e.g. Next or Debenhams) due to different photography styles, with some using picture backgrounds and others using plain backgrounds. However, ASOS seems exempt from this as they appear to create their own imagery.

What action can you take now?

Many of the themes around imagery highlighted in our research present opportunities from an optimisation point of view.

1. Test image types

Test the impact of model Vs. product shots to allow you to understand the role of different image types at different stages of the customer journey. For example, do model shots work best on lister pages?

2. Use high quality images

Image quality is also key from a conversion perspective. Imagery should always replicate the in-store experience as much as possible.

Multiple angles and images of any key product details can all help users to fill the gaps when browsing online and make a confident and informed purchase decision (which, in turn, should positively impact returns rates).

3. Optimise images

Image search has long had something of a place in search, even if it is a small one. Images rarely drive organic traffic to a site, however, the effort to optimise images is minimal so it's definitely worth doing.

Simply titling the image with something relevant and adding a descriptive alt tags works for both SEO and accessibility purposes.

Alt tags are added to your images so that, should the image fail to load, descriptive text will be displayed in its place and ensures that users can still understand the content of the page. Describing the image and including your keywords is important for both search engines and users to make sense of it.

However, be careful not to use excessively large imagery because it can play a huge role in slowing your site down which is far from optimal for users or search.

Site speed is important from both an SEO and UX perspective so always make sure your images are appropriately sized as well as titled and tagged.

4. Optimise Gallery Ads

When it comes to Google Shopping ads, brands are limited to the use of the standard Product Listing Ads format, which does not allow for any model/lifestyle imagery.

However, over the last few years, visual search has become more prominent within paid search, with new ad formats such as gallery ads giving retailers the opportunity to be more creative with their brand on the search results page.

Gallery ads are a swipeable, image-based ad unit that appears at the top of the search results and can feature up to eight images.

Our recommendation for Gallery ads is to test a range of different creative styles in order to measure the most effective, ranging from lifestyle/model imagery, to more product focused.

Another creative format across Shopping 'Showcase Shopping Ads' will also typically show for more upper funnel related queries (i.e. think more 'buy dresses' than 'buy red frilly prom dress'.

So, segment your showcase shopping campaigns by category and choose a creative which will be appropriate for a wider range of queries within that category.

5. Create product videos

The introduction of product videos is also worth exploring. Pick a high traffic category of set products and commission product videos to allow you to understand the impact and build a business case for wider implementation.

6. Grab attention with display ads

With so many advertising messages out there, when users see display ads, it's more important than ever to grab their attention enough for them to click through. And great imagery is the best way to do this. What are our best practice tips for your display ad imagery?

*   Be relevant

Users are much more likely to click on an ad that they feel is relevant to them, their needs and their situation. Understanding your target audience and tailoring your messaging and imagery to them and their place in the customer journey will help to drive success.

*   Be consistent

Always maintain consistency in the imagery of your display ads. Creating a consistent message and helping users to match your ads together when they see them across the internet will not only improve brand recognition, it will also help to build trust with customers which, as we mentioned earlier, is an important factor in any campaign.

Your ads should always match your site design because this provides a more consistent experience when users do click through. If they find something completely different on your landing page, they're not likely to stick around.

- Be clear, keep it simple

Crowding your display ads with busy pictures or too much information is more likely to turn users away than entice them to click.

When it comes to display imagery, keep it simple. Ads that utilise white space and that look clean and simple, with a clear CTA are far more likely to be successful.

Interaction with PPC ads

Many of our users (42%) were observed clicking on branded PPC ads when searching for the brand they wanted to visit in Google. However, later in the study, 40% of users claimed that they generally don't click on ads when shopping online.

Some users did not seem bothered by adverts (especially branded ones) but many claim they are annoying and not relevant.

One user stated that she doesn't trust ad messaging such as "80% off" because she feels that it's not always true.

Some of our users associate ads with being spammy and untrustworthy

Some users claim that they click whatever comes up first but have been observed hovering over a brand's PPC ad, then scrolling and clicking the organic listing instead.

Seven participants stated that they do not click on ads. This was due to a number of reasons including:

- Knowing how ads work so ignoring them without looking at the brands
- The brands in PPC ads are not recognised so participants will not click on them as they would never buy from those brands anyway
- Participants find ads untrustworthy and referred to friends who have been scammed for festival tickets from websites that are not real
- One participant felt that ads were unlikely to be relevant to what she was looking for

Three participants stated that they would click on paid search results because it doesn't matter that they are ads, they still direct you to the right website. Some participants stated that they would have looked at the websites advertised anyway but some said they often didn't recognise the brands but would click anyway.

What action can you take now?

When it comes to PPC ads, you should only pay for brand searches when you need to. Many retailers was a large proportion of their budget by paying for brand clicks, when there was a high chance they would have received the traffic anyway through organic search.

If you are facing competitor bidding activity, there may be more of a need to bid on brand terms. However, a brand incrementality test will prove the value of this.

If your strategy is to bid on Brand, ensure that you are getting the most out of this spend by enriching your advert with as many ad extensions as possible.

The ability to filter and save products

On-site filters were found to be very important, especially for sites such as ASOS where there are a huge number of products.

One user was more likely to use filters that were open and visible, such as on the PrettyLittleThing website. Another user didn't notice the Zara filters until they were pointed out because they were in small text and hidden in the top right corner of the page, it's important for filters to be prominent on every page to help users find them.

One user found product filters can often be unreliable, showing results for something they had already filtered out, or vice versa.

83% of our users interacted with filters extensively

We found that 25% of users don't always like to filter too much because they don't want to narrow the products down too much and miss out on products.

Many users (67%) use some filters and scroll through lots of results while opening items in new tabs.

Some users use on-site wishlist functions when deciding on which items to buy. Others use the basket as a wishlist.

Some users also open products in a number of new tabs and after they have lots of tabs open they go through and narrow the items down to the ones they like the most.

What action can you take now?

From a UX perspective, filters can be both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, they allow users to narrow down products to a more relevant list, personalised to their needs.

On the other hand, they can be a tricky piece of functionality to get right, especially on mobile devices.

There are a huge number of UX best practices around filters which should be considered such as ensuring the number of filters applied is displayed, allowing users to remove individual filters as well as clear them all and show them when filters have been successfully applied.

1. Use data to aid the user journey

The key to creating filters that help rather than hinder the user journey is data.

Having a solid understanding of which filters are being used and how many filters are being applied in which categories can help you to optimise accordingly.

For example, opening filters on a mobile device generally results in an overlay appearing. Some sites allow users to select multiple filters and then opt to view results by clicking a CTA, whereas others will automatically close the overlay when users have made their first selection.

Which of these options is right depends entirely on your specific business and users. Understanding how many filters are added in general will help you make informed decisions.

2. Utilise wishlist features

Providing users with a wishlist can help them to collate and narrow down their selections, supporting their decision making. However, wishlists can also have further reaching benefits such as loyalty and cross-device tracking.

Encouraging users to collate wishlists naturally encourages returning visits, building loyalty and over time helping to support brand building efforts.

Wishlists provide an opportunity to offer users a compelling reason to sign up for an account. This means you'll be able to track more of your users across devices and as such get a clearer picture of overall user behaviour to support optimisation efforts.

3. Create strong PPC quality scores

If your website has functionality that allows dynamic URLs based on website filtering options, this can be an effective way to create highly specific, deep-linked PPC landing pages.

Creating highly targeted ad groups with keywords specific to product sub category, size, colour and type and using website filtering options to display these relevant products will provoke strong quality scores and conversion rates, which will result in a strong user experience and a more profitable campaign.

4. Build long tail organic traffic

When it comes to SEO, filters are both a blessing and a curse. They simultaneously open us up to a huge amount of long tail traffic but, at the same time, can create hundreds of thousands of shallow pages for Google to crawl.

To overcome this, make sure you are working in both directions. Noindex anything that you don't want to appear in search, usually with an on-page meta robots tag to retain flexibility.

On the other side, spend time improving the pages you want to be indexed to help them perform as well as possible.

The influence of
social proof

Reviews are an important factor in the buying journey for some users but are not always as important as you might expect. Eye tracking data shows that star ratings on Google Shopping results went mostly unnoticed.

If their friends have already used unfamiliar brands, users are much more confident in using them themselves. One user likes to read product reviews, particularly for items such as shoes, to see how others have found the fit.

Only five out of 12 of our users mentioned reviews as being important when they are unfamiliar with a shop or they want to see what the product is like

What action can you take now?

1. Use seller ratings

We always recommend the use of Google 'seller ratings'. Google collates these from reputable sources that aggregate business reviews.

Seller ratings are an automated extension type that showcases advertisers with high ratings which appear below text ads, as a five star rating, to help users find businesses that offer quality services. The rating is a reflection of the customers' overall consumer experience and if they're strong, they will help consumers to put more trust in your brand.

If your website has the functionality to collate product reviews, Google can also show star ratings on Shopping ads and, in some instances, on Google product listings.

These ratings are great for helping shoppers with their purchase decisions, driving more qualified shoppers to your product pages. Product Ratings appears as a one to five star rating system and a count of total reviews. These star ratings represent aggregated rating and review data for the product, compiled from multiple sources including merchants, third-party review aggregators, editorial sites and consumers.

2. Utilise star ratings

Many brands can trigger star ratings in Google search results through the use of schema, though this changes on a regular basis so always keep an eye on the news.

Reviews are also a very important factor for local search so, if you're a brand with a bricks-and-mortar presence; these ratings and reviews can help you to appear more prevalent in the local pack.

3. Build trust through social proof and always AB test

As we mentioned earlier, trust is an integral part of the conversion process and social proof is a huge part of instilling this trust. Look for ways to implement social proof over and above simply displaying reviews and testimonials.

4. User generated content

When implemented well, user generated content is a powerful way to create social proof.

Examples of this can be seen on fashion sites such as Oasis, which allows users to upload pictures of themselves wearing the products.

This can also support from an imagery point of view, providing users with more 'realistic' product imagery to support their purchase decision.

Conclusions

The importance of each of the elements and channels is completely dependent on user intent, what they're looking for and the stage in their journey.

When it comes to fast-fashion, brand recognition and trust are hugely important factors. However, some users will deviate from their normal brands or from more well-known brands to find what they're looking for and as a result of trust signals and social media.

Knowing how your audience searches and what sways them towards one website over another is hugely valuable and should dictate more than just a few on-site changes.

If you'd like us to delve into your target audience and conduct some user research in our new UX lab, Mindseye, please get in touch with our team for more information on one-off projects and on-going strategies as part of your wider paid and organic strategy.

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