

The state of
ONLINE FASHION

in 2021

An international study from Croud exploring what matters to online shoppers in the UK, US, Germany and Italy


croud

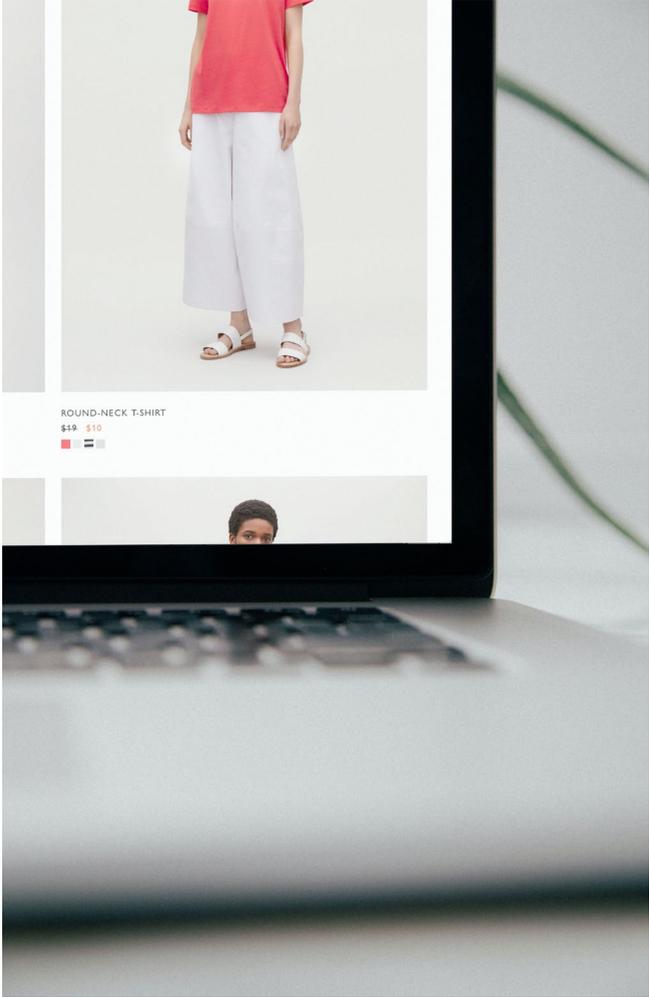




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ROUND-NECK T-SHIRT

\$49 \$10



INTRODUCTION



Covid-19 has accelerated a global shift to online shopping. Amid lockdowns and social distancing, consumers have been forced to make their purchases online, and the trend is, seemingly, here to stay. According to Croud's survey of over 1,000 shoppers across the globe, 59.6% of shoppers expect to purchase clothing online more in the next six months, particularly in the US (65%).

But how do retailers drive sales, stay relevant and compete with the big brands?

This report explores shifting attitudes towards fashion, featuring an exclusive survey of 1,054 shoppers in the UK, US, Germany and Italy. It looks at key trends, including the appeal of fashion marketplaces, the rise of virtual and augmented reality, and the promise of Amazon in the realm of clothing and footwear.

The research shows that being able to browse a wider variety of products, discounts, and convenience are the three top motivators for shopping online internationally. Yet, delve into

the research further, and what motivates and deters online fashion shoppers varies greatly according to age, market, gender, and income.

Perhaps one of the most surprising findings is that 16-24-year-olds - the age group most active on social platforms - are less likely than other age groups to use the medium for purchasing. And, though Amazon is less closely associated with the fashion category than the likes of consumer electronics and games, 54% of respondents stated that they frequently purchase items of clothing on

the marketplace.

It is also important to note that, though increasingly popular, shoppers are not entirely convinced by online shopping: only just over half of respondents said that they prefer to shop online for clothing and footwear. A seamless omnichannel experience is therefore key.

I hope this report is a useful guide to not only your digital and ecommerce strategy, but also your future thinking more broadly.

Emil Bielski

Managing Director, UK - Croud





WHAT ONLINE FASHION SHOPPERS WANT FROM RETAILERS



Respondents were asked what motivates them to shop online for clothing and footwear. The research, on average, found that being able to browse a wider variety of products, discounts, and convenience are the top three motivators for shoppers internationally.

23%

ranked being able to browse a wider variety of products as the biggest motivator.

22%

selected discounts as their top incentive.

17%

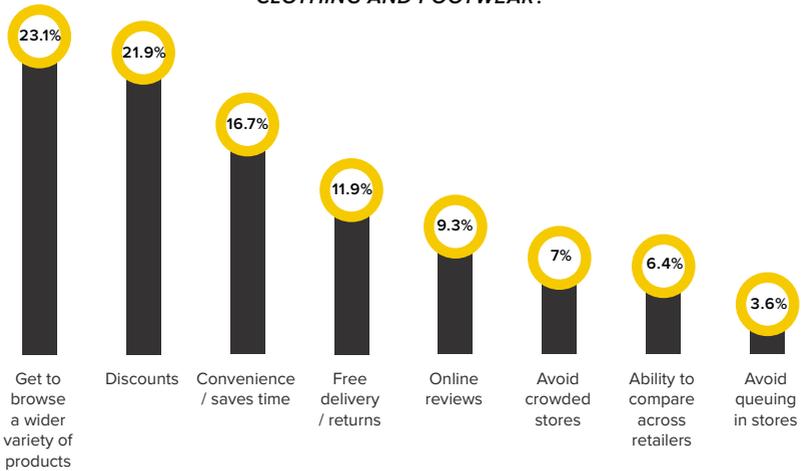
said saving time was what motivates them most to shop online.



Digging specifically into the top motivator per market, online reviews are particularly important in the US (biggest motivator for 12.7% of respondents), whilst in

Germany, 28.3% of respondents selected being able to browse a variety of products as their top motivator.

WHAT MOTIVATES PEOPLE TO SHOP ONLINE FOR CLOTHING AND FOOTWEAR?



Factors selected by respondents as the biggest motivator for purchasing clothing and footwear online, across all markets

Where are shoppers most discount-driven?

Discounts were the top driver for both British (22.9%) and Italian (32.8%) online shoppers. This is an important finding, as it indicates that pricing is a critical factor when selling online. But how can brands and retailers structure their promotions and discounts in order to drive value for both their customers and their bottom line?

Caroline Buckingham, Client Strategy Director at Croud, advises, “We often find that percentage-off discounting (without a minimum spend) works best in European markets versus promotions such as bundle offers or a free gift with purchase. However, whilst percentage-off discounts without a minimum spend can provide a significant performance boost, offering percentage discounts *with* a minimum spend can help to safeguard average order value. Often-repeated promotions can lead to fatigue, so be selective of promotional pushes and frequency.”

“Often-repeated promotions can lead to fatigue, so be selective of promotional pushes and frequency.”

Scaling promotions in the run-up to peak periods can also work well, for example:

- First week of November: **10% off certain items**
- Second week of November: **15% off certain items**
- Third week of November up to Black Friday: **25% off certain items**
- Black Friday Weekend and fourth week of November: **35% off**

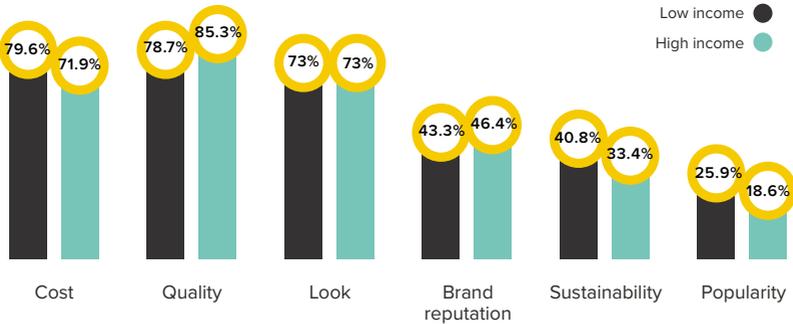
Responses, of course, also varied according to age. Younger shoppers - between 16-24 years old - prioritise discounts, in addition to free delivery and returns. Avoiding crowded stores is, however, more important to older shoppers, with 10.7% of 55-65-year-olds selecting this as their primary incentive.

It is, therefore, important to understand what the value exchange is for each of your audience segments. Whilst discounts can often be perceived as offering good value to the consumer, if you want to avoid a race to the bottom and potentially

negatively impacting the perceived quality of your brand, instead focus on creating value through rewarding loyalty, or using bundle offers to grow average order value, for instance.

Unsurprisingly, income also affects consumers' wants and needs. Whilst quality, look and cost are considered significant across the board, low-income shoppers are more sensitive to cost, whilst higher income shoppers are generally more concerned about the brand's reputation and the quality of products, particularly for footwear.

HOW DOES INCOME AFFECT SHOPPING PRIORITIES?



Respondents were asked to select what is important to them when purchasing clothing and footwear online, selecting all that apply. Chart shows selected factors across all markets, for footwear specifically

Sustainability high on shoppers' radars

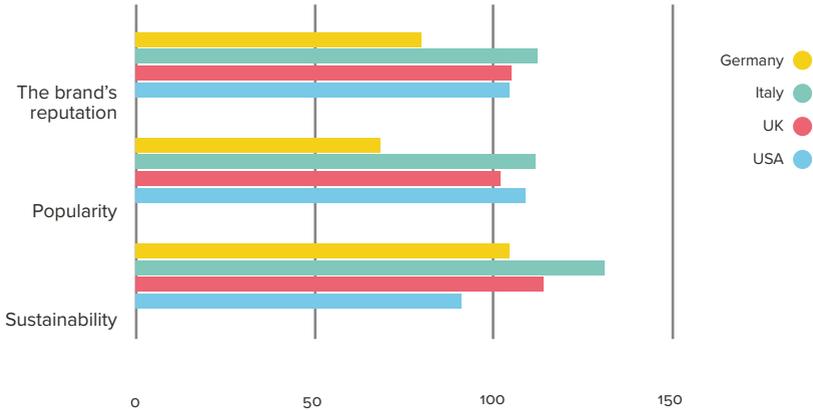
“Keep in mind what’s an expectation and what’s a true USP when it comes to sustainability.”



Looking across markets, sustainability is particularly important to shoppers in Italy (where 50.7% of respondents selected it as an important factor) and the UK (44%). Caroline Buckingham, Croud’s Client Strategy Director, says, “From running in-depth surveys and focus groups for Croud’s retail clients, we’ve found that it is a basic expectation for many European consumers, rather than sustainability being a differentiator or USP. A good example of this is France’s limiting of ‘sale’ retail periods and postponement of Black Friday sales in 2020 - a government-directed sustainable initiative designed to reduce over-consumption and support independent retailers.

“Brands should therefore keep in mind what’s an expectation and what’s a true USP when it comes to sustainability. With consumers increasingly wise to greenwashing, ensure you have the relevant industry-recognised accreditations before making any claims.”

WHAT MATTERS MOST TO SHOPPERS IN EACH MARKET?



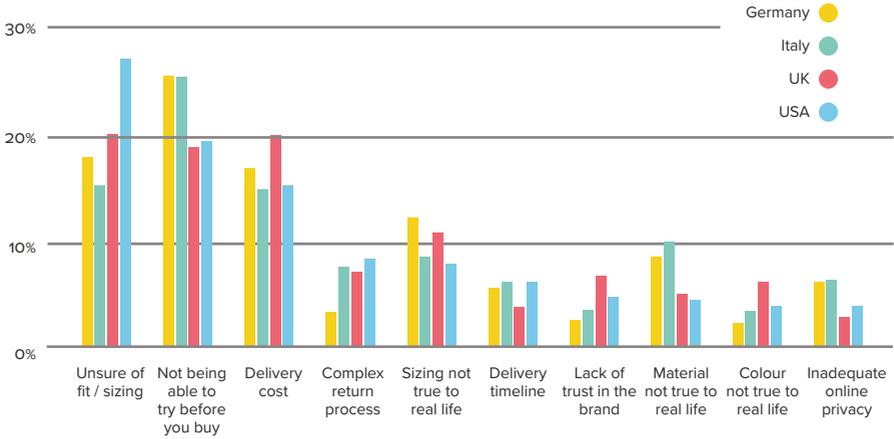
Selected factors that are important to shoppers when purchasing clothing and footwear online, by market (<100 means the market under-indexes; >100 means the market over-indexes for that factor)

The drawbacks of online shopping

Whilst online shopping is becoming increasingly popular - with the global fashion ecommerce market expected to continue to grow at 9.1% per year according to [Statista](#) - it does also have its downsides. Respondents consistently identified fit, sizing, and the inability to 'try before you buy' as notable barriers. Perhaps, though, more comprehensive size guides and the introduction of virtual and augmented reality 'try ons'

could act as a solution. Bringing this experience online can act as a brand moment; retailers over lockdowns created 'size at home' packages to increase visibility (through branded stickers) and cross-sell other products (such as fragrance). In addition, this acts as a great zero-party data collection opportunity and provides future opportunities for a retailer to communicate with a user, even if they didn't go on to purchase an item.

WHAT PUTS SHOPPERS OFF PURCHASING CLOTHING AND FOOTWEAR ONLINE?



What shoppers across markets ranked as the biggest barrier to purchasing clothing and footwear online

Perhaps surprisingly, online privacy is not a major concern for shoppers, despite being in the spotlight currently; only 4.3% selected 'inadequate online privacy' as their main deterrent. Delivery costs, however, put off a lot of buyers, especially in the UK, where 19.8% of respondents selected this as the biggest disadvantage to shopping online. Retailers that offer free shipping may often do well enough in sales that they can absorb the loss of the delivery

fees, making free shipping a potentially attractive marketing tactic.

Generally, consumers enjoy shopping online. In fact, 59.6% of shoppers expect to purchase clothing online more in the next six months, particularly in the US (65%). But fashion marketers should be aware of its limitations, and proactively come up with solutions and innovations that address the challenges involved.



“With 9.4% of shoppers in the UK starting their fashion purchases on TikTok, the platform should be an important part of any media mix.”

THE ONLINE SHOPPING JOURNEY



We also looked at how shoppers across markets go about discovering, researching and purchasing clothing and footwear online - and what it means for brands' digital marketing strategy.

Where do online shoppers start their journey?



Across markets, 54.5% of shoppers choose specific retailers' or brands' sites when starting their online shopping journey for clothing or footwear. In the UK, this method is particularly popular, rising to 63.6%. German (56.2%) and Italian (67.7%) shoppers tend to start with fashion marketplaces, such as ASOS, Zalando and Farfetch. Amazon is also a key discovery point across all four countries, but markedly so in the US (at 59.9% and the top result) and much less so in the UK (37%).

Search also remains a key discovery point for shoppers

across the board, particularly in the UK, where 54.9% of shoppers use Google or another search engine when starting their online shopping journey. However, as Duncan Nichols, Director of Strategy and Planning at Croud, points out, it's important that newer channels are not neglected: "With 9.4% of shoppers in the UK starting their fashion purchases on TikTok, the platform should be an important part of any media mix. Content is key, though - brands need to design for the platform and not simply repurpose other material."

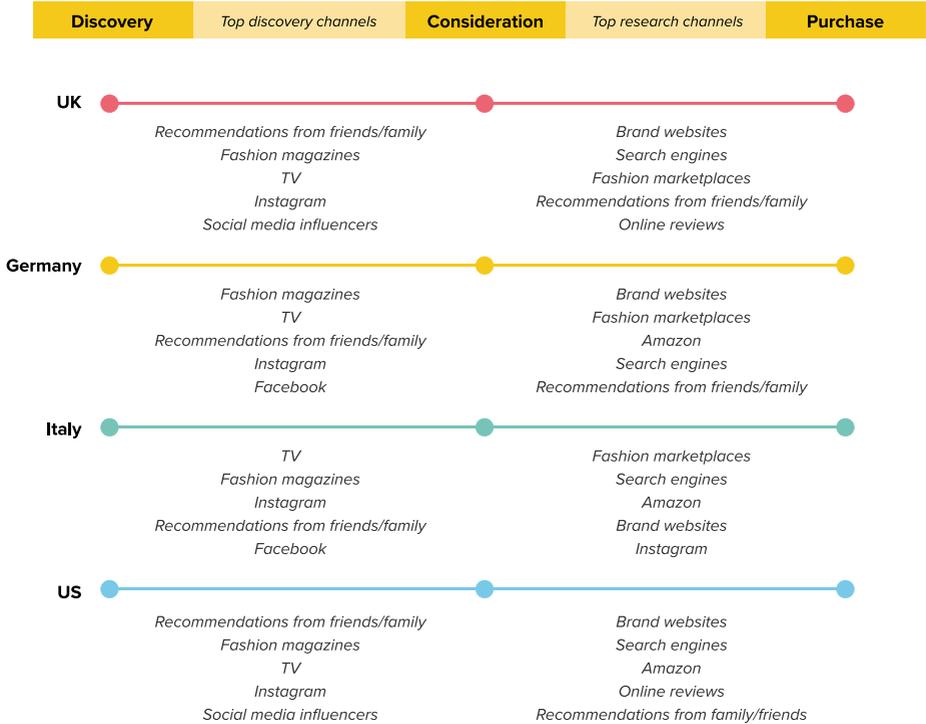
Where do online shoppers find inspiration?

“Digital-only brands may want to consider their channel mix to see how they can get in front of the right audiences.”

Social networking sites Instagram, Facebook and TikTok certainly have a major influence on fashion shoppers. But consumers seek inspiration from a range of sources. Interestingly, recommendations from family and friends are ranked highly across the board, with over 50% of respondents identifying them as a key source of inspiration.

What's more, shoppers seek fashion inspiration from non-digital channels such as TV and fashion magazines. Around 60% of German respondents placed TV in their top three sources of inspiration, and 65.5% selected fashion magazines. As Duncan Nichols explains: “The relative importance of ‘traditional’ channels for inspiration in Germany will be interesting for advertisers. Digital-only brands may want to consider their channel mix to see how they can get in front of the right audiences, exploring programmatically-bought media like connected TV and digital out-of-home. A long-term plan for measurement will also be key.”

WHAT DOES THE 'AVERAGE' CONSUMER JOURNEY LOOK LIKE PER MARKET?



WHICH CLOTHING BRANDS ARE MOST POPULAR AMONGST CONSUMERS IN EACH MARKET?

US	UK	Italy	Germany
1. Amazon	1. ASOS	1. Zalando	1. Zalando
2. Macy's	2. Next	2. Amazon	2. Amazon
3. Nike	3. Amazon	3. Zara	3. H&M
4. Target	4. M&S	4. ASOS	4. Otto
5. Kohl's	5. H&M	5. H&M	5. Esprit

Respondents were asked to list up to five brands or retailers they typically consider when purchasing clothing online; these tables show the top five responses per market

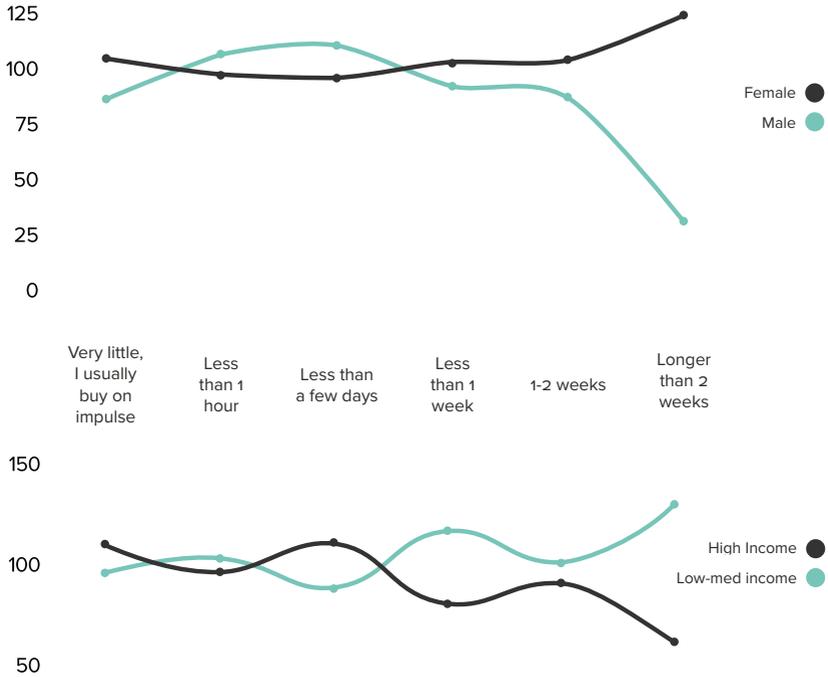
Who are the biggest impulse shoppers?



When looking at the length of time that shoppers typically spend researching clothing and footwear purchases, our research proved to be divisive. The data highlights some often stereotyped gender differences, with women over-indexing at either end of the scale, spending a very long time considering purchases, or buying on impulse. Men, on the other hand, are unlikely to spend longer than a few days; they make decisions quickly but not on impulse. In terms of income, there is also a clear difference between groups. Lower budget shoppers, for example, are much more likely to spend longer than two weeks considering a purchase.

Germany appears to have the largest proportion of impulsive shoppers, with 23.3% of respondents saying they spend 'very little' time researching their purchases and 'usually buy on impulse'—versus 12.4% across all markets.

TIME SPENT RESEARCHING ONLINE FASHION PURCHASES BY GENDER AND INCOME



Responses to 'Before purchasing clothing / footwear, how long do you typically spend researching?', indexed for gender and income bracket

WHICH FOOTWEAR BRANDS ARE MOST POPULAR AMONGST CONSUMERS IN EACH MARKET?

US	UK	Italy	Germany
1. Nike	1. ASOS	1. Zalando	1. Amazon
2. Amazon	2. Amazon	2. Amazon	2. Zalando
3. Adidas	3. Next	3. Adidas	3. Deichmann
4. Macy's	4. Nike	4. Nike	4. Nike
5. DSW	5. Clarks	5. eBay	5. Otto

Respondents were asked to list up to five brands or retailers they typically consider when purchasing footwear online; these tables show the top five responses per market



Which channels do shoppers find most useful when researching their purchases?

When asked to rank the usefulness of specific channels for researching clothing or footwear purchases, three out of four markets found brands' and retailers' sites the most effective. Italy is the exception, placing more of an emphasis on marketplaces. Over 80% of respondents agreed that they tend to purchase clothing and footwear from brands they've bought from before, highlighting the importance - especially for lesser known brands - of leaning on popular discovery and research channels for your target audience.

Though a common source of inspiration, offline sources

such as fashion magazines are considered less useful at the research stage. However, information and comparison sources, such as Amazon and other marketplaces, are well favoured.

The case for prioritising search is also clear. In the UK, where Amazon is generally seen as less important as a research channel, search is most likely to make an impact. But it is important to note that Amazon is much more popular among low-income shoppers - with 19.6% of low-income shoppers selecting Amazon as their top research channel, compared to 10.9% of high-income shoppers.

How can brands make the most of virtual and augmented reality?

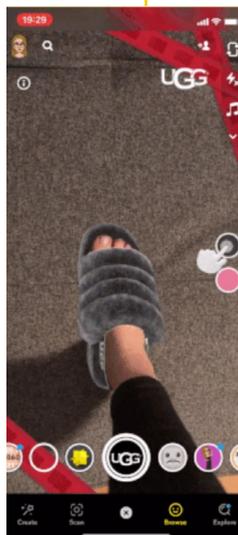
Across our surveyed markets, VR and AR are still relatively underused by fashion shoppers, with only 16.5% saying they have used VR or AR filters to try on clothes or shoes in the last year. However, this proportion grows in younger cohorts (20.9% amongst 25-34-year-olds), though interestingly not among 16-24-year-olds (16.4%). This group are also more likely to be social purchasers, indicating that such technologies are key for engaging younger consumers.

The fully immersive digital experience is seemingly more popular in the US, with 19% using it to try on products in the last year—versus just 10.7% in Germany. Interestingly, high-income shoppers were more likely to have used VR/AR (21.7%), which is perhaps a reflection of the fact that luxury brands have generally been investing more into such technology.

Croud and UGG help shoppers 'try on' the Fluff Yeah with AR filter

In 2020, Croud developed and launched an AR filter for Snapchat, which allowed customers to 'try on' the Fluff Yeah, one of UGG's most popular styles. The aim was to enable potential customers to engage with the product, even whilst stuck at home during the global lockdown: after all, respondents consistently identified fit, sizing and the inability to 'try before you buy' as notable barriers when shopping online.

The AR 'try on' Snapchat filter for UGG was a huge success, helping the brand to drive engagement, reach new users, and ultimately drive sales. Over the course of the full campaign, the AR filter drove 23m try-ons, with swipe up rate 65% higher than the campaign average, and save rate 13x higher.





THE PROMISE OF SOCIAL COMMERCE



Respondents were asked if they had purchased an item of clothing or footwear by clicking on a social ad or post in the last year. Across all markets, 36% of people answered “yes”. This is relatively significant, particularly when compared with the 16% of those who had used VR or AR.

There was, again, a noticeable difference by market: 42.6% of US shoppers said they had

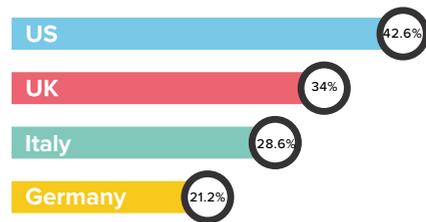
purchased via social media in the last year, versus only 21.2% of German shoppers. What’s more, this mode of shopping was popular with those in the 25-34 (40.9%) and 35-44 (42.5%) age brackets, as well as higher-income earners. But, surprisingly, 16-24-year-olds - the age group most active on social platforms - are less likely to use the medium for purchasing.

“it’s vital for marketers to really understand their audience and performance by age group”

Yazmin King, Paid Social Account Director at Croud, comments, “Shopping on social media can often be quite an impulsive decision, especially if your highly favoured influencer starts telling you about something you need to buy immediately, so it makes sense that those with a higher disposable income are more likely to purchase. I think it’s vital for marketers to really understand their audience and performance by age group, and make sure they use these insights to build out creative and formats better suited to people who are going to drive results for them.”

Delving further into the question, we also asked which social platform had been used for the purchase(s). Facebook and Instagram were by far the most popular mediums for purchasing clothing or footwear after clicking on a social post or advertisement. “This doesn’t surprise me, as Facebook holds the majority share of media investment. It’s really important for brands to test other platforms though, such as TikTok, Snapchat or Pinterest - depending on the advertiser’s audience and also creative execution,” added

King. Following this advice also presents a potential solution to engaging Generation Z: around 38% of Snapchat’s users are aged 18-24 according to [Statista](#), whilst only 23% of [Facebook’s users](#) are in that key age range.



Shoppers who have purchased an item of clothing/footwear by clicking on a social ad or post in the last year, by market

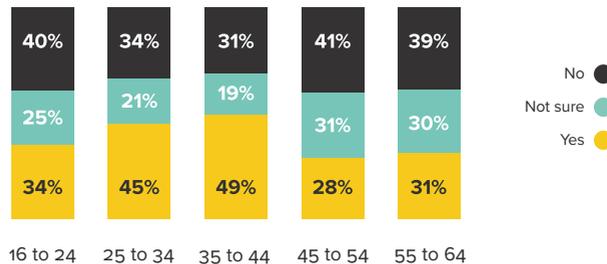
“It’s really important for brands to test other platforms though, such as TikTok, Snapchat or Pinterest - depending on the advertiser’s audience and also creative execution”

How receptive are shoppers to an end-to-end social commerce experience?

With more social platforms introducing in-app checkout, so shoppers can complete their end-to-end purchase within the app, we also asked the research group whether they would be comfortable buying clothing and footwear directly within a social media app.

The figures echo the idea that 25-44-year-olds are more receptive to completing a fashion purchase entirely within a social app. It is interesting, again, that Generation Z are

more sceptical of the end-to-end commerce experience, alongside older participants. Yazmin King points out, "Whilst data privacy issues in the press may mean that some users are wary of sharing their personal details, we've seen that convenience is a key driver of online shopping, so it will be interesting to keep an eye on how perception changes over time as the platforms' capabilities evolve."



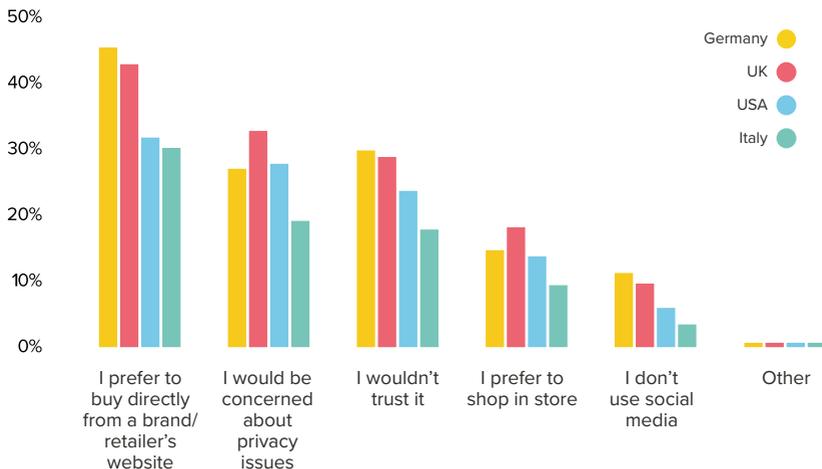
Responses to 'Would you be comfortable buying clothing / footwear directly within a social media app? Please select the option that most applies' by age group

What would deter shoppers from purchasing clothing and footwear directly from a social platform?

Contributors were asked what would put them off an end-to-end social commerce experience. The most common factor that deters people is preferring to buy directly from brands and retailers; this was closely followed by privacy and trust. Germany and the UK have the highest resistance, with respondents based in the UK especially concerned about privacy (32.7%) and German

shoppers expressing their distrust (29.6%).

A clear pattern emerges when we segment by age. In parallel, 16-24-year-olds responded with issues of trust and wanting to buy directly. More interestingly, a large proportion (27.1%) highlighted a desire to shop in stores when compared to older people.



Responses to 'What could potentially deter you from purchasing clothing / footwear directly from a social platform? Please select all that apply', across markets

How can clothing and footwear retailers encourage shoppers to use social commerce?

Yazmin King advises that “Building consumers’ trust should remain a priority. A solid foundation takes time (stick to your promises!), but once the relationship is secure, you will be able to push social shopping and, as a result, increase engagement and revenue - whether that be through promoting social exclusive products, using social to complement in-store product launches, or introducing gifts with social purchases, for instance.”

Facebook recently announced [plans to introduce automated ad destinations](#), allowing brands and retailers to test how user shopping behaviour compares on a brand site versus a Facebook Shop. The roll-out is a huge step towards introducing in-app purchasing more broadly, encouraging consumers to shop directly on social media.

Shoppable TV ads may be on the rise, too. Around 36.2% of respondents would consider buying clothing and footwear from a shoppable TV ad in the next six months, with shoppers in the US most receptive to this idea (41.2%), much more so than in Germany (21.3%).

Social commerce shows great promise, particularly amongst certain demographics, offering brands and retailers an accessible additional sales avenue, as well as creating opportunities for creative interaction and feedback. Focus on building trust and consistent brand messaging in order to capitalise on the growing social commerce opportunities available.

“Shoppers use Amazon to check prices, reviews and gather more product information, regardless of where they eventually end up making the purchase online or offline.”



IS AMAZON SET TO BECOME A TOP FASHION RETAILER?



Amazon has unseated Walmart to become the top apparel retailer in the US, topping \$41 billion in clothing and footwear sales in 2020, according to estimates by Wells Fargo. And across the globe, Amazon's popularity in the fashion space is evident from our survey of 1,000+ shoppers.

What is Amazon's role in the shopping journey in different markets?



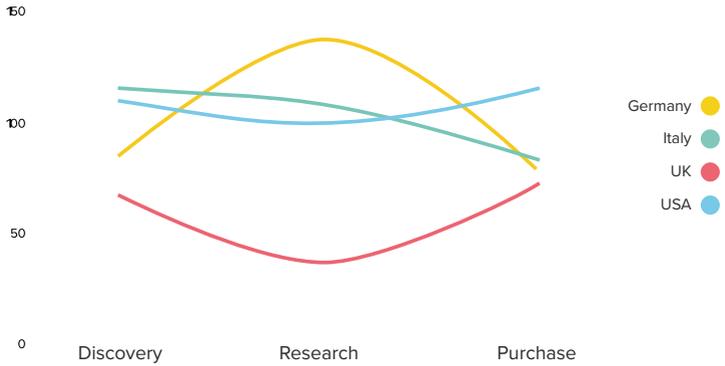
Its role in the shopping journey should not be understated. In the UK, people may prefer to start their journey on a specific brand or retailer's site, a search engine or a fashion marketplace, but recent research shows that almost nine in ten Brits are Amazon shoppers, so fashion retailers should not discount the marketplace in this market.

The site is considered particularly useful for discovering items. Around 63% of Italian and 60% of American respondents selected Amazon when asked

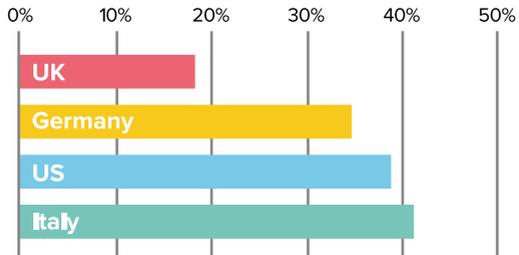
where they typically start their journey looking for clothes and footwear online.

Respondents were also asked to rank 13 different channels in terms of usefulness when researching clothing and footwear products before purchasing. Among different markets, 41.4% of Italian shoppers ranked Amazon in their top three most useful channels, whilst American shoppers also rated Amazon's usefulness as a research channel (39%), whilst Brits were much less convinced (18.5%).

WHAT IS AMAZON'S ROLE IN THE SHOPPING JOURNEY IN DIFFERENT MARKETS?



The importance of Amazon as a channel to shoppers in each market, at the discovery, research and purchase stages (indexed)



Proportion of respondents, across markets, who ranked Amazon in their top three most useful channels when researching clothing and footwear purchases online

Unsurprisingly, shoppers in lower income brackets are more likely to use Amazon to discover and research than high-income earners. Andy Siviter, Croud's Director of Commerce & Data Operations, comments, "The fact that nearly 40% of low-income shoppers consider Amazon as a key research channel is not surprising given we see Amazon used as a vital tool for lower funnel consideration and comparison. In most categories shoppers use Amazon to check prices, reviews and gather more product information, regardless of where they eventually end up making the purchase online or offline."

In terms of purchasing, fashion sales across all four countries remain high. American respondents were most likely to agree that they 'frequently purchase clothing items on Amazon' (62.4%), versus 42.4% in Germany, 44.8% in Italy, and 39.5% in the UK.

"Amazon has struggled in the past to be seen as a destination for luxury and fashion. The functional product page layout we're all used to on Amazon just isn't really the kind of shopping experience these types of brands are looking for," commented Siviter. "However, Amazon has been working hard to create more engaging content on pages and in Amazon Stores to combat this. Luxury Stores and Amazon Prime Wardrobe are good examples of Amazon's intent in this category."

He continues, "Amazon US has been leading the way with fashion initiatives and partnerships, and so expect other markets to follow the same trend, as Amazon rolls out successful learnings globally over the coming years." Fashion retailers should, therefore, keep their finger on the pulse and consider being among the first to capitalise on the latest developments in their category.

What drives shoppers to buy on Amazon?

Convenience appears to be the dominant driver to Amazon's success, with consumers - particularly those with children (70.4% of those with 3+ children said they frequently purchase clothing on Amazon) - praising the easy-to-use website and favouring the platform's easy returns policy.

An overwhelming importance is also placed on the site's review system: 83% refer to the reviews before making a purchase. What's more, those who most value online reviews are 74% and 94% more likely to purchase clothing and footwear respectively on Amazon, compared with the population average, showing this is a key selling point for Amazon shoppers, helping to build trust.

Siviter notes that, "Amazon has been taking so much action recently to rid the system of bad actors and rebuild trust in

product reviews because they know without it people will be less inclined to use Amazon for browsing and discovering new products."

Despite its success, most shoppers (71.5% in the UK, 61.5% in Germany, 55.7% in the US and 48.4% in Italy) still prefer to use other channels over Amazon when shopping for fashion. The lack of quality appears to be the deciding factor. Only 50.8% of UK shoppers agreed that 'I trust Amazon provides good quality footwear products', and 56.3% for clothing.

In order to build trust on Amazon, brands and retailers should aim to build positive and natural reviews for their products, as well as investing in creating an excellent brand experience using A+ content, Amazon Stores and rich image and video ad creatives.



Despite some remaining scepticism from fashion shoppers, now could be the perfect time to test Amazon as an additional branding and sales platform for your brand. Andy Siviter adds, “I think Amazon will be increasingly important across all markets,

so more and more brands will be considering it as a channel to test. With adoption levels still relatively low outside of the US, now could be the perfect time to explore the potential of Amazon for your brand across the globe.”

“Amazon US has been leading the way with fashion initiatives and partnerships and so expect other markets to follow the same trend.”



CONCLUSION



A digital transformation has swept across the world and as a result, consumers' wants and needs have changed. The real test for digital and ecommerce may now be upon us as the world begins to return to some sense of normality, but those brands that take the time to really understand the preferences and habits of their target audience in each market will be the ones that succeed.

People now expect choice, discounts, convenience, sustainability, reviews and quality when shopping for clothing and footwear online. But there's also a clear desire for flexibility, innovation and, increasingly, authenticity. Our

findings show that there is not only one path to increasing engagement and revenue but instead, many. This, of course, makes marketing your brand more difficult, but also more exciting. Understanding your audience is essential.

Methodology

We surveyed 1,054 online shoppers in the UK, US, Germany and Italy to find out about their online shopping habits when looking for and purchasing clothing and footwear. All respondents had an interest in fashion and had purchased clothing or footwear online in the last month. The survey was carried out on behalf of Croud by [GWI](#).

About Croud

Croud is a global, full-service, digital marketing agency that works with some of the world's leading brands.

Through the seamless connection of data, technology and creativity, Croud develops strategies for sustainable growth that drive immediate business impact.

Croud builds deep partnerships with clients thanks to its unique model, using its 'Croud Control' platform to harness a global network of 2,500 digital experts, delivering holding company scale with the precision of a specialist.

Founded in 2011, Croud is proud to partner with clients such as Paul Smith, Vans, Orlebar Brown, Superdry, and UGG - leading media strategy, performance marketing and digital experiences.



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