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Low scores for usability across UK fashion web sites

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Only half of web users in an extensive usability survey of fashion retail sites, said they could complete simple navigation and browsing tasks successfully. The specific task of locating a defined product had a success rate of only 49%, for example. These are the worrying findings of the first [e-Performance Observatory](#) report compiled by user specialist YUSEO, and presented this week to IMRG members in London. YUSEO tested the usability of nine online fashion retailers operating in the UK: Marks & Spencer, NewLook, TopShop, BooHoo, Mango, Promod, Zara, H & M and ASOS in research work that took place between May 26 and June 15 this year.

An entirely female panel of more than 1,400 web users was asked to visit the ready-to-wear fashion sites and proceed to check-out as though performing a real purchase. They were asked to perform specific tasks from which they could rate the user experience. They were then surveyed more extensively on three areas of customer satisfaction: access to the product on offer; check-out procedure, and customer support/information. All participants tested sites they were previously unfamiliar with.

"This was a relatively poor sector-based performance shared across the overall UK market, and similar to the corresponding survey of French sites," said Jean Pierre Le Borgne, a director of YUSEO. "But what does come out of the research is the fact that low scores for completing tasks are not necessarily reflected in the feeling of satisfaction users express post-web experience." The average satisfaction rate across the nine UK sites was a more encouraging 6.8 out of 10, he explained. "Such a "gap" in the results reminds us of the advantages of a dual analytical reading that the Yuseo Observatory now offers, between the real customer experience and the users' post-navigation feelings."

For navigation experience and user satisfaction, Newlook.co.uk – the 15th most visited site in England according to the IMRG – enjoys the leading position on this British edition of the Observatory, with a success rate of 58%, closely followed Marksandspencer.co.uk. Meanwhile the Mango.co.uk and ASOS.co.uk websites achieved a score of 47% which is below the average.

Le Borgne said fashion retailers in the UK are dealing with customers who have particularly high expectations of the web experience. "Fashion players would benefit from improving their online merchandising techniques, offering clearer product information and building more flexibility into sites," he said. "Not offering the best usability will have a direct impact on the potential attractiveness of online fashion stores."

Key Findings of the ePerformance Observatory

- The ready-to-wear UK sector shows a browsing experience score measured at only 51% success, which echoes the results of a corresponding French study.
- However general satisfaction scores in the UK were relatively high, with an average satisfaction rating of 6.8 out of 10 for the retailers in question.
- Despite the poor performance of the websites (which is similar to the findings for the French market), only 28% of panelists felt there was "a lack of flexibility" on the web sites, (against 40% of French participants in 2011).
- In terms of "access to products", the average score is estimated at 49% success, which is a score that contrasts sharply with the participants' feedback.
- In line with the sector's customer experience score, the checkout process displays a global average rate of 48% of success on all the web sites tested in the survey