

4 Research Methods to Improve Your DTC Website

a user experience white paper from The Integer Group®

Creating a best-in-class digital shopping experience is a cyclical and iterative process. No matter how well-informed, aesthetically beautiful, and carefully crafted your brand's site is when you launch, or when you last refreshed, there is always room to improve, optimize, and provide additional content and features to engage customers. The best experiences, that have extended life spans, share something in common: they incorporate quantitative and qualitative user-experience research throughout every stage of the planning, design, and development process.

User research can take many forms. It refers to a toolkit of research activities including quantitative analytics, A/B testing, usability testing, customer support analysis, card-sorting, contextual inquiry, on-site satisfaction surveys, task scenarios and more.

The types of tests that are the right mix for your site is dependent on what you're attempting to learn, your audience, your business objectives, user feedback, and/or analytics insights. There is no one-size-fits-all formula for which tests to employ and when—but each method can be essential to creating an optimal digital shopping experience that ultimately impacts the bottom line. In the 4 sections in this white paper, we look at common user research activities, when they can be used, and how they can help to uncover actionable insights you can leverage to improve your DTC experiences and reach your goals.

A/B & MULTIVARIATE TESTING

Data sources such as Google Analytics can shed light on where your site's users encounter obstacles, which pages are performing well and which aren't, and generally how users behave while visiting your site.

These quantitative findings lead us to hypotheses; for example, if users aren't clicking on the primary "Buy Now" CTA on product pages, we might think that the issue is with the button itself. We might hypothesize that making the button more prominent, or changing its color to something more noticeable, will increase the conversion rate of a given page.

A/B and multivariate testing provide a methodology by which we can test these hypotheses—without committing to them—and return metrics to validate or invalidate those hypotheses. Tests are executed by simultaneously displaying different variations of the same page to two different sets of users, and measuring the effectiveness of each on the ability of your users to complete the desired task.

Another use/case for A/B testing is to help evaluate creative ideas and optimizations before committing to a change. We can even segment our audience to test specific creative with specific segments. Say we have a page where we are seeing a significantly higher bounce rate for a certain segment of users.

A/B testing allows us to isolate traffic from that segment, test various headlines, and see which

idea has the largest impact. The potential here is to take some of the guesswork and subjectivity out of the creative process and instead implement the solution our data tells us will perform best. In practice, robust and informed A/B tests have been shown to improve conversion rates by up to 69%.³

ON-SITE SATISFACTION SURVEYS

"How well we communicate is determined not by how well we say things, but how well we are understood." —Andrew Grove, former CEO at Intel Corp

On-site surveys are one of the most simple forms of user research. These are typically triggered by a specific action or during a specific user flow. These surveys,

Figure 1: The User-Centered Design Process¹

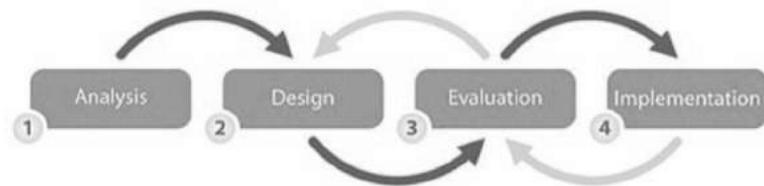
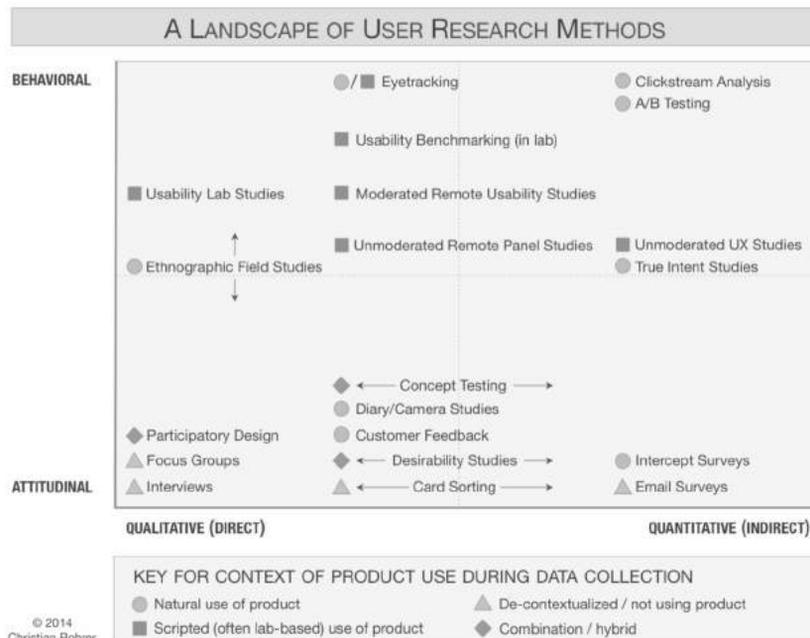


Figure 2: User Research Methods Landscape²



like the other methods in this article, can take many forms. A common and effective way to utilize on-site surveys is to ask users about the intention of their visit, if they were able to find/do what they came for, and their level of satisfaction with their experience. This data can then be leveraged to form design hypotheses that you can test (using A/B methods) and convert to measurable results.

Figure 3: A/B Variant Comparison Testing³

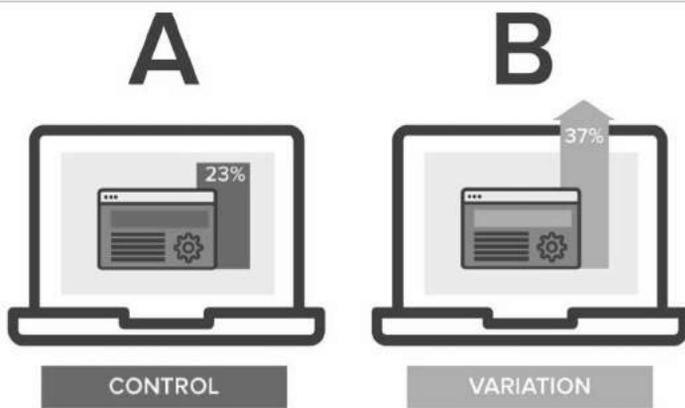


Figure 4: Example On-Site Survey⁴

The screenshot shows a survey question: "Which of the following features would you like to see added to product pages (please check all that apply)". Below the question are five checkboxes, each followed by a feature name: "Customer reviews", "Video demos", "3D pictures", "Sizing charts", and "Customization options". At the bottom of the survey, there is a "Send" button with a right-pointing arrow. In the bottom left corner, there is a small red flame icon and the text "Not using Hotjar yet?".

1:1 MODERATED USER TESTING

"It's about catching customers in the act, and providing highly relevant and highly contextual information." – Paul Maritz, CEO at Pivotal

A/B tests and on-site surveys can often help us to solve issues that we identify through analytics. However, both have the potential to return results that invalidate our hypotheses—and leave us with more questions than answers.

This happens in situations where our analytics show us users are behaving a certain way—but we may not know why—or make a false assumption of why users are behaving this way. In situations like these, performing 1:1 moderated user testing can uncover the actionable insights you'll need to continue to optimize.

During 1:1 moderated user testing, we instruct participants to think aloud, sharing their thoughts and emotions as they complete various tasks. Depending on what you want to learn, actionable insight trends can usually be uncovered by as few as 5–7 test participants.

Say for example, your site's analytics show that users are navigating successfully through your site reaching product pages, and then exiting without clicking the primary "BUY NOW" CTA. You perform A/B testing with various button sizes, shapes, colors, and copy—only to find negligible differences in results. In such a situation, performing 1:1 user testing (listening to users as they complete the task of shopping for your products) you can uncover contextually relevant insights that would be nearly impossible to get to through quantitative methods alone (including why users aren't clicking that button!). For example, you might



find your users are looking for a piece of information that is relevant to their conversion-based decision making process and is missing from your product pages (such as a ratings and reviews section). This type of testing can take many forms, depending on your goal. For example, a less defined task might be used to help uncover user intents when they visit various sections of your site, or why they go about performing product research a certain way.

CARD SORTS

“Asking users to adopt new behaviors or even modify their existing behaviors is very, very hard.” –Khoi Vinh, Principal Designer at Adobe

In order to create an intuitive navigation structure and information architecture and present information in a way that is intuitive for shoppers, it is essential to understand how they naturally organize information related to (or including) your products.

One way to effectively get at this information is to perform card sorts with your users. Card sorting activities place a set of words, phrases, concepts, etc. in front of a user and asks them to group the cards in a way that makes sense. An open or mixed card sort also provides the opportunity for your participants to write in words you may have not included in your sort.

For example, you could perform a card sort

“ You can uncover relevant insights that would be nearly impossible to get through quantitative methods.

with your existing site's categories, subcategories, and a few products in order to determine if your navigation is organized in a logical, user-friendly way. This can help to uncover potential issues with your information architecture that are hurting the findability of certain content or products on your site.

You may notice users aren't visiting any of your recipe pages within the blog section of your site, and a card sort can help to show that users aren't visiting this content because they don't expect to find it within the "blog" section of the site. They don't associate "recipes" and "blog" at all. An open-card sort might even lead you to the insight that users would prefer to classify recipes as "inspiration."

Card sorts can be performed in person as a facet of a 1:1 moderated user test, or remotely through online software.

IN CONCLUSION

Employ quantitative and qualitative methods in tandem to maximize the potential of your UX research. Qualitative UX research will give you deep insight into why your users behave the way they do. Quantitative tells you how they behave, allows you to validate or invalidate design hypotheses, and also enables you to measure the impact. "If you can't measure it, you can't improve it."

A recent survey of 15,000 consumers performed by PwC found that 1 in 3 would leave a brand they love after just one poor experience⁴ (yes, that includes your website!). Regularly performing user research in order to optimize the user experience of your website is critical and should be baked in to your design/development process to ensure you're satisfying the needs of every potential customer who visits your website. This will lead to higher conversion rates and higher customer retention rates.



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