

MAN ON A MISSION

– *Male Shoppers*

Preface

Apparently, men no longer hate shopping. Now it's an outdated cliché, the modern man is embracing the joys of retail – even taking on family-related shopping missions that were previously the exclusive domain of their partners. In-Store Insights assesses the rise of the male spender and what it means for brands.



Traditionally, it's been rare for discussions around in-store engagement to focus on the needs of male shoppers. After all, they have long been associated with a 'hatred' of shopping – their needs within the retail environment being singularly limited to somewhere comfy to sit as they while away the minutes and hours watching their partners try on endless outfits. A recent tabloid survey suggested that 45 per cent

of men avoid shopping at all costs, while one in four will end up going home without their partner, citing being "hungry", "thirsty" and "wishing they were outside" as the main reasons. Put simply, real men don't shop. Or so some would have us believe. "Walmart's classic insight was that the most popular item bought with nappies was beer – by husbands doing the top-up shop on the way home from work," says Mark

Broughton-Foxall, strategy & planning partner at shopper agency, LIFE.

Brands first woke up to the fact that there may be men who wanted to spend money in the mid-nineties. There's been an upward trend since then, though most men, and the market as a whole, are still catching up. But attitudes are changing and marketers are beginning to target a shift in mood. "Male shopping habits have changed as a result of the combination of two things: the 'new world order' of shopping, which has made the action of shopping more accessible, convenient, relevant, instant and personal - values that have always appealed to the male psyche - and the evolved perception of a male's role in society," says Peter Martin, managing partner, UK head of retail experience at marketing agency, Cheil UK.

In the past few years, both physical and online shops have massively upped their game. We are in an era where every shopper counts, and both retailers and brands have had to find new ways to squeeze growth out of shoppers. Male shoppers provide a clear opportunity to do just that.

In the world of high street fashion, menswear and grooming sales are booming. In June, market researchers Verdict announced the UK menswear market was forecast to grow by a whopping 25.7 per cent in the five years to 2019, outperforming





all other clothing sectors. Enduring masculine anxieties around being perceived as vain, or silly, or caring too much, are also fading away. "You only have to look at the rise of the 'spornosexual' reported in the mainstream media – style-, appearance- and health-conscious male consumers spending more to look good," says Broughton-Foxall. For the uninitiated, the 'spornosexual' is the evolved version of the 'metrosexual', a term first coined twenty years ago to describe men who were magnificently heterosexual in their day-to-day lives but took pride and care in their appearance.

In the past, products targeted at male shoppers were often displayed bluntly: here it is, make your choice, and be gone. In short, it was viewed, and presented, as more of a necessary mission – shopping wasn't supposed to be interesting, or fun, or particularly enjoyable. But some stereotypes still ring true. "While women collate and compare, men would generally still rather have an authoritative edit – tools that help them to effortlessly find and buy rather than sifting through information, visual or otherwise," says Jim Thompson, managing director at strategic design consultancy, 20.20.

Indeed, research continues to show that men are 'branded' shoppers whereas women are 'occasion' shoppers. "Men are creatures of habit: if you find a good barber, you hang on to him for life. Men prefer to do the research once, do it thoroughly, and then stick with that decision for quite some time," says Karl McKeever, managing director of retail consultancy, Visual Thinking.

It's perhaps why male shoppers have been quick to adopt the concept of shopping through curated online platforms such as Outfittery and Thread. These new subscription services offer a kind of pre-emptive retail based on a profile at the beginning of the membership. "It is zero-effort shopping," says Thompson. Online has been great for men, because most embrace the tech element. More importantly, it provides what men really want from shopping: someone to help them do it. In-store, it means having plenty of staff available. Indeed, more men than women ask for assistance from store teams, according to latest research – shattering the myth that men don't ask for directions (or at least they do in-store).

Research also shows that more men are taking an active role in their households when it comes to grocery shopping. "We carry out our own programme of qualitative shopper research each quarter to get under the skin of shoppers," says Broughton-Foxall. "We're finding that the burden of grocery shopping is now one that is shared by both family heads – if the man isn't doing the shopping, he definitely has a huge influence on the items and brands chosen."



In grocery, however, the question is less about gender and more about the fragmented nature of shopping for food," explains Broughton-Foxall. "Top-up shops in convenience stores, particularly for 'dinner tonight' missions, mean the 'chore' is now split between couples – who can most easily pop into Sainsbury's Local tonight? The big grocers have reacted to this need-state by bringing meal solutions to front-of-store, with curated collections of complimentary dishes so you can pull together a meal easily – regardless of whether you're male or female."

Despite this, the influence of gender on how shoppers engage with the in-store environment cannot be ignored. It plays a significant role in influencing not only what we buy, but also our mindset to shopping and how we engage with retail communication. According to the findings of POPAI's Grocery Display Effectiveness Study, women are typically better at translating the intended meaning of visual imagery, and respond to more emotive design and messaging. Male and female shoppers also respond differently to size, shape and colour, and to visual imagery in-store. Meanwhile, male shoppers engage better with more functional, obvious communication. They are also more susceptible to looking at P-O-P in the first place than their female counterparts. "Responding to changing men's behaviours in-store is something we're actively involved with," says James Beanland, senior client manager at P-O-P design agency, StormDFX. "It's no coincidence that we're now receiving more briefs focused on education and persuasion of the male shopper. Men are increasingly aware of what they're buying and why, but there is still plenty of room for improving engagement – you'll be seeing more P-O-P specifically targeting male shoppers in the future," says Beanland.

But according to Broughton-Foxall, the question, especially within a supermarket context, is do retailers need to? "The grocery market has undergone a seismic shift since the economic downturn – the traditional models broken, discounters shattering the norms and the grocers slow to respond. The big grocery retailers have more fundamental challenges to face into: value perception, right range in the right stores, making customers feel valued, and adding value. This must take priority over whimsical tailoring for men – right for all, not right for a gender."

