Usability Report on Pela Case, Inc.
Project 2: ENGCMP 1430

Ravi Gandhi, Alexis Giobbi

Introduction

The purpose of this UX study was to test the effectiveness of Pela Case, Inc.'s website in selling their products. As a B2C (Business to Consumer) company that does not allow distributors such as Amazon, their website is the main vehicle for generating sales. We compared their website to other B2C companies and also large distributors when conducting user testing. We ultimately found that though Pela Case, Inc. is well branded, it could do more to distinguish itself in a crowded market and ultimately generate more sales.

Client, Product, Business Model

A Pela Case client maintains an interest in sustainability, as well as technology. The brand caters to users of smartphones, wireless earbuds, and smartwatches. Typically, the client will be a younger person who is active on social media, around 18-35, with a concentration in the early to mid-twenties. Pela products are more expensive than many of their competitors, so they market to clientele from medium to high income households. Pela products are also geared more towards women.

The products Pela currently has to offer are phone cases for over 60 different types of phones (including many different versions of the same phone type, such as the iPhone X vs. XS), watch bands, Airpod cases, and other phone accessories. Pela as a brand is also selling an initiative that focuses on creating a waste-free future.

In addition to their sustainable products, Pela's focuses on a community model of subscription-based sales. Users can "Join the Collective" for $4.95 a month, which is intended for "eco-evangelists." Users can also join an ambassador program, sign up for an email list, and check out the Pela blog. Pela states that the average customer purchases three to five items per year. This shows that they focus on building a base with repeat, loyal customers.

Competitor Research and Analysis

In the saturated accessories industry, a few key factors can differentiate a platform or brand from its competitors: quantity, customizability, and novel functionality. We decided to test Pela Case with the leaders of each factor listed above and identified Amazon as the biggest competitor for quantity, Etsy as the biggest competitors for customizability, and Cell Helmet as the biggest competitor for novel functionality.

Amazon's millions of options make searching overwhelming, as well as more difficult to generate demand for a singular product. The same is true for accessories of all types. Amazon easily carries the largest selection of accessories and for every single device, not just the higher-end or more popular devices. On the flip side, the top search results are typically more affordable, generic, and therefore, more frequently purchased. Amazon is very easy to use, but it's very transactional and doesn't provide a special user experience.

Etsy offers extreme customizability with some stores offering commissioned work and a majority of stores offering highly specific cases. Etsy shops are technically small businesses operated by either a single person or a small group of people, resulting in a more personal experience with a limited quantity and range of options. Additionally, since many of the products on Etsy are handcrafted and sold by a single individual, prices are often higher than most accessories, and can often vary widely from shop to shop. Overall, it's much more likely that a user can find something very specific that they want on Etsy, but the process of finding the perfect shop and ensuring its validity may feel time-consuming and inconvenient.

Similar to Pela Case, Cell Helmet operates a B2C company featuring products for a highly specific user base. It makes ultra-durable products with amazing warranties that rival those of the legendary Otter Boxes. It's innovative like Pela, and it offers an extremely professional and personal user experience when purchasing and receiving an accessory. Unlike Pela Case, Cell Helmet limits

the quantity of devices served, and the types of accessories offered, and gears the website much more towards generating demand for products, rather than building a community. Cell Helmet focuses on bringing new users in and converting them to customers instead of making a very loyal base with several repeat purchases a year.

Client Value Innovation

Pela is not the first company to make phone cases. In fact, far from it. However, they are the first company to make phone cases, watch bands, and other accessories that are 100% biodegradable and manufactured using clean processes resulting in a net zero carbon footprint. While pricing usually drives the decision among device accessories, Pela's unique value innovation allows them to set themselves apart from their competitors in a unique way. To emphasize their commitment to their users' environmental consciousness, they even promote a subscription service that allows you to be part of a community and receive updates about the company's environmental impact and innovative new features. At its core, Pela case success as an accessory company comes from keeping their very specific user in mind and modeling every feature, branding element, and promotional material around them, not just around anyone with a device looking for accessories.

User Profile and Scenarios

We were able to gather three users and conduct some UX tests with them. Our overall prompt asked each user to visit the four sites provided (Pela Case, Amazon, Etsy, and Cell Helmet), and try to find something they would actually purchase. While the overall result was binary (whether they could find something they would buy for themselves or not), we collected data relating to (1) how much time they spent on each site before coming to their conclusions, (2) which pages on each site they spent the most time on, (3) which elements of each site they found most engaging and

impactful in reaching their decision, and (4) which aspects of each website made their search for the perfect accessory difficult. The users were carefully selected based on our analysis of each website's client base, and due to the global pandemic, we virtually conducted testing.

The first user was Genevieve Hayes, a first-year college student as well as an Etsy shop owner. She is familiar with technology and owns a smartphone and a smartwatch but is not an expert with either technology or technology accessories. She comes from a middle-income family and is very politically involved; she's an environmental activist and tries to make green decisions when shopping. She was presented with the following scenario: she is searching for a new iPhone case and a new AirPod case. She needs something that will be compatible with her iPhone 6s, an older version, and is looking for something that is not too expensive. She likes supporting small businesses but also concerned with sustainability.

Our second user is Rhea Kukkar, a third-year Environmental Science major at Colorado School of Mines. She is not sure what she wants to do after graduation, but she wants to go traveling and exploring. Rhea is an only child to a higher income family and she's very close with her parents. They adopted a highway to clean monthly ten years ago. She has some high-end technology but doesn't utilize them for any sort of heavy computing or professional applications. She was presented with the following scenario: she is looking for a new iPhone case, specifically seeking something durable for all her adventures, but also something eco-friendly. She currently owns an iPhone 12.

Our final user was Justin Seth, a third-year computer science student at Rutgers University in New Jersey. He's a very involved gamer and is barely on social media; he only joined Instagram because he was forced to by friends. He comes from a middle-income family but has higher-end technology since he needs it for professional purposes and gets material pleasure from technology. He was presented the following scenario: he recently upgraded both his iPhone and Airpods, as he typically does yearly, and is looking for new accessories that'll work well for the whole year. He's a

STEM major and expects to look into the technical specifications of each accessory he's purchasing to ensure he's getting a high-quality product.

User Research Findings

We've first included the binary results from each of the user testing scenarios (whether they bought a case from Pela Case or any of their competitors), and then included the results from timing each person on the sites and observing which features were easiest and most difficult to use.

Genevieve looked over her options, including Pela, Amazon, and Etsy. She was really impressed by Pela's website and admired their mission. However, buying two products from the site would be too expensive. She decided that if she were shopping out of the user study, she would buy the AirPod case on sale at Pela, and then support a small business by buying her phone case from a shop on Etsy. However, she would plan on returning to purchase more Pela products in the future once her income increases.

Rhea finds that what she is looking for cannot really be found on any other site, as nothing really compares to Pela's biodegradable products. Price is not really an issue for her, as she maintains enough disposable income. She decided that she would be willing to order the case. After going through the process as if she were purchasing the accessories, she looks further into the Pela website and discovers that she can join the Pela collective, receiving various perks. She says she would join, willing to pay the monthly membership fee, and hopes that if the phone case is successful, that she could continue to buy from Pela in the future.

Justin wasn't really a fan of either Pela or Amazon. He spent little time on both sites as neither offered the type of technical specifications he was looking for. He liked Etsy a little more because he could specifically look for durability tests and other specifications at certain shops, but the inconsistency (by design) of the shops on Etsy was a deal-breaker for him. He absolutely loved

Cell Helmet and would have bought one of their cases for his phone. He really enjoyed the detailed technical descriptions and diagrams that featured prominently on Cell Helmet's site.

For the users that would have bought from Pela, the environmental aspect of the accessories that were clearly highlighted on the home page were the most important feature to draw them in. Subsequently, they each spent a lot of time going through different designs and colors, leading us to conclude that the wide variety of options available made it easier to pick something that truly fit the user's style and what each user was looking for. For the user that chose not to purchase from Pela, the environmental feature was something that was easily skipped over in search for other specifications that were non-existent. The wide collection and aesthetic display didn't help retain the user's attention, as the initial pitch of environmental friendliness was not sufficient to capture the attention.

Recommendations for business model and UX

Our user testing has made it very clear that Pela Case aims to capture attention and pitch itself with its environmental features,. It aims to generate sales by offering an extremely wide variety of designs and colors that any environmentally minded user has something they really like. The biggest drawback to this approach, is the over-reliance on their homepage pitch of environmental friendliness.

To improve the UX experience, we suggest increasing the length of the homepage and adding more technical details about the products. Pela Case can further define and emphasize their environmental specifications in keeping with their branding and mission, but the addition of technical specifications could attract wealthier and more technically savvy customers who otherwise might be impressed with Pela Case products, but don't have enough information upon initially visiting the site. A multi-layer diagram or other diagram that essentially breaks down the case could

prove effective in showing the engineering behind the product and give the impression of a well-designed durable accessory.

Appendix

We've attached hyperlinks to the following supplemental documents below: (A) a matrix tool that allowed us to analyze competitors, (B) the UX Strategy slide presentation, (C), the screening and testing tool scripts we used to determine which potential users would be best for our testing, and (D) a document outlining our product research on Pela Case.

        A. [Matrix Tool](#)

        B. [UX Strategy Presentation Template](#)

        C. [Screening Tool and Testing Tool](#)

        D. [Product Research](#)