IMPROVING ZARA'S MOBILE APPLICATION'S USER INTERFACE

Part 1: Proposal Document

CPS613
Dr. Somang Nam

Chloe Parentela
Dylan Rodrigues
Ghazal Mirsayyah
Omar Syed
Shantanu Singh

February 18, 2022

Table of Contents

Part 1: Problem Description

A. Description

Our project will tackle the various usability issues with Zara's mobile application. These include the categories of products, which are too segmented and numerous, making them hard to understand and keep track of. Next, the forms on the application are unlabeled and do not indicate which inputs are required. Buttons are also ill-designed and badly sized, making them hard to distinguish and use; additionally, they are ill-placed. Button placement and the sacrifice of functionality for the sake of minimalist aesthetic makes navigation difficult. Finally, the carousel interfaces are hard to work with, hard to see, and lack continuity.

B. Assumptions and Claims

In terms of the demographics that we are targeting, based on market research, we are assuming the primary user base of Zara's mobile application is mostly young, female and, due to their age group, experienced with using commerce websites (Danziger, 2018). Hence, the changes we make will cater to them. However, we will also keep in mind accessibility needs. According to the literature that we have reviewed, the changes that we make in terms of usability will make the users more likely to use Zara more than once and feel less dissatisfied with the overall experience.

C. Risks and Realities

For our project, we will observe and analyze key parts of Zara's mobile application that seem to significantly reduce the platform's usability and functionality. Zara's menu categories, forms, navigation, image carousels and buttons are confusing and overwhelming. This leads to a big risk: the customers having a memorably negative experience. This could easily prevent the customer from ever attempting to use the platform again, even if the problem is resolved in the future. Sometimes modifications to the platform hold the risk of worsening platform usability rather than fixing it if not implemented correctly. A platform that is rendered difficult to use for new users can generate user frustration and dissatisfaction, resulting in the users never returning to the platform or even finding an alternative for the platform (Stone, 2005).

D. Usability Goals

The usability goal of our project is to determine what key changes to Zara's mobile application would significantly improve the platform's functionality and traffic. As an online e-commerce resource, when platforms are difficult to use and hard to learn, the learning is much steeper and takes longer; this results in decreased customer satisfaction (Travis, 2017). Our improvements will focus on Zara's menu categories, forms, navigation, carousels interfaces, and buttons. If successful in making these improvements to the mobile application, we can provide the users with a functional website that is easy to operate, significantly increasing platform usability.

E. User Experience Goals

The user experience goal of our project is to analyze the effectiveness of all possible modifications to our targeted application functions. We intend on determining what changes to Zara's mobile application — specifically its menu categories, forms, navigation, carousel interfaces, and buttons — would result in the highest amount of user satisfaction. Increased user satisfaction upon platform usage would result in the repeated return of said user to the platform (Travis, 2017). Our goal is to provide the best possible user experience, thereby increasing the platform's traffic.

F. Justification

The reasons for the improvements we propose are that users, as Calisi et. al (2009) point out, find usability features such as navigation and ease of use the most important. This is due to the fact that what users want the most out of a site is the ability to find what they need, in the most effortless way (Calisi et. al, 2009). Unsurprisingly, the products that deliver in those key areas are more likely to be used more often by consumers. Therefore, we would like to suggest design changes that will improve Zara's mobile application in these areas, such as moving the help button and making the categories more intuitive for example.

Part 2: Literature Review

This section expands on the problem statements described in Part 1 in more detail.

A. Menu Categories

Zara's mobile application has four main categories for its items: Women, Men, Kids, and Beauty, with the first two expanding to more than twenty sub-categories. This can be particularly cumbersome as most humans' inability to remember long lists makes them forget the first items by the time they reach the seventh or eighth option. In general, the number of list items that a person can remember and juggle is "seven, plus or minus two" (Grant, 2018). This problem can be solved by breaking subcategories into sections. For example, "Jeans", "Pants", "Shorts", and "Skirts" can all be put in a single section of "Bottoms".

B. Forms

The forms in Zara's mobile application, for example the sign up form, have several issues. First of all, they do not indicate which fields are required, and only warn the user about them after submission. This is a problem as people often use required field indicators to assess the trustworthiness and the effort used to fill out the form. This problem can be solved by adding asterisks next to the required fields, as it is what most web forms use to indicate required fields, and therefore what most users use to distinguish them.

Another problem with Zara's mobile application forms is the lack of labels. Eye tracking heat maps show that when faced with a form, users mostly focus on fields and labels and barely take a look at the rest of the form. This indicates that labels play an important role in the usability of the form (Jarrett et al., 2009).

C. Navigation

The ease of navigation on a website or a mobile application is one of the key aspects of judging usability. Navigation, presentation and ease of use are directly related to users' trust in the application (Belanger et al., 2002). Although Zara is one of the largest and

most well-known retailers, the app's navigation may prevent the users from returning for future purchases. Zara's mobile application also follows the Zara website's "Lookbook" aesthetic, sacrificing navigational functionality for minimalism to give the feeling of flicking through a physical magazine. However, this leads to an increase in the number of steps taken to perform tasks and a decrease in convenience and customer retention (Seiders et al., 2007).

Some of the important buttons in Zara's mobile application are put in unconventional, unrelated places. One example is the "Help" button, which is at the bottom of the Profile page, with no indication for the user to scroll to the bottom. Another example is the "Settings" button, which is initially hidden and only accessible by swiping right on the Navigation bar at the top of the Profile page. This is especially confusing since other navigation bars are not scrollable (Figure 1). A possible solution would be to move these buttons to the Menu category, which as a result of being more conventional, will make them more accessible to the users.

D. Carousel Interfaces

Zara's mobile application's landing page has several carousel interfaces, all with several issues. First of all, the carousel indicators are almost invisible – just a small arrow on the right side of highly-crowded images.

The other problem is that the carousels' items do not relate to each other – they range from images to videos to to other tabs in just one carousel. This goes against the recommended best practices for carousels, which state that the items in carousels should be highly related so that users can predict what type of content they will see next if they interact with them (Badiu, 2018).

Another problem with using carousels is that they are hard to work with — a 2020 study on usability of carousel interfaces found non-carousel interfaces to be more usable and accessible than those with them. It also demonstrated that users with no prior experience with carousels often find it quite complicated to understand and navigate (Keya, 2020). Therefore, changing the carousel interface for a more accessible interface is recommended.

E. Buttons

There are several issues with the buttons used in Zara's mobile application. Firstly, they do not look like buttons, and their only difference with normal text is that they are written in all uppercase letters, possibly making it hard for some users to distinguish them as buttons. Based on Nielsen's second heuristic, a good design matches real-world conventions: buttons in real life are designed in a way that shows they can be pushed (Grant, 2018). To solve this problem, the buttons should have visual cues to show they can be pushed, like borders or box shadows.

Another problem with the application's buttons is their size. The minimum recommended size for a button on screen is 44x44 CSS pixels (Understanding Success Criterion 2.5.5: Target Size, n.d.), and many buttons in Zara's mobile application, for example the ones at the bottom of the main page, are smaller than the recommended size (WebAim, n.d.). This problem can be solved by increasing the size of the buttons.

Part 3: Benchmarking

A. Menu Categories

Our proposal for more precise menu categories could be represented using Urban Outfitters' website navigation as an example. When looking at their women's category, there are 15 subcategories opposed to the over twenty subcategories present in Zara's women's category (Figure 2). Similar to Urban's categories, our solution includes grouping subcategories, such as skirts, shorts, pants, and jeans together as "bottoms". A moderately large number of subcategories, similar to Urban Outfitters' design, is more effective in encouraging purchases opposed to an extremely large number, like Zara's design (Chang, 2011).

B. Forms

Regarding Zara's mobile app, it's important for the forms, such as Zara's sign-up page, to be very easy for the user to navigate. Knowing that users opt for minimal effort (Pernice, 2015), if we want them to create an account, it should be made as convenient as possible. A good example of how we propose to improve Zara's forms is shown on Figure 3. Here, the required field for the user's email is clearly indicated with an asterisk, and as shown in Figure 4, the box turns red to indicate that the required field has yet to be filled if the user attempts to move forward. With this solution, users may be more encouraged to create an account since the process is more clearly defined.

C. Navigation

While Zara's navigation is infamously difficult, our proposed solution may be quite simple. The most bothersome quirk of Zara's navigation seems to be their placement of buttons. Many important features, such as the help button, are seemingly invisible to the user, resulting in a frustrating shopping experience. An example of an improved navigation for important features would be Oak + Fort's website (Figure 5). The top right corner of the page contains all important features such as the shopping cart, profile, search, and image search easily accessible to the user. Additionally, the website provides the user with a very clear help button, with the large black button contrasting the plain white background.

D. Carousel Interfaces

Zara's carousel interfaces are a big point of contention since they take up the entire homepage, and confuse new users. Carousel interfaces are a difficult UI element, so if there must be one present on a page, it is recommended to ensure that there is a limited number of content displayed, and that swiping through the content on the carousel is enabled (Budiu, 2018). Zara's app completely disregards this, since not only the swipe is unresponsive, but there is also a large number of content opposed to the recommended amount of 3-4. The site allows you to swipe horizontally 4 times, with the option to swipe vertically 5 times for each of the 4 options, which results in 20 total images on the carousel.

Our solution proposes an entirely different interface to replace the carousel, which will be much more accessible to the user. An example of a similar yet improved interface would be Aritzia's website (Figure 6). The Aritzia homepage includes two main pieces of media beside each other, one being a video and the other being an image. These elements stay in place, yet the page is still dynamic due to the video. The images are also interactive with text, which is likely to provide users with a better shopping experience.

E. Buttons

Zara's buttons are not only confusing to the user, but also barely visible or distinguishable as buttons. This might turn away users due to the strain of trying to read the text, as well as the confusion as to how to navigate the app since the button lacks any sort of design that distinguishes itself as a button (Grant, n.d.). Our solution is to simply make the buttons more visible to the user. Considering Zara's minimalist design, we will opt for making the text larger and bolder rather than surrounding the text with a box to represent it as an option. A good example of this would be the text buttons on H&M's website. While Zara uses a font similar to Microsoft's Daytona Condensed Light, H&M uses a font similar to Microsoft's Mangal Pro. As shown in Figure 7, the text under the product image is clear, bold, and large enough for the user to read. Due to the text being bold, it is easier for the user to distinguish it as a button. Additionally, there are multiple rows of text which help make it visible as a whole. By implementing these

improvements, Zara's website should be much more intuitive for users to browse through.

References

Belanger, France & Hiller, Janine & Smith, Wanda. (2002). Trustworthiness in Electronic Commerce: The Role of Privacy, Security, and Site Attributes. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, *11*(3-4), 245-270. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0963-8687(02)00018-5

Budiu, R. (2018, August 19). *Carousels on mobile devices*. NNGroup. Retrieved February 16, 2022, from https://www.nngroup.com/articles/mobile-carousels/

Calisir, F., Elvan Bayraktaro lu, A., Altin Gumussoy, C., Iker Topcu, Y., & Mutlu, T. (2010). The relative importance of usability and functionality factors for online auction and shopping web sites. *Online Information Review, 34*(3), 420-439. https://doi.org/10.1108/14684521011037025

Chang, C. (2011, May 8). The effect of the number of product subcategories on perceived variety and shopping experience in an online store. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 25*(3), 159-168. Retrieved February 16, 2022, from https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1094996811000302

Danziger, P. N. (2018, April 23). Why Zara Succeeds: It Focuses On Pulling People In, Not Pushing Product Out. *Forbes*. Retrieved February 18, 2022, from https://www.forbes.com/sites/pamdanziger/2018/04/23/zaras-difference-pull-people-in-not-push-product-out/?sh=31ed8cd523cb.

Grant, W. (2018). *101 Ux principles: A definitive design guide*. *O'Reilly*. Packt Publishing. https://learning.oreilly.com/library/view/101-ux-principles/9781788837361/

Jarrett, C., Gaffney, G., & Krug, S. (2009). Taking Care of the Details. In *Forms that work: Designing web forms for usability*. Morgan Kaufmann. https://learning.oreilly.com/library/view/forms-that-work/9780080948485/

Keya, R. T. (2020). *Universal Design and Usability Investigation into Carousel Interaction*. Oslo Metropolitan University. https://oda.oslomet.no/oda-xmlui/bitstream/handle/10642/9250/keya_mauu2020.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y

Pernice, K. (2015, October 4). Device inertia and momentum behavior make users seem lazy. NNGroup. Retrieved February 17, 2022, from https://www.nngroup.com/articles/lazy-users/

Seiders, K., Voss, G. B., Godfrey, A. L., & Grewal, D. (2007). SERVCON: Development and validation of a multidimensional service convenience scale. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 35*(1), 144–156. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-006-0001-5

Stone, D. L., Jarrett, C., Woodroffe, M., & Minocha, S. (2005). *User interface design and evaluation*. Morgan Kaufmann.

Travis, D. (2017). E-Commerce Usability: Tools and Techniques to Perfect the On-Line Experience. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis.

Understanding Success Criterion 2.5.5: Target Size. W3C. (n.d.). Retrieved January 25, 2022, from https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Understanding/target-size.html

WebAIM. (n.d.). Web accessibility evaluation tool. https://wave.webaim.org/report#/zara.com/ca

Appendix

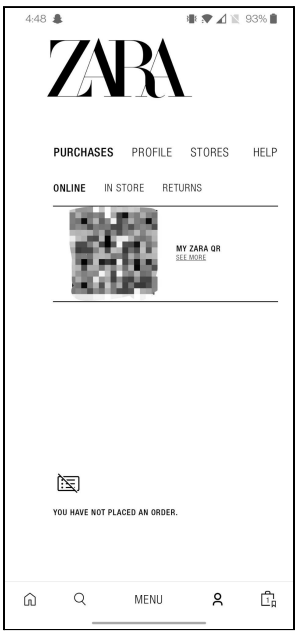

Figure 1: ZARA's Profile Menu. No indication of the "Settings" Menu being present.

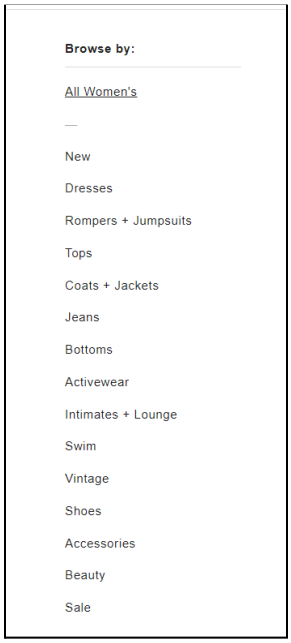

Figure 2: Urban Outfitters' subcategories for the Women's category.

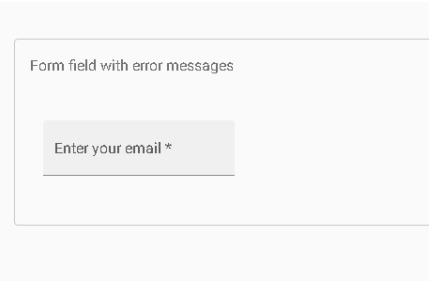

Figure 3: Required field indicated with an asterisk. Screenshot from Angular Material.

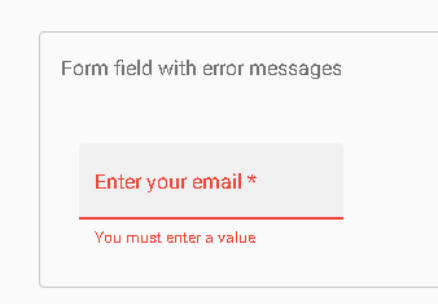

Figure 4: Required field left incomplete, indicated by red box and text. Screenshot from Angular Material.

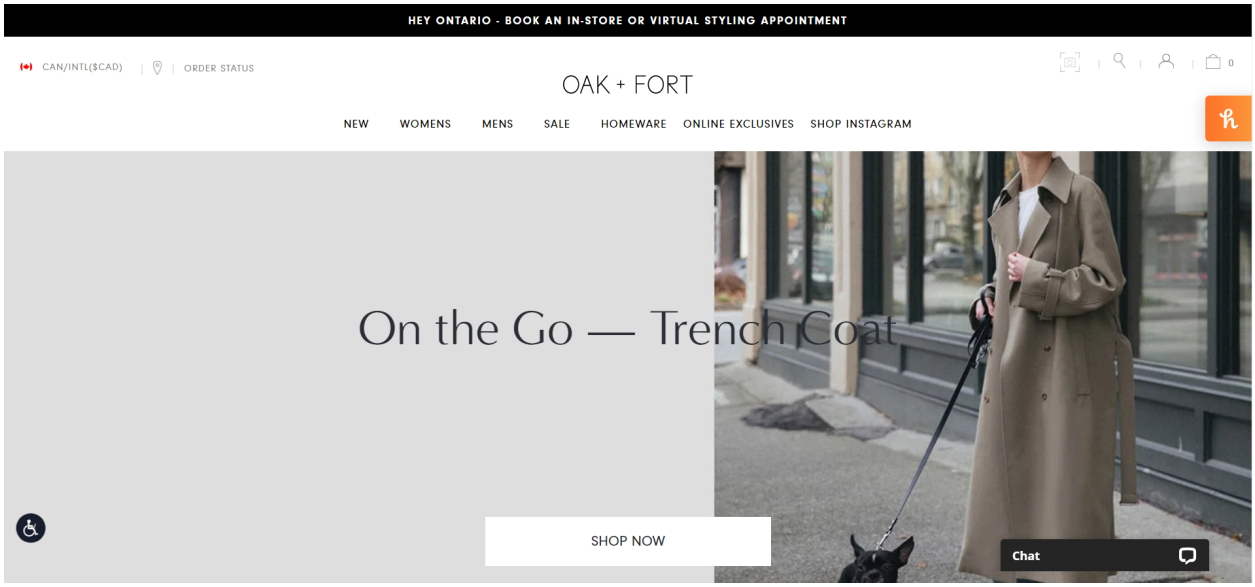

Figure 5: Oak + Fort's homepage.

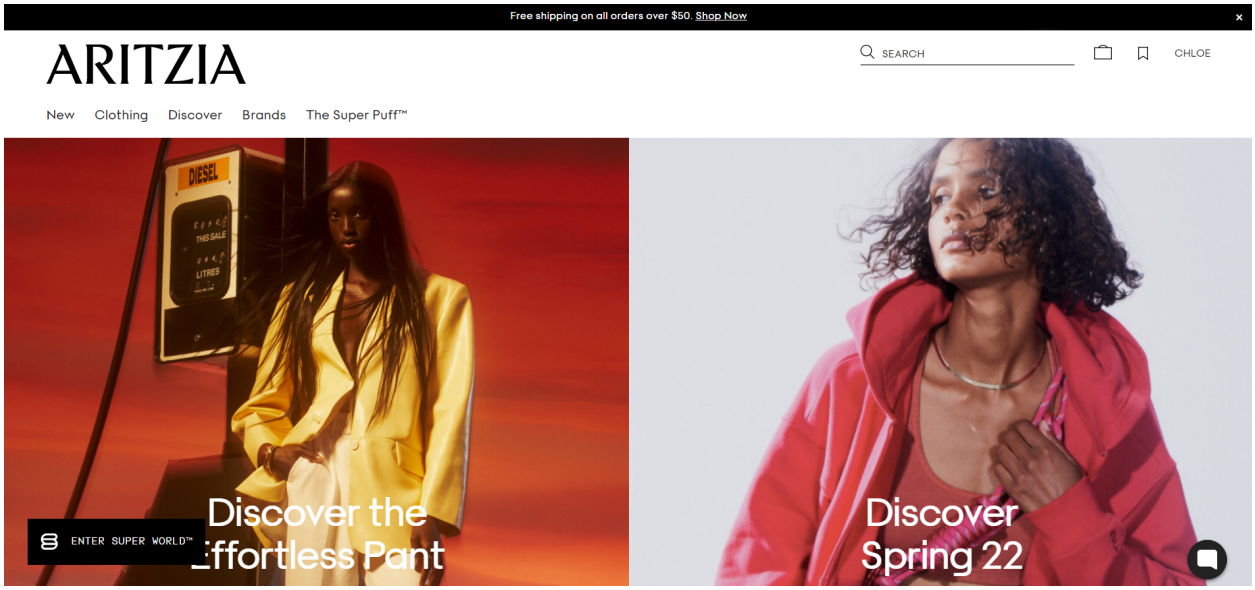

Figure 6: Aritzia's homepage.

Figure 7: H&M product image with bolded title as button.