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Introduction

The last 12 months will be remembered as a period when global events and the COVID outbreak combined to "pack a decade of e-commerce growth into a single year." Shelter in place orders swept across regions, forced a sea change in shopping behavior as record numbers of consumers leaned into mobile and apps to do daily shopping, hunt bargains, and collect digital coupons.

The outcome was a "shopping boom," according to app market intelligence provider App Annie. It observed that time spent in shopping apps in 2020 grew 45% across the majority of markets. The global impact on mobile commerce was profound. In the U.S. alone—where mobile commerce has more than doubled since 2015—numbers hit a new high. Research firm Insider Intelligence reckons mobile commerce in the U.S. hit $284 billion in 2020, accounting for 45% of total revenues.

To equip marketers to make data-informed decisions and deliver compelling campaigns, Liftoff partners with App Annie and poq, a cloud native mobile app provider, to analyze engagement trends and metrics. The 2021 Mobile Shopping Apps Report breaks down Shopping app data by platform, region and season to tell the story of a special year for e-commerce.
Report Highlights

Cost Metrics

Across the year, CPIs averaged $2.67, with the highest point reached in August 2020 ($4.21). Cost per Acquisition - Purchase averaged $17.85. The mean ITA was close to 15% but increased to 19.9% in May 2021.

Basket Size

Basket sizes increased as users depended on mobile apps for their daily shopping. poq reports that basket sizes hit an average spend of $78, rising 22% within a year.

Shopping App Sessions

By May 2021, app usage among Android shoppers averaged two billion hours per week. The Americas experienced the largest increase in time spent, followed by APAC and EMEA who tied for second place.

In-App Time Spent

Time spent in shopping apps grew 48% year-over-year in Q1 2021. Indonesia experienced an 87% rise in use, the largest of any country.
The Shopping App Landscape

Mobile app usage has increased thanks to the pandemic, but will present trends continue?
Worldwide time spent in shopping apps grew 49% year-over-year in Q1 2021.
By May 2021, app usage among Android shoppers averaged two billion hours per week, up 51% from pre-pandemic levels.

- The momentum of m-commerce, driven in part by COVID-19, increased in pace as mobile-first shopping habits replaced in-store.

- Across the board, shopping app use was up. But trends in time-spent-per-week highlighted the distinct differences posed by inevitable shopping app seasonality in each region.

- User hours peaked during regional holidays: 2020’s Singles Day and Black Friday/Cyber Monday saw massive jumps in use on their respective days.

Use market estimates to understand which trends and features drive user interest and high engagement rates on mobile.
Mix of dominant and local players using key regions to expand their global reach.

Digital-first players dominate the charts, occupying 13 of the top 20 ranks for breakout shopping apps by growth in aggregate downloads. Grocery, peer-to-peer, and marketplace apps continue to grow. Gen Z are significantly influencing growth, with particular concentration on apparel and footwear shopping apps.

India drove downloads for “Fashion Shopping” apps like AJIO and Nykaa Fashion. SHEIN made its way to the Americas, where the US and Brazil drove nearly ⅓ of total apps downloads over the last 12 months.

Vinted and LIDL Plus saw strong growth throughout Europe. Shopee, Alibaba.com, IKEA, PatPat and SaraMart also ranked among the top breakout apps with a large global footprint acquired in the last year.

Monitor breakout apps to know which apps are gaining traction with users and could infringe on your market.
User Acquisition Trends

The pandemic offered a once-in-a-generation opportunity to convert new audiences.
At $17.85, the cost per acquisition (CPA) didn’t break the bank. Conversion rates hovered at nearly 15%, showing that ads continue to reach users and resonate.
Seasonality and sales were the force behind falling cost-per-install (CPI) rates. But captive audiences under regional lockdowns helped push prices down further.
Uncertainty led to price volatility, but by October 2020, ITAs consistently increased as users turned to shopping apps.
Android edges out iOS in both cost and conversion performance. The platform offers marketers 2x lower rates to acquire shoppers willing to spend.

- **CPI:** At $2.13, Android users offer better value (saving $1.72 per install) versus iOS with a CPI of $3.85.

- **CPA:** Acquiring a user who makes a purchase on iOS ($33.99) is almost 2x more expensive than on Android ($12.88).

- **ITA:** Android apps convert better, with an install-to-action (ITA) rate of 16.5%—a massive 5.2 percentage points above iOS (11.3%).
LATAM wins where it counts with low-cost installs and outstanding performance. APAC follows second, offering marketers high engagement for an affordable price.

Shopping App Cost Metrics by Region
User onboarding is very important. With only an online interface, it is difficult for shopping apps to communicate with users to build trust. To compensate, cultivate and retain your users by promoting offline user onboarding measures to improve user acquisition.

Shota Onishi
Acquisition Marketing
Formerly mercari

Click the button for more:
Ad Creative Trends

Video rises as the must-use format of 2021.
The creative mix suggests marketers use their mainstays to grab user attention. Banners (76%) make up the majority of creative impressions, while expensive ad formats are used far less.
Marketers pivoted to video, taking advantage of bigger audiences glued to popular video-based apps. Banners also experienced a rise in the run-up to the holidays, peaking in November.
Ads must focus on walkthroughs, products and price.

### Show thematically-similar product options

Whether in a carousel or showing all products at once, marketers should group together similar products to boost ad conversions. Showing dissimilar products can have the opposite effect, harming your conversion rate.

### Display your discounts

If your popular products are on sale, make sure viewers can’t miss deals by using bold fonts and bright colors to draw attention to what is on offer. Promotions and special offers should be front and center to catch eyeballs and clicks.

### Give users an app walkthrough

A simple app walkthrough sets users expectations of the app. Make sure to show potential users how to navigate the app, add products to cart and make purchases with the ad. Giving users the full experience up front can help convert those still on the fence.
Dynamic creative optimization can be the key to stepping up your ad experience. It's not easy to accomplish, but it can be done by utilizing your product data feed to engineer dynamic creatives for retargeting and user acquisition.

Marian Bucher
Senior App Growth Manager

OTTO
Retaining and Engaging Users

Getting users to “shop ‘til they drop” requires real focus on digital-first experiences.
Digital-first shopping apps drive better engagement as consumers try out new retail experiences.

- Digital-first retail experiences create engagement. The average US user spent over 3 minutes in online-first apps; 1.6x longer than shoppers spent in bricks-and-clicks apps.
- South Korea and Japan appeared to favor apps that focus on their digital experience, with the average user spending almost 35 sessions in online-first apps each month—the most of any country.

Monitoring engagement in your peer group and digital disruptors will be critical to maintaining mobile market share for traditional brick-and-mortar retailers.
Spotlight on SHEIN: Fast-fashion player skyrockets to popularity as markets open back up around the world.

In 2020, time spent in SHEIN on Android phones skyrocketed around the world.

Stage of life as well as income factor into how users shop both digitally and in-person. On mobile, Women’s Fashion apps are growing, and SHEIN is helping to pave the way for other rising stars.

Global Traction (Worldwide, Q2)
- Downloads of SHEIN grew 12% to 40.1 Million in Q2
- Active Users increased 24% to 71.0 Million MAU
- 12% increase in avg. sessions/user and avg. time/user

Primary Audience (SHEIN Users, US)
- 96% of users were female
- 61% of users were 16-24 years old

Understand how growing players are approaching UA and growing among key user segments—does your current audience align with where the market is headed?

SHEIN In-App Ads Are Critical to Overall Mobile Acquisition Strategy

Source: App Annie Intelligence, Creative Gallery
SHEIN targeted advertisements appeal to a key demographic audience segment that is growing within the retail market.
Spotlight on SHEIN: Digital-native player drives strong retention and engagement in the US.

Background
The CN-HQ’d company started in 2014, and in recent months has quickly gained a lead against players like Amazon. As a mobile-native retailer, SHEIN leverages ‘influencer’ style product placements in images and allows for outfit ‘likes’ and fosters shoppers submitting user-generated content to target young females.

Success Metrics
Users of SHEIN spent +215% more time in the app in the last 12 months, totaling about 22.9 monthly million hours in the mobile-first shopping app. By global breakdown, SHEIN saw a +170% YoY increase in Mexico, +490% in the UK, +530% in France and +550% in Canada. In March 2021, over 88% of people who had the SHEIN app installed used the app at least once in the month.

Learning
Incorporating mobile-first gestures is a standout way to slot into existing habits from mobile-first users like Gen Z.

Compare your mobile performance to the market—are you over or underperforming and maximizing your top-line potential as a retailer?
In-app Actions and Activity

poq data reveals basket sizes are growing as users favor feature-rich experiences.
Basket sizes are growing fast: average order value (AOV) increased 22% in a single year.
Convenient and shareable experiences have a significant impact on cultivating loyal user engagement.

- The more interactive features available for users to engage with, the more they frequent the app.
- In-app features such as Stories (25.9 sessions per user) and Wishlists (27.7) lead to better engagement.
- Another popular feature available in poq apps is 'Swipe To Like' (like Tinder, but for product recommendations and discovery). Interaction with this increased engagement by 3%.

To show how gamification can also help increase sessions per user and conversion rates, poq partnered with Gameloft for brands.
Push notifications timing matters. Thursday is the optimal day to make your message heard.

### Push Notification Opens Heatmap

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4 pm until 8 pm tends to be hotspots of push receptivity. Time your messages during these hours for optimum reach.

Data analyzed from over 207 million sessions in retailer shopping apps across the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.
Notes on the Report
Liftoff Methodology

Date range: June 1, 2020–June 01, 2021

- 106 Apps
- 95B Impressions
- 1.1B Clicks
- 14M Installs
- 39M Events
Disclaimer

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Liftoff is a complete mobile app marketing platform that helps companies acquire and retain high-quality app users at scale. We use unbiased ML to find all the best users for your app, creative tech to deliver the most engaging ad experience, and a unique cost per revenue model to optimize for your LTV goals.

Liftoff is proud to be a long-term partner to leading brand advertisers and app publishers since 2012. Headquartered in Redwood City, Liftoff has a global presence with offices in New York, Berlin, London, Paris, Singapore, Seoul, and Tokyo.

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