

A User-Centred Approach to Trust, Sizing Confidence, and Checkout Usability in Fashion E-Commerce

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Abstract - Purpose — This study explores the user needs and experience challenges associated with discovering, evaluating, and purchasing fashion online, focusing on Gen Z and Millennial shoppers. It examines product discovery, sizing and fit confidence, trust, checkout friction, sustainability signalling, and responsive, accessible design. Based on these insights, it proposes a user-centred approach to designing a more trustworthy, editorial, and low-friction fashion e-commerce experience, developed through the design of a live platform, Marzena.

Design/methodology/approach — A user-centred design (UCD) approach structured around the Double-Diamond model was adopted. Secondary research into Gen Z and Millennial fashion behaviour was combined with a competitive audit of leading fashion platforms. The findings informed personas, empathy and journey maps, information architecture, user flows, a component-driven design system, low- to high-fidelity screens, an interactive prototype, and moderated usability testing focused on the checkout flow.

Findings — Users experience friction across product discovery, fit and sizing confidence, trust, and most acutely checkout. They value editorial, content-first discovery, transparent pricing, immersive product media, a short and clear mobile checkout, and credible sustainability cues. Reducing checkout steps and surfacing trust signals emerged as the highest-impact design opportunities.

Practical implications — The study demonstrates how user research and a reusable design system can inform fashion platforms that simplify discovery, comparison, and purchase while remaining consistent, responsive, and accessible.

Originality/value — The study contributes an editorial-first, checkout-focused, user-centred perspective to fashion e-commerce, translating consumer needs into concrete design decisions and positioning trust, sustainability signalling, and responsive accessibility as core considerations.

Keywords — User-Centred Design, Fashion E-Commerce, Checkout Usability, Design Systems, Gen Z Consumers

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of digital technologies has fundamentally reshaped how people discover, evaluate, and purchase clothing. What was once an in-store, tactile experience is increasingly mediated by screens, where shoppers browse catalogues, compare products, read reviews, and complete payment without ever handling the garment. For younger consumers in particular, online channels have become the default: reported estimates place the share of Gen Z shopping that occurs online at around

80% (Statista, cited in Porch Group Media, 2025). This shift has raised the stakes for the digital experience — the interface is now the store, the fitting room, and the checkout counter combined.

Fashion, however, is a uniquely experiential and identity-driven category. Consumers do not simply buy a product; they buy a look, a mood, and a sense of belonging. A platform that presents clothing as a flat grid of thumbnails fails to communicate the story, craft, and aesthetic that drive fashion purchase decisions. At the same time, the practical mechanics of online apparel retail — uncertainty about fit and sizing, unclear pricing, concerns about return policies, and long or confusing checkout flows — introduce friction that can undermine even the most visually compelling experience.

These frictions are measurable. Across the industry, roughly seven in ten shopping carts are abandoned before purchase, with the global average cart abandonment rate documented at 70.22% (Baymard Institute, 2025). A substantial share of this loss is avoidable and traceable to checkout usability: unexpected extra costs, forced account creation, and checkout flows that are simply too long or too complicated (Baymard Institute, 2024). Fashion, notably, shows some of the highest abandonment rates of any vertical. This positions the user experience — and the checkout in particular — not as a cosmetic concern but as a decisive factor in whether a fashion platform succeeds.

Trust and values add a further dimension. Younger shoppers increasingly weigh a brand's sustainability and authenticity alongside price and style, yet they are also sceptical of unsubstantiated claims. While a majority of Gen Z shoppers report preferring, and being willing to pay more for, sustainable brands (First Insight, 2023), a large proportion distrust the sustainability messaging that brands present (The Conversation, 2026). For a fashion platform, this means trust cannot be asserted; it must be designed — through transparency, credible cues, clear information, and a coherent brand voice.

This study addresses these challenges through the design of Marzena, a responsive fashion e-commerce platform created during a nine-week UI/UX design internship at Veins Studio. Rather than treating the platform as a purely technical catalogue, the study considers the complete experience surrounding fashion discovery, evaluation, comparison, purchase, and post-purchase confidence. Drawing on secondary research, a competitive audit, and iterative usability testing, it examines how a user-centred design approach — supported by a reusable design system — can make a fashion platform more trustworthy, editorial, usable, and responsive to the expectations of Gen Z and Millennial shoppers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Growth of Digital Retail and Fashion E-Commerce

The adoption of online retail has accelerated over the past decade, and the COVID-19 pandemic further entrenched digital channels as a primary mode of shopping. Millennials and Gen Z, in particular, shifted rapidly toward online purchasing, home delivery, and cashless payment during this period (Blazquez-Resino et al., 2024). For fashion specifically, this transition created both opportunity and complexity: platforms could reach shoppers anywhere, but had to compensate for the loss of the physical, tactile evaluation that apparel purchasing traditionally relies on. The result is a category in which the digital experience must work harder — to convey fit, texture, drape, and styling context that a screen cannot naturally reproduce.

2.2 Gen Z and Millennial Fashion Shopping Behaviour

Gen Z and Millennial consumers are digital-natives who discover products through social media, value authenticity, and expect fast, mobile-first experiences. Studies note that these cohorts research and discover fashion through social and editorial content before purchasing, and that their expectations of speed, personalisation, and brand values are higher than those of previous generations (Manley et al., 2023). Their behaviour is also marked by an attitude-behaviour gap: strong stated preferences for sustainability co-exist with continued fast-fashion consumption, in part because trustworthy information is hard to find at the point of decision (The Conversation, 2026). For platform design, this implies a need to support content-led discovery, surface credible information efficiently, and remove friction so that intent converts into purchase.

2.3 User Experience and Checkout Usability in E-Commerce

The effectiveness of an e-commerce platform depends not only on its catalogue but on how easily users can move through discovery, comparison, and purchase. Checkout is the most consequential and most studied of these stages. Baymard Institute's large-scale research documents a global cart abandonment rate of 70.22% and estimates that resolving checkout-usability issues alone could raise conversion on the average large site by 35.26% — equivalent to roughly US\$260 billion in recoverable orders across the US and EU (Baymard Institute, 2025). The leading fixable reasons for abandonment include unexpected extra costs (cited by 39% of abandoners), mandatory account creation (19%), and a checkout that is too long or too complicated (18%) (Baymard Institute, 2024). These findings establish short, transparent, and low-friction checkout as a primary design objective, and are especially pressing on mobile, which now accounts for over 72% of e-commerce traffic yet converts at a markedly lower rate (Baymard Institute, 2025).

2.4 Trust, Sustainability, and Brand Storytelling

Because online shoppers cannot physically inspect a garment, trust must be constructed through the interface. Verified information, clear sizing guidance, transparent pricing, authentic reviews, immersive product media, and honest return policies all reduce the uncertainty that drives hesitation and abandonment (Baymard Institute, 2024). Sustainability has become part of this trust equation: a majority of Gen Z shoppers

report preferring sustainable brands and a willingness to pay a premium for them (First Insight, 2023), yet scepticism toward sustainability claims is widespread (The Conversation, 2026). This suggests that sustainability and provenance cues carry weight only when they are specific, credible, and integrated into the shopping experience rather than presented as marketing. Editorial, content-first storytelling — imagery, lookbooks, and mood-led product pages — offers a way to communicate both aesthetic and values authentically, selling a mood rather than an isolated item.

2.5 Toward a User-Centred, Design-System Approach

The literature establishes that a successful fashion platform must reconcile competing demands: rich, editorial storytelling with functional clarity; extensive information with an uncluttered interface; and a distinctive brand voice with consistent, accessible, cross-device usability. Delivering this consistently at scale is difficult without a systematic design foundation. A component-driven design system — reusable components, defined interaction states, a type scale, and a responsive grid — supports consistency, accessibility, and faster iteration (W3C, 2023; Google, 2024). A user-centred design approach helps capture the distinct needs of different shopper segments and translate them into these design decisions. The present study addresses this space by exploring the needs and frictions of Gen Z and Millennial fashion shoppers and using those insights, expressed through a reusable design system, to inform a more trustworthy, editorial, and usable home for a fashion brand online.

3. Research Objectives

The major research objectives of this study are:

- To identify the needs, expectations, frictions, and concerns of Gen Z and Millennial consumers while discovering, evaluating, and purchasing fashion through digital platforms.
- To examine how existing fashion e-commerce platforms address — and fall short of — these needs across discovery, product evaluation, trust, and checkout.
- To explore how a user-centred design approach, supported by a reusable design system, can be applied to create a more trustworthy, editorial, low-friction, and responsive fashion e-commerce experience.

4. Design Process

The study followed a user-centred design process, structured around the Double-Diamond model (Discover, Define, Develop, Deliver) and delivered across nine weeks as a sequence of nine stages. The process began with a Discovery and Research stage, in which brand analysis and secondary research into Gen Z and Millennial fashion behaviour were combined with the definition of the target audience, alongside a competitive audit of existing fashion platforms to understand their features and experience gaps.

In the Define stage, research findings were consolidated into personas, journey maps, a core feature list, and an information architecture, clarifying what different shoppers needed and where existing experiences created friction — particularly

around discovery, fit confidence, trust, and checkout. The Develop stage translated these requirements into solutions: low-fidelity wireframes and user flows established structure and navigation; a reusable visual identity and design system defined colour, typography, components, interactive states, and a responsive grid; and these were elevated into high-fidelity screens for the homepage, product listing (PLP), product detail (PDP), cart, and checkout, then adapted mobile-first across tablet and mobile breakpoints.

Finally, the Deliver stage focused on validation and readiness: an interactive prototype with micro-interactions was built and evaluated through moderated usability testing concentrated on the checkout flow; the work was documented as a UX case study; and a clean, annotated developer handoff was prepared for engineering.

Discover	Define	Develop	Deliver
01 Discovery & User Research	02 Information Architecture & Competitor Analysis	03 Low-Fidelity Wireframing & User Flows	07 Prototyping & Usability Testing
		04 Visual Identity & Design System	08 Case Study & Documentation
		05 High-Fidelity UI Design	09 Developer Handoff & Final Presentation
		06 Responsive Adaptation	

Table 1: The user-centred (Double-Diamond) design process, expressed as the nine stages delivered across the internship.

4.1 Competitive Audit

A competitive audit was conducted to understand how existing fashion platforms address the needs of shoppers and to identify opportunities for improving the experience. Five platforms spanning marketplaces, curated retailers, and brand-owned stores were reviewed, considering their primary focus, key strengths, and observed experience gaps. The audit paid particular attention to features relevant to fashion decision-making — product discovery and filtering, product media and sizing guidance, reviews and trust signals, transparent pricing, and the length and clarity of the checkout flow.

Platform	Primary focus	Key strengths	Experience gaps observed
Myntra	Large-scale fashion & lifestyle marketplace	Vast catalogue, powerful filters, size cues, frequent sale events	
AJIO	Curated contemporary & branded fashion	Strong visual merchandising, distinctive collections, trend edits	
ASOS	Global youth-fashion retailer	Rich product media, size assistant, clear and detailed PDPs	
Zara	Brand-owned, editorial fast fashion	Minimal, image-led, strongly editorial aesthetic and brand voice	
Nykaa Fashion	Curated fashion with beauty crossover	Content-led discovery, curated trend edits, aspirational tone	

Table 2: Competitive audit of representative fashion e-commerce platforms.

The audit revealed a recurring trade-off between scale and simplicity. Marketplace platforms offer breadth and features but risk a cluttered, promotion-driven interface, while brand-owned stores achieve an editorial, uncluttered aesthetic at the cost of product information, reviews, and search depth. Adding more features, in other words, does not guarantee a better experience. The key opportunity identified was to combine editorial, content-first discovery with functional clarity — bringing product media, transparent information, trust and sustainability cues, and a short, low-friction checkout together within a single coherent design system, so that the platform supports the complete journey from discovery to confident purchase rather than any one step in isolation.

4.2 Secondary Research and Trend Analysis

Alongside the audit, secondary research into Gen Z and Millennial fashion behavior and current e-commerce and UX trends was synthesized into a set of themes that directly shaped the design. Each theme carried a specific design implication for Marzena:

- **Editorial, content-first discovery.** Large imagery and lookbook-driven pages that sell a mood, not just an item — applied to the homepage and PDP layouts.
- **Fit and sizing confidence.** Clear size guidance and detailed, zoomable product media to reduce the uncertainty that drives hesitation and returns.
- **Low-friction, mobile-first checkout.** Shorter, clearer, transparent flows optimised for thumbs — the primary focus of usability testing.
- **Trust and transparency.** Verified information, honest pricing (no surprise fees), reviews, and clear returns, surfaced where decisions are made.
- **Credible sustainability signalling.** Specific, honest provenance cues rather than generic claims, reflecting demand tempered by scepticism.

- **Micro-interactions and motion.** Subtle feedback and transitions that make the interface feel responsive and premium.
- **Accessibility as a baseline.** WCAG-aligned contrast, touch targets, and readable typography treated as standard rather than an add-on.

5. Design Outcomes

The research insights were translated into a connected set of design artefacts, each building on the last from understanding through to a tested, developer-ready product. The sections that follow present the key outcomes in the order they were produced — user personas, user journey and information architecture, wireframes, the design system, and the high-fidelity, responsive interface.

5.1 User Personas

Primary personas were developed to represent the platform's target audience and their differing priorities, grounding every design decision in real user goals rather than assumption. Two personas anchored the work: a style-conscious Gen Z shopper who prioritises discovery, trend relevance, values, and a fast mobile experience; and a value-oriented Millennial shopper who prioritises quality, fit confidence, transparent pricing, and reliable delivery and returns. Empathy mapping captured what each thinks, feels, sees, and does when shopping for fashion online, foregrounding the recurring frustrations the design needed to resolve.

Aisha Verma — The Trend-Led Discoverer · Gen Z	Meera Nair — The Considered Buyer · Millennial
Age: 24 · Location: Mumbai Occupation: Content creator & final-year student Devices: iPhone (primary), laptop (occasional) Shopping style: Mobile-first, impulse + inspiration	Age: 31 · Location: Bengaluru Occupation: Marketing manager & boutique owner Devices: Laptop (primary), phone Shopping style: Considered, research-led
Goals: Discover trend-led, sustainable pieces quickly. Shop and check out in under a minute on mobile. Save and share looks with friends.	Goals: Understand fabric, fit, and provenance before buying. Curate quality pieces; reorder favourites easily. Trust the brand's sustainability claims.
Frustrations: Cluttered listing pages and weak filters. Unclear sizing and fabric detail. Long, multi-account checkouts.	Frustrations: Poor or few product images. No fabric or care detail. Guest checkout not offered.

"If it takes more than a minute to check out, I'm gone."	"I want to know the story and the fabric before I buy."
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Table 3: The two primary personas that anchored Marzena's design decisions.

5.2 User Journey & Information Architecture

Journey maps traced the shopper's path from initial inspiration and discovery, through product evaluation and comparison, to cart, checkout, and post-purchase, identifying the emotional highs and the drop-off points along the way. These maps confirmed that the sharpest friction clustered around evaluation (fit and trust) and checkout. The findings were then organised into an information architecture and sitemap — validated through digital card-sorting — that structures the platform around four primary destinations (Shop, Cart, Contact us, About us) and keeps the path to purchase short. The user-flow diagram maps the same structure as a set of decisions and steps, marking where a choice (such as selecting a size or applying a coupon) gates progress toward a confirmed order.

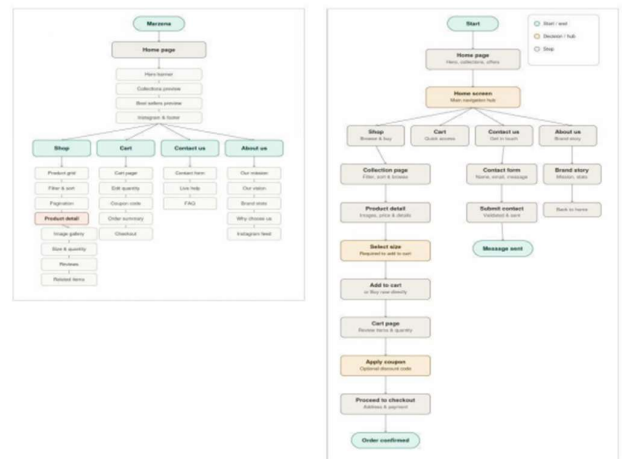


Figure 1: User Journey and Information Architecture

5.3 Low-Fidelity Wireframes and User Flows



Figure 2: Low-fidelity wireframes for the homepage, cart/checkout, and about pages.

Structure was explored first through paper sketches and then low-fidelity digital wireframes for the homepage, PLP, and PDP, establishing clear hero sections, new-arrival placement, filtering and sorting patterns, and high visibility for sizing guidance and primary calls-to-action. A streamlined, multi-step checkout user flow was drafted with the explicit goal of minimising steps and eliminating the friction points identified in the research. The wireframes were reviewed with the design team, and their structural feedback was incorporated before any visual design began — keeping expensive, high-fidelity work anchored to a validated structure.

5.4 Visual Identity and Design System

The brand identity for Marzena — a soft, romantic, “quiet-luxury” aesthetic pairing a considered palette with editorial fashion photography — was expressed through a reusable design system. This included a coherent colour palette and a scalable type ramp built on Playfair Display headings over a clean sans-serif body, a library of reusable components (buttons, input fields, navigation, product cards), fully mapped interactive states (hover, active, disabled), and a twelve-column responsive grid with defined spacing rules. Building the interface on this system ensured visual consistency, supported accessibility, and enabled faster iteration and a cleaner developer handoff.

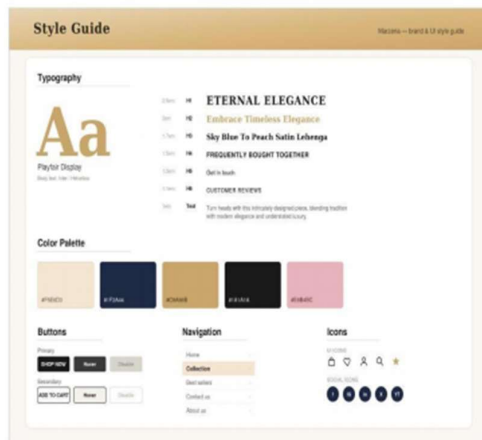


Figure 3: The Marzena style guide — typography scale, colour palette, button and navigation states, and iconography.

5.5 High-Fidelity Screens and Responsive Adaptation

The design system was applied to produce polished, high-fidelity screens for the homepage, PLP, PDP, cart, and checkout, integrating editorial photography, a clear typographic hierarchy, and readable product information. The finalized desktop designs were then adapted mobile-first: the main navigation was simplified into a mobile-friendly menu, product grids and image scaling were optimized for smaller screens, touch targets were sized to meet usability guidelines, and intermediate tablet breakpoints ensured a seamless transition across devices.

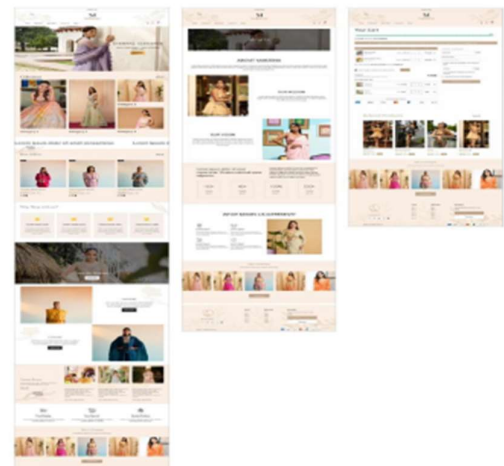


Figure 4: High-fidelity screens for the Marzena storefront — homepage, about, and cart.

5.6 Interactive Prototype

The high-fidelity screens were linked into an interactive, clickable prototype demonstrating the core user flows, enriched with micro-interactions such as hover effects on product cards and transition animations. The prototype served both as a communication artefact and as the basis for usability evaluation.

6. Usability Testing and Findings

A usability testing script was prepared to evaluate the intuitiveness of navigation and, above all, the checkout flow. Moderated usability testing sessions were then conducted, observing how target users interacted with the Marzena prototype as they completed representative tasks from discovery to purchase. Analysis of the sessions confirmed the priorities established in the research. Participants moved comfortably through editorial discovery and product evaluation, but the checkout process remained the point of greatest friction — mirroring the industry pattern in which checkout usability, rather than product interest, most often determines whether a purchase completes (Baymard Institute, 2024). Observed hesitation concentrated around form length, clarity of cost, and confidence at the point of payment.

Based directly on these observations, final UI adjustments and prototype refinements were made: the checkout was shortened and clarified, costs were made transparent earlier in the flow, and trust signals were strengthened at the moment of payment. This evidence-led iteration illustrates the core value of the user-centered approach — decisions were validated against real user behavior rather than assumption.

7. Discussion

The study reinforces that, in fashion e-commerce, experience is not separable from commerce. The competitive audit and secondary research converged on a central tension: shoppers want both an editorial, inspiring experience and a fast, frictionless, trustworthy one, and most existing platforms optimize for one at the expense of the other. Marzena's contribution is to treat these as complementary rather than opposed — using a design system to hold an editorial brand

voice and functional clarity together in a single, consistent interface.

The findings also foreground checkout as the highest-leverage area of fashion UX. With cart abandonment averaging around 70% and a large, avoidable share attributable to checkout friction and cost surprises (Baymard Institute, 2024, 2025), the decision to concentrate usability testing on the checkout flow is well supported: it is the stage where design improvements translate most directly into completed purchases. Equally, the research on sustainability underscores that trust cannot be asserted — with widespread scepticism toward brand sustainability claims (The Conversation, 2026), credible, specific cues integrated into the shopping experience matter more than generic messaging. Finally, treating accessibility and responsive behavior as a baseline, rather than a later refinement, aligns the platform with both the mobile-dominant reality of Gen Z shopping and established accessibility guidance (W3C, 2023).

8. Practical Implications

For practitioners designing fashion platforms, the study offers several transferable implications. First, invest in editorial, content-first discovery to communicate mood and values, but pair it with functional clarity so inspiration converts to action. Second, treat the checkout as a first-class design problem: shorten it, make all costs transparent early, avoid forced account creation, and reinforce trust at the point of payment. Third, build on a component-driven design system to keep a growing interface consistent, accessible, and quick to hand off to engineering. Fourth, make sustainability and trust cues specific and credible rather than decorative. Together, these practices help translate user research into a platform that is both distinctive and demonstrably easier to buy from.

9. Limitations and Future Work

This study was conducted within a nine-week internship and carries the corresponding constraints. The research relied primarily on secondary sources and a competitive audit, complemented by moderated usability testing with a small number of participants; broader primary research — larger user interviews and quantitative surveys — would strengthen the evidence base. The design was validated at the prototype stage rather than in a live production environment, so findings on real-world conversion remain to be tested. Future work could include A/B testing of the checkout in production, deeper personalization and AI-assisted discovery, richer immersive product media, and formal accessibility auditing against WCAG success criteria. These directions would extend the user-centered foundation established here as the platform matures.

10. Conclusion

This study set out to understand the needs and frictions of Gen Z and Millennial fashion shoppers and to explore how a user-centered design approach could address them. Through the end-to-end design of Marzena — from research, competitive audit, and personas, through information architecture, wireframes, a reusable design system, and high-fidelity responsive screens, to an interactive prototype and checkout-focused usability testing — the study demonstrates that a fashion platform's success depends on reconciling editorial storytelling with trust and frictionless usability. The work

positions checkout usability, credible trust and sustainability signalling, and responsive accessibility as central rather than peripheral concerns, and shows how a component-driven design system can hold a distinctive brand voice and functional clarity together. In doing so, it contributes a practical, user-centred perspective on how digital fashion experiences can become more trustworthy, inspiring, usable, and responsive to the expectations of the shoppers they serve.

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