

Instagram Shopping Usability Study

HCDE 417 - Group 1

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Executive Summary

Here lies all of the research findings and recommendations in regards to Instagram Shopping

Finding 1: Users care a lot about credibility in the shopping process, and IG Shopping lacked in conveying it. (severity rating score: 4)

Recommendations

1. *Adding a verification process*
2. *Repairing the Information Architecture of the Item Page*

Finding 2: Profit-oriented product details distracted from the shopping experience (severity rating score: 4)

Recommendations:

1. *Emphasize the story behind each seller and product*
2. *Toning down the prominence of buying products.*

Finding 3: There is a lack of personalization and organization in the content displayed on users' feeds (severity score: 3)

Recommendations:

1. *Remove lives from shopping pages as it lacks value propositions of this feature*
2. *Only show options that fit under the keywords searched and filters selected*
3. *Cater options are shown based on the interests of the customer.*

Finding 4: There is a lack of intention for the features of drops and live (severity score: 3)

Recommendations:

1. *Improve the Instagram Shopping feature that has personalized and personal*
2. *Remove the live feature as it lacks value propositions of this feature*

Background & Overview

Study objective

Instagram is a popular social media app for photo and video sharing. It has many different features for exploring posts, stories, reels, etc., and is known for its high user engagement and scrollable content, especially targeting short attention spans [1]. In our study, we investigated Instagram Shopping, a feature on Instagram that allows users to browse through products and brands to buy items directly through the app. Our main goal was to identify the usability issues because we noticed that consumers generally don't seem to use the shopping feature on Instagram (at least among our peers) as its original purpose is to share photos and videos. We chose Instagram Shopping specifically because there hasn't been much research on this feature and its engagement.

Based on our initial analysis, there are many pathways a user can flow in the Shopping feature, where it can feel overwhelming and inconsistent depending on the shopping flows on different items and shops. We aim to learn how users currently interact and think about the feature. From a value proposition perspective, we want to uncover why this feature was initially valuable and provide recommendations to fix the usability issues to make the shopping experience more delightful.

We had four research questions to investigate in this study:

1. Do users understand how to navigate through Instagram Shopping (between multiple pages, returning to home, etc.)?
2. How do users feel about the interface layout and features? Are they helpful in the shopping experience?
 - a. Do users interact with specific features in the shopping experience?
3. How easily can users find an item they want to purchase?
4. What do users think about the product information provided? Are they relevant to helping them to decide on a purchase?

Method

We conducted hour-long usability tests in-person and over Zoom, recording both the participants and their screens. Before beginning each test, we had each participant fill

out a screening to ensure they fit our target demographic and were eligible to participate. Then we had them each fill out a pre-study questionnaire to gain background information about them before starting. At this point, we started recording, read the consent form out loud to them, and asked for verbal consent. We read from a script to ensure consistency among each test. During each test, we asked each participant to complete a series of four key tasks, asking follow-up questions after each task and encouraging them to express their thoughts out loud along each step:

1. Search for a specific product or explore different items on the shopping home page
 - a. Think aloud, talk through what you are doing (record what features the participant interacts with and for approximately how long)
2. Assess and evaluate the item (look at reviews, pictures, and sellers)
 - a. How do you feel about this page? Are there any features that stand out?
 - b. Is there anything frustrating about this interface?
3. Interact with drops and live features
 - a. Think aloud, would you use these features to look at products?
 - b. Tell us about the experience of using drops and live features - on a scale of 1-10 (10 being extremely easy, 1 being extremely frustrating), how would you rate this experience overall?
4. Buy the item
 - a. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being extremely easy, 1 being extremely frustrating), how would you rate this experience overall?

During each test, a notetaker was present to type down observations, commentary made by the participant, and other notes in a note sheet for later reference. After each test, we asked the participant to fill out a post-study questionnaire to understand which parts they found enjoyable, frustrating, and surprising, making sure to thank them for their time and effort.

Participants

Anyone with an Instagram account can access Instagram Shopping as it is available. Because the typical active Instagram user is aged 18-25, we will user test with people who fall under Generation Z [2]. A substantial number of people aged 25-34 also use Instagram, but for a convenient sample, we will test with the people most available to us as college students: those aged 18-25. We anticipate that similar problems would

arise with both categories of people and that, generally, most people comparably use Instagram shopping.

People of these ages do not use Instagram as often as those aged 18-34 and are outside our scope. Our limitations include scheduling for coordinating our group and the participants and room availability.

We tested with seven participants in total, with our first one being our pilot test. We used convenience sampling by asking our friends and peers to be participants in this study because it was cheap, simple, and easy to implement for the scope of this study, but this also has its limitations. Because our sample of participants was not chosen randomly, it is unlikely that our sample fully represents the general population being studied (all Instagram Shopping users). This makes it difficult to generalize our sample to the entire population of Instagram Shopping users.

Findings & Recommendations

What worked well

All the participants completed all the tasks asked of them and navigated all the pages of Instagram Shopping, which was very successful. Half of our participants had never used Instagram Shopping before, and the other half had interacted with it before but had never purchased anything from Instagram Shopping and were unfamiliar with the different parts of Instagram Shopping. This shows how Instagram Shopping is very usable and functional.

We also asked them after each task if they knew what each page was for and if they could explore all the pages, which all of our participants could do. This exemplifies how users felt Instagram Shopping was intuitive and easy to understand. The main functionalities were not hard to operate, even for first-time users.

Finally, we found that Instagram Shopping's user interface flowed very well with Instagram's other pages, making it even easier to navigate because they were already familiar with Instagram's other pages. For example, they carried over the swiping carousel feature to show more pictures for the product images.

Findings for improvement

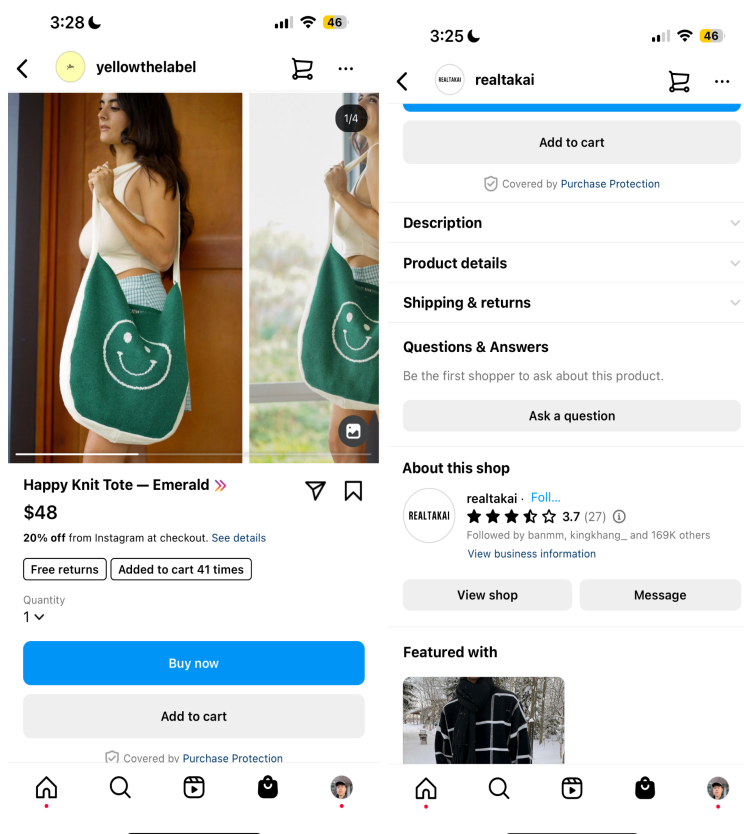
From our study, we have put together four main findings. To rate them, we utilized Jakob Nielsen's Severity Rating Scale from 0-4, 0, meaning that the finding is not a usability problem, and 4 meaning that it is a usability catastrophe.

Finding 1: Users care a lot about credibility in the shopping process, and IG Shopping lacked in conveying it. (severity rating score 4)

We find this finding with a severity rating of 4/5 because 5 out of 7 participants indicated that they feel the items offered and the sellers themselves aren't authentic or trustworthy. Many participants noted that Instagram Shopping reminded them of similar competitors like Pinterest, Etsy, and YesStyle in an insecure and 3rd-party way.

As they scrolled through multiple items, there was no easy visual indication that multiple items were secured and protected from scams and frauds.

In terms of credibility, it is hard to assess whether a particular item from a seller is legitimate once you're on the particular item page. Finding reviews and QA is hard as the shopper will have to click multiple buttons, which leads to multiple pages to find a single review or answer. This creates unnecessary friction as it can demotivate and frustrate the users, potentially leading to them not buying that particular item. Additionally, the shopper can't tell if the seller is verified or not, which means the shopper will have to go to the seller's Instagram page to assess the seller's credibility.



Both of these screenshots conveys the Items Page of a particular item

Here are quotes from our participants:

- “It felt like Pinterest. I didn't know if I could trust it unless I looked at the account. ”
- “Instagram feels like you could get scammed. Maybe some kind of checkmark for verification. Instagram isn't suited for small business.”

- “It feels like they're trying to scam me. I feel like it was quite nice. I saw a lot of things I didn't like”

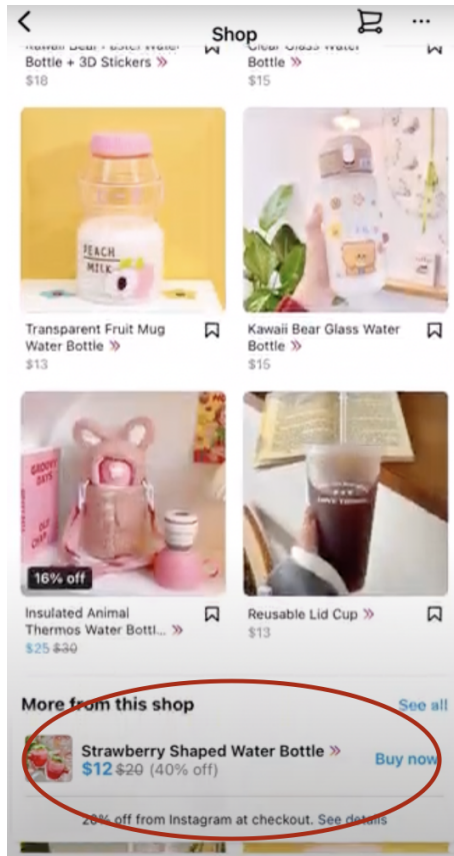
Recommendations

3. *Adding a verification process* - By adding some kind of verification process, it would reduce potential unverified products, and it would strengthen the ethos of Instagram Shopping as shoppers could be enticed by the safeness. A simple checkmark on both the items and sellers could save the shoppers time as they explore and buy an item. Furthermore, this would save the shopper's mental capacity when assessing whether they want to buy an item from the seller.
4. *Repairing the Information Architecture of the Item Page* - When a shopper goes into the item page, many information and pages are hidden, so it would be critical to reevaluate the IA of the item to determine what information is necessary for the shopper to make their decision on purchasing the item. This means they could restructure the layout to ensure seamless storytelling and experience as they read the information on that particular item.

Finding 2: Profit-oriented product details distracted from the shopping experience (severity rating score 4)

5/7 participants noted a lack of authenticity and felt as though they were scrolling through advertisements. We gave this finding a severity rating of 4 because so many of our participants expressed displeasure with how it felt like Instagram Shopping was full of advertisements, and it was a sentiment that persisted throughout all sections of Instagram Shopping. This impact on the overall user experience makes this finding of high priority.

Even from the main Instagram Shopping pages and the individual product pages, there is an emphasis on quickly buying the product or similar products. For example, there is a pop-up to buy the product on the product's own page, bombarding the user with pushes to spend their money. There is a feeling of detachment from Instagram when scrolling through Instagram Shopping pages, resulting in disinterest from users.



This is an example of a pop-up notification that comes in when scrolling down the same product's page, showing just a hint of the amount of other advertisements included in one product's page.

Here are some quotes from participants that exemplify this sentiment:

- "I wanna see my bffs and not a shopping bag. Each link takes you to a new page which felt unnecessary. It seems really easy for kids to buy things."
- "It only tells the bare minimum of the product (pictures of the product and the price)."
- "I don't like how the description doesn't describe the bag, it's more marketing fill."
- "Are these companies sponsored by IG?"

Recommendations:

To strengthen the genuineness of Instagram shopping, we suggest two main changes:

1. *Emphasize the story behind each seller and product.* Instagram, as a whole, cares about telling a story and connecting users with each other. We believe that this attitude should prevail in Instagram Shopping as well. Instagram Shopping has a unique opportunity to highlight people and organizations as real

individuals with an important and interesting narrative to share. One way that this could be strengthened is by putting more emphasis on the seller's story and account by making it so that users can get to the seller's pages with one click instead of having to click twice and navigate through cluttered pages. There could also be another section on the product page describing the seller.

2. *Toning down the prominence of buying products.* While Instagram Shopping's main purpose is to sell products, we suggest that there should be fewer pop-ups and no endless scrolling on product pages not to overwhelm users. Instead, we recommend horizontal scrolling sections and an option to look at more products if the user is interested.

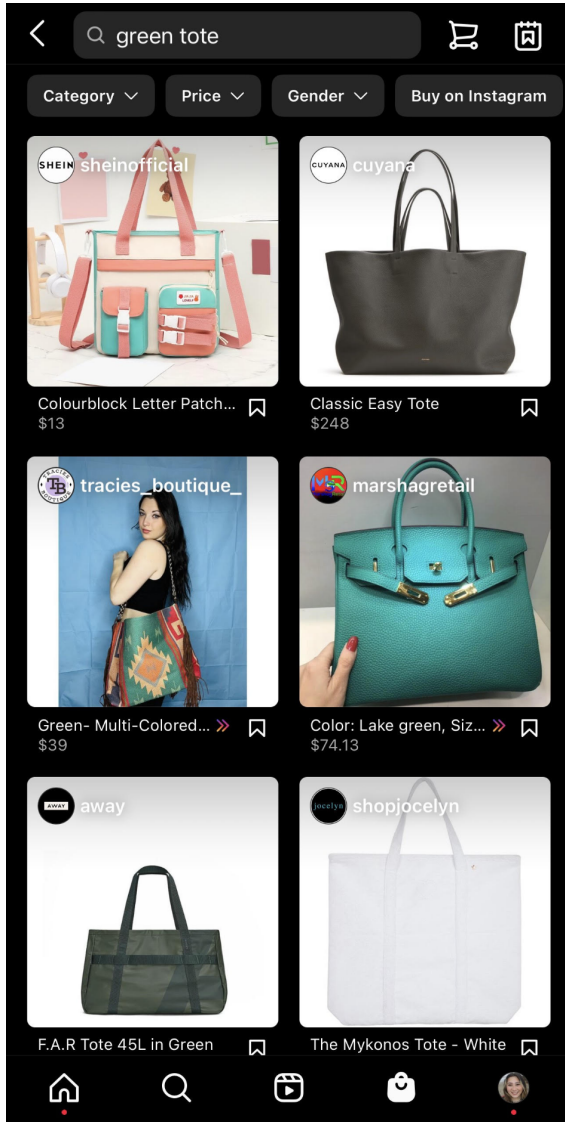
Finding 3: There is a lack of personalization and organization in the content displayed on users' feeds (severity score 3)

We ranked this finding a severity score of 3 because while this does not prevent the participants from completing any key tasks, it causes them to lose interest in the feature entirely.

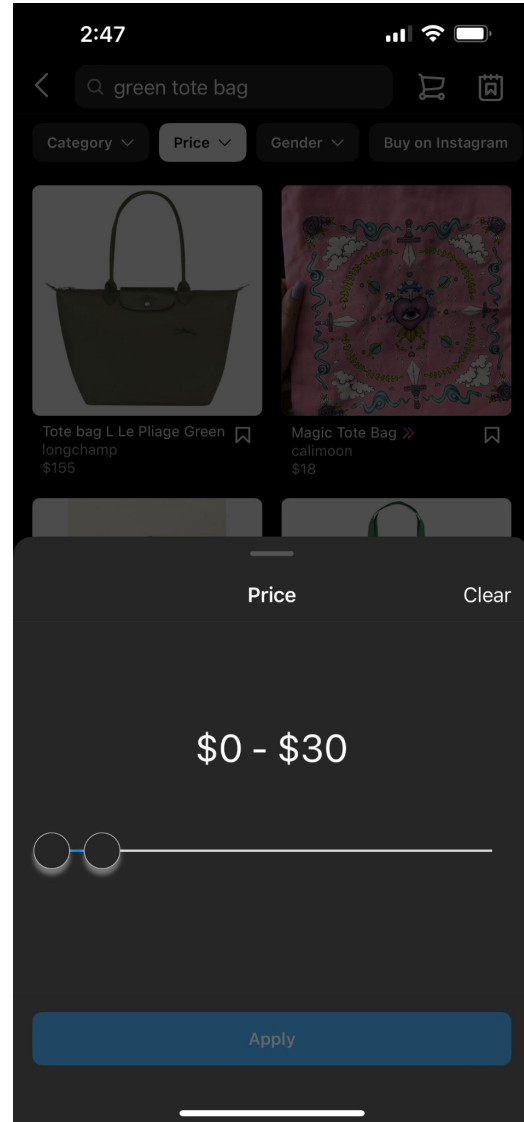
Instagram Shopping severely lacks personalization and organization in the content that it displays to its users. Most of the items shown are not based on recommendations they think the user will like but instead are a random selection of items. Additionally, the search results often do not match the keywords searched, and they continue to display items that do not match the filters applied. Some features seem pointless, such as lives. It would make sense if the lives were people announcing product launches or promoting certain products, but many of these lives were just of people talking, clubbing, riding a scooter, or performing various activities that were unrelated to shopping.

6/7 participants expressed frustration with the search results not matching the keywords typed in, or the filters selected and were dissatisfied with the options shown or lack thereof. When browsing through items, participants explained that the items shown were not interesting to them or items that they would consider purchasing, and when using the "search" function, the items shown did not fit under the keywords typed. For example, when searching for a green tote bag, many participants were surprised that many of the bags shown were not green or a tote bag. Additionally,

when using the “filter” feature, the items shown did not fit under the filters either. For example, when filtering the price to “\$0-\$30,” the page still showed bags that were more expensive than \$30.



Here is an example where when searching for “green tote,” many of the options shown are not green and/or are not totes.



Here is an option where when filtering the options to \$0-\$30, they continue to show options that are outside of the selected price range. (That bag in the top left in the background is \$155.)

Users also expressed confusion about the overall organization and layout of Instagram Shopping. Many were confused why lives were included as part of the shopping

feature on Instagram since most of the lives seemed unrelated to selling products or shopping in general. Although every user could complete all assigned tasks in a reasonable amount of time, they expressed some difficulty finding where to click to find certain features or items.

Here are a few quotes from our participants that support this finding:

- “I don’t know why [live videos] would be on the shopping page. There’s this one selling rocks but even if I wanted to buy it, I don’t know where to go to find it... I’m generally confused.”
- “The increments were not to my liking, and there’s limited options. I looked up ‘green tote bag’ and there were not a lot of green tote bags.”
- “I’m not interested in purchasing anything from drops and it’s not catered to my likes. I feel like the options shown aren’t relevant to me.”

Recommendations:

As a result, we came up with three recommendations to improve this feature:

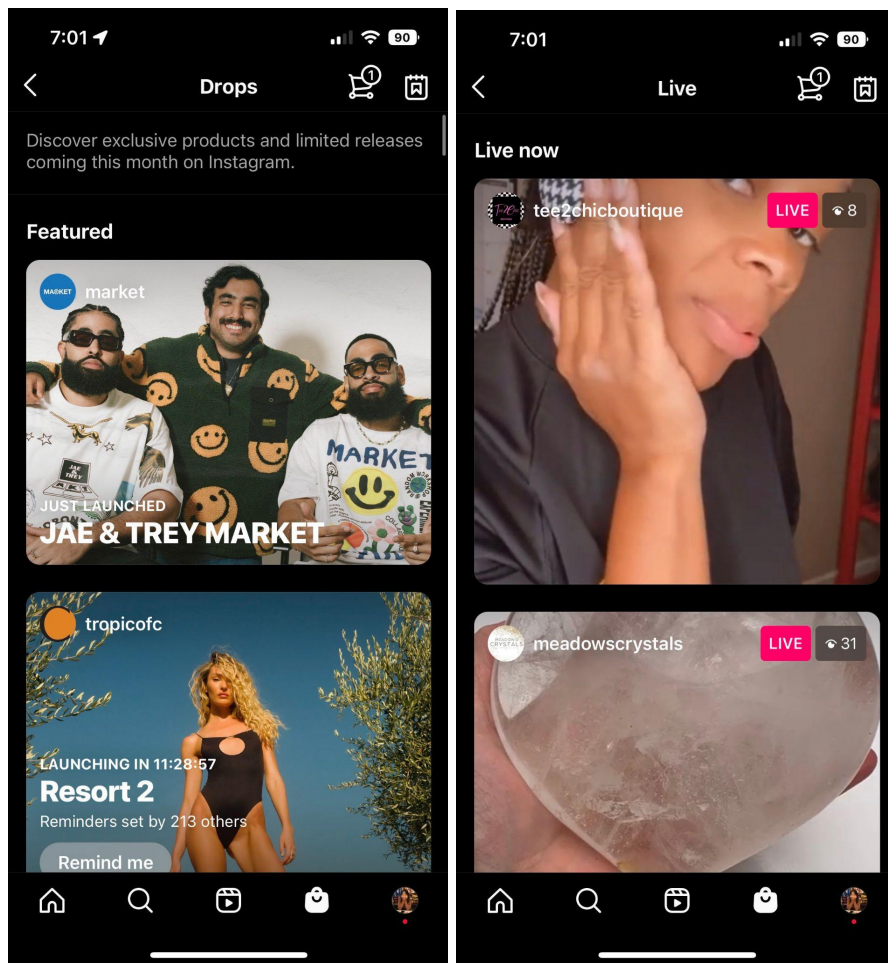
4. Remove lives from shopping pages because they don’t seem to add anything to the shopping experience
5. Only show options that fit under the keywords searched and filters selected
6. Cater options are shown based on the interests of the customer.

Because all of our participants expressed dislike in their lives and they don’t add anything to the shopping experience, we recommend removing this feature from Instagram Shopping entirely. To make the shopping experience more seamless for all customers, we recommend that they only display options that fit under the keywords searched and the filters selected. That way, users can quickly and easily find what they are looking for without searching through hundreds of unrelated products. Lastly, to improve consumer interest in the products being sold, we recommend that Instagram Shopping caters to the options shown based on customer interests. They could easily use data from within their own app to track what types of products receive more engagement from each user (products that are viewed liked, or previously bought by the user), and show them products similar to those in the future.

Finding 4: There is a lack of intention for the features of drops and live (severity score 3)

6/7 participants expressed disinterest in using drops and/or live in their regular shopping routine. Most expressed confusion as to what the point of the features is. We gave it a severity score of 3 (adjusted from 4) because it is a major usability issue and should be given high priority to fix, even if it did not hinder the basic functionality of Instagram Shopping.

For background, drops is a page with announcements for exclusive products and countdowns for product releases. Live is a page intended for sellers but can be used by anyone, where users can go live and promote their product or just talk to viewers.



Left image shows drops. Right image shows Live (notice engagement numbers). There are several issues to both of these pages, one being that both are visually hidden away in the shopping tab and do not draw attention or engagement, given the small button and real estate it takes up. Live had no description of its purpose and also displayed content that was not curated for the user. Many live videos were overly long, irrelevant, and had a low engagement. Drops were similarly uncurated towards users,

showing products that did not interest them. Infinite scroll seemingly led to fatigue and frustration in the participants.

Quotes that support this finding:

- “I don't find a reason to use this page, and I feel like it's just there but I wouldn't click on it”
- “There's just random accounts as well. I'll click on one - it's a live video, but it's 50 minutes, I don't know why this would be on the shopping page”
- “Not into it, I'd rather see my friends live than the products”

Recommendations:

Based on our participant findings, at least 3 showed some interest in the feature, though under different conditions (for example, one participant mentioned they would potentially use it only if they already follow the account). Therefore, we would recommend keeping the feature on Instagram (and removing the page), though one major change is to keep it more personalized (through algorithms) and focus on keeping drops as a feature for sellers within their posts or stories so that it reaches their followers directly.

As for the Live feature, we argue to remove this page entirely because none of the participants were interested in using it in their shopping experience. Currently, it only clutters the interface, is not personalized, and has little potential for engagement. Because live is still a monetary source and feature on Instagram, we recommend keeping it on the explore page as content for users to watch in their browsing experience.

Next steps

Overall, we would say that our usability study was successful and our tests ran smoothly. We got more participants than we anticipated and got a lot of helpful feedback from them where we could easily identify insights. Participants were able to understand our instructions, and testing was straightforward.

However, something that we would definitely improve on is clarifying our Likert scale questions. We asked our participants “On a scale of 1-10 (10 being extremely easy, 1 being extremely frustrating), how would you rate this experience overall? Why?” after each task, we found that participants were interpreting this question in different ways. Some of our participants were giving us a rating with how much they enjoyed the experience while others answered how difficult it was to complete the task. This made it so that we couldn’t properly use the Likert scale ratings in our analysis, although the discussion about their answer was informative and was used in our analysis. If we were to carry on this study, we would ask multiple Likert scale questions that better target the fields we are interested in.

Additionally, if we were to have more time and resources to move forward with our study, we would have liked to interview a wider variety of participants. Because of the time and our personal connections for this study, all of our participants were very similar in demographics. Even though these participants do fall under the age range of the population who uses Instagram often, it would be interesting and more comprehensive to test with a broader population. With more resources and incentives to offer, this could lead to a longer interview time that could be beneficial to our research.

We would also be interested in analyzing the main competitors to Instagram Shopping and seeing how Instagram Shopping compares. This could shed light on what Instagram Shopping could do better, along with identifying unique strengths that could be enhanced.

Appendix

Full research data, tasks and scenarios used, and other artifacts from the study.

Overview of Study:

Study Details	Description
Study Number	Instagram Shopping Study
Type	One-on-one usability study
Study Dates/Times	November 14-21 from 8am to 5pm
# of Participants	6 participants
Gratuity	N/A
Study Duration	1 hour (Arrive 15 minutes early for orientation and logistics)
Location	Zoom or In Person if applicable
Primary Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All participants must currently use Instagram.• All participants can have little to more experience with using Instagram Shopping• 1 participant = Pilot Tester• 5 customers = Instagram Customers• Range in age between 18 and 25; 50% male/female. Recruit a mixture of people that includes different types of races and ethnicity.• Be personable and communicative over Zoom or In person. Has English Fluency.• Roughly equal number of women and men

Screener: [W Screener - Instagram Shopping.docx](#)

Screener survey: [Google Form](#)

Pre-study questionnaire: [Google Form](#)

Post-study questionnaire: [Google Form](#)

Prompts & Post-task Questions

Task 1: Searching and Finding an Item

It's your friend's birthday! You're hoping to purchase a tote bag for them as a gift. Specifically, you're looking for a green (their favorite color), unisex tote bag. You're also on a budget, so you'll have to purchase something under \$35. Navigate to Instagram Shopping and start your search. Think aloud and talk through what you are doing. *(Stop the participant once they have decided on their tote bag choice)*

Notes taken during task:

- Goal: Can users successfully find a product? (Y/N)
- Notes on what the user is doing during the task (what they click on, thought process, etc.). If there's anything unexplained, ask "I noticed you did X. Talk to me through your thought process."
- Did the user use any filters during their search? (Y/N)
- Did the user successfully find a product that fits the description? (Y/N)

Post-task questions:

- What are your initial impressions of Instagram Shopping?
- Did you use the filters? Why or why not?
- **Likert scale** On a scale of 1-10 (10 being extremely easy, 1 being extremely frustrating), how would you rate this experience overall? Why?

Task 2: Exploring Item Page and Purchasing

Now click into the tote bag you have selected. Explore the page and assess this item. Interact with any of the features you see that might help you decide if you want to buy it (feel free to click on links). When you're ready, show us what you would do to purchase the bag. Think aloud and talk through what you are doing.

Notes taken during task:

- Goal: Can users successfully learn more about the product and purchase it? (Y/N)
- Notes on what the user is doing during the task (what they click on, thought process, etc.). If there's anything unexplained, ask "I noticed you did X. Talk to me through your thought process."
- Did the user successfully purchase the product? (Y/N)

Post-task questions:

- How do you feel about this page?
 - Are there any features that stand out to you?
- Is there anything frustrating about this interface?
- **Likert scale** On a scale of 1-10 (10 being extremely easy, 1 being extremely frustrating), how would you rate this experience overall? Why?

Task 3: Interact with Drops

Please return to the home shopping page and navigate to the drops section. Interact with the elements you see on the screen. Think aloud and talk through what you are doing.

Notes taken during task:

- Goal: Can users successfully interact with it? (Y/N)
- Notes on what the user is doing during the task (what they click on, thought process, etc.). If there's anything unexplained, ask "I noticed you did X. Talk to me through your thought process."
- Did the user successfully locate drops? (Y/N)

Post-task questions:

- What do you think this page is for?
 - Are there any features that stand out to you?
- Would you personally use drops while shopping?
- Is there anything frustrating about this interface?
- **Likert scale** On a scale of 1-10 (10 being extremely easy, 1 being extremely frustrating), how would you rate this experience overall? Why?

Task 4: Interact with Live

Please return to the home shopping page and navigate to the live section. Interact with the elements you see on the screen. Think aloud and talk through what you are doing.

Notes taken during task:

- Goal: Can users successfully find live and interact with it? (Y/N)
- Notes on what the user is doing during the task (what they click on, thought process, etc.). If there's anything unexplained, ask "I noticed you did X. Talk to me through your thought process."
- Did the user successfully locate live? (Y/N)

Post-task questions:

- What do you think this page is for?
 - Are there any features that stand out to you?
- Would you personally use live while shopping?
- Is there anything frustrating about this interface?
- **Likert scale** On a scale of 1-10 (10 being extremely easy, 1 being extremely frustrating), how would you rate this experience overall? Why?

Closing

From your perspective, what is the most important thing to consider in the design of Instagram shopping?

That was all the questions we had for today. Do you have any additional comments or feedback on topics we didn't cover today?

Participant Results (links)

All notes: [Note-taking spreadsheet](#)

P1 (Pilot) - Astrid

[Screen recording](#)

[Live session recording](#)

P2 - Maria

[Zoom session recording](#)

P3 - Sam

[Zoom session recording](#)

P4 - David

[Screen recording](#)

[Live session recording part 1](#)

[Live session recording part 2](#)

P5 - Han

[Screen recording](#)

P6 - Vivian

[Live session recording](#)

P7 - Emma

[Screen recording](#)

Final affinity diagram - identifying major insights
 Figma file

