

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Conducted by Michael and Sarra

In attendance: Hailey (32 Female), Tom (22 male), Daniel (42 male), Anna (28 Female), Samir (24 male)

Michael My name is **Michael** and this is **Sarra**.

Sarra: Maybe we just go around the room and get your guys names so we can have a bit of a conversation.

Hailey: Hailey.

Tom: Tom.

Daniel: Daniel.

Anna: Anna.

Samir: Samir.

Sarra: Okay, so thank you all for agreeing to participate. I guess as you saw, we are really just trying to understand sports shoes and social responsibility and young consumers. I guess the first question really is about, when you buy sports shoes, I'm assuming everyone buys sports shoes at some point? Tennis shoes, runners, what are the other ... Sneakers.

What kind of things would make it be that ... What makes a sports shoe valuable? When you evaluated it, what is the thing you are looking for? There's no right or wrong answer.

Tom: I just probably look for high quality and comfort. Because I spend a lot of time in my runners, in my sports shoes playing sports, doing sports, so I want to make sure I'm comfortable and they are probably going to last a while as well.

Hailey: I guess it depends on what the purpose is that I'm buying them for, so I tend to have multiple pairs of sports shoes depending on if I'm using them for like track running or if it is just general wear. If it is track running I'm probably looking for something that's a bit lighter and feels like it is a bit quicker, I guess, it won't have any aerodynamic consequences on my performance, whereas running in general where I'm just looking for something that looks like it is going to be durable.

Daniel: I don't know, like when I used to play basketball back in school, I look for the colour and the design, but that's because that was my first sport that I started playing, but then when I went onto a sport that I really like playing, like football, I started buying shoes, like pairs like professional players wore and that's why I bought them. Those factors are there all the time, you know?

Samir: I guess when I buy my running shoes I tend to buy something that is a reputable brand, not just good quality, but good for your feet as well. I have to wear orthotics, something that isn't going to be damaging and protects my foot.

Sarra: When you are trying to figure out about value, how do you decide? You talk about how you decide, but how do you decide if it is good value? Because we could have really cool shoes that would be 1.2 million dollars, that might not be so valuable. It might be, I don't know. How do you guys decide? You talked about a lot of attributes, but how do you decide if it is like a good value.

Michael: For example, when you walk into a store and you pick up and look at shoes, what are you looking for to assess whether it is of value to you?

Samir: I guess I think about how often I'm going to be using the shoe. Like if I'm playing football every weekend or during the week and I'm going to be wearing it a lot so I'm going to get quite a bit of use out of it, so my purchase is going to be a little bit better and it might last for longer, but if I'm just going to be using it for like more casual footwear or if I was just running. I don't run all that much, but if I were to use it just a running shoe maybe something that's not as expensive just because I wouldn't wear it as much.

Anna: Yeah, I'm probably similar to Tom. I'd probably place a premium on the runners that I wear, just because I wear them a lot, run a lot, do a lot of exercise and so something that looks like it is going to hold up and hopefully last awhile as well.

Daniel: Two things I do is the material, like you know, if there's like a unique material that is used to make the shoe, then I would value it more, and second is like how many athletes use it, like professional athletes use it.

Michael: Could you describe a unique material?

Daniel: Yeah, when I got these, I remember when I was playing basketball and I got these shoes and it was like white and green, but then on the bottom it was like the sole was like transparent green, like a transparent sole, so those type of unique materials that are used.

Sarra: Anything else?

Hailey: I guess I'm kind of stuck in the middle, my foot is not really big enough for normal sized shoes, but it is too big for kids sized shoes, sometimes I can squeeze into them, so I tend to compare like a kids sized one with the closest available adult sized shoe, and just kind

of look at the price tags, the quality of the finish, what materials are used and just kind of make a decision based on, well the appearance in the end.

Tom: Yeah, I think I go in with a general idea of what I want, and then will also have a general idea of how much I'm willing to pay for it. Then once you ... I do a lot of online shopping, so it is not so much physically looking at it, I might go to a shop, kind of decide what I want, and then go look at the online, just because there's way more options online, you can suss better prices and stuff.

I think I'm definitely looking at how they feel on my foot, which one's the most comfy fit. I'm thinking like if I'm going to be wearing it at a gym, would I want to be seen wearing this as well, and then yeah, just going from there. If we get something in the price range that meets all those and I'm happy with it, if not then maybe I need to think about what I'm after or reconsider how much I'm willing to pay.

Sarra: Are there some brands that you would say: "These are a good brand of shoe?"

That is if I were asking you for advise what sports shoe to buy, what would you suggest is a good brand, a bad brand?

Tom: I think Under Armour have put out a few good products recently as well, and then also something like isn't as popular but good quality like Sketchers.

Anna: I was going through shoes, because I have really flat feet, have orthotics, some of them didn't quite fit and then Asics put out a shoe and it was a perfect fit. Ever since then I've kind of had a really positive experience with Asics, I'm not sure why, it is just Asics is my runner.

Tom: Yeah, I'm the exact same. I had good experiences with Asics and have been sort of advised they are better for my foot, more so than the Nikes, which are probably more designed for looks and potentially not longevity or comfort sort of thing, so yeah, I've always gone with Asics as well. In terms of runners.

Hailey: Yeah, I tend to gravitate more towards Asics just because when I was little I used to do athletics and they were a major sponsor, so that always used to be the shoe I go towards because I've just had that history with them, they've been good for me.

Daniel: Yeah, same situation with her, like in my country there's a lot of Adidas tours, so we just gravitate towards Adidas, so a lot of us just buy Adidas shoes most of the time.

Sarra: Are there any brands that you would say, stay away from?

Samir: Some of the boring ones like Brooks, or other ones that don't seem to be creative. I don't know, might provide the same sort of good for your foot aspect, but when you are at the end of the day you do pick one that you like the look of, so you sort of want a little bit of colour on your shoe and that sort of thing.

Anna: Yeah, I actually had a pair of Brooks as well that felt pretty comfortable, but just we gravitated towards Asics because the looks are a bit more appealing to me.

Hailey: Not any that I can think of off the top of my head.

Sarra: If we're thinking about ... One of the things that we're interested about is social issues and how social issues might impact your choices as consumers. You think if we say, well what are ... You talked about brands you like and good shoes, now if I said, if I were going to ask you what is a responsible shoe, a shoe that actually was socially responsible, or a brand that was socially responsible, or one that was also equally, that wasn't socially responsible? What would you ... Anything come to your mind?

Anna: I think any of your big brands, your Nikes, Asics probably would be all pretty acceptable in society and then I don't know, maybe K-Mart kind of generic runners are not.

Tom: Did you mean like the way in which the shoe was made?

Sarra: Yeah. It might be the materials, it might be the way it is made, it might be all sorts of other issues.

Tom: Well I think the one that comes to mind for me, I'm not sure that Nike has the best reputation for producing their shoes, it is all offshore and in the poorer countries, so I guess socially responsibly they may not be as strong, but maybe that is just because they are the most well-known brand, so you hear about the negative aspects of their production more so than other brands. I'm not sure how Asics make their shoes, I haven't really looked into that, but maybe they follow similar practises.

Hailey: Like Tom said, the only brand I've really heard anything about is Nike, they've had a couple of issues in the past, but other than that it's not something I've really considered when I've been purchasing shoes.

Daniel: Yeah same here. We learned about it in school, they teach us in school that Nike did this stuff in the past, yeah, so it is pretty popular.

Sarra: How important would it be if the shoe is socially responsible or not to you all? Would it matter? I mean let's just say your brand wasn't good, would that make a difference do you think? Would you buy it or effect it in coming into your consideration set?

Anna: I guess it probably would, depending on the stigma surrounding the shoe, like whatever they were doing wrong.

Daniel: Yeah, it is pretty hard. If you are like really ... You know, some people are against animal cruelty and all the other stuff, if you are like that, obviously you are going to resist the brand, but if it is not such a sensitive issue for you, you are going to purchase it anyway.

Hailey: If I think I was going out tomorrow to buy a pair of sports shoes and I had my eyes set on say this Asics pair I'd seen online and then there was a big story come out tonight about

Asics and slave labour in the Middle East or something, I think I definitely wouldn't purchase that pair of shoes tomorrow, I would be looking elsewhere, because I want to be socially responsible, I don't want to be wearing shoes that are being made by some poor people in India, or something that aren't even being paid. That is just something, a consideration that I'd personally make.

Samir: Yeah, I feel like I would need to do my research. Like if I heard one of the companies was doing something like that then I would ask myself, like why is this company doing these dodgy things and not all of them? Because surely they all are. If they are not, and it is just that one, Asics that are doing slave labour then like yes, stay away from that brand.

Yeah, if there was an option that was marking itself as 100% like all good, then I might be more inclined to go with that one, but otherwise I'd need to see what the options are. Because if they are all doing it, then I can't not have sneakers, I don't know, it would be?

Sarra: You talked about some issues. You guys talked about working conditions, are there other issues that might be important, social issues that might be important for shoes. Sports shoes.

Hailey: Sustainable products.

Sarra: What do you mean sustainable?

Hailey: Not tearing down rainforests to be able to make the product.

Tom: I guess other considerations would be, if the company not necessarily to do with making the shoe, but if they were doing activities to help out in the communities that they were making the products in, like I don't know, retaining some money or helping develop houses and communities in those countries that they're making the shoe in, trying to give back a little bit.

Anna: Probably wouldn't ... If I had my eye set on a shoe that was perfect it probably wouldn't matter so much, but if I was deciding between one shoe and another, perhaps the same and one is Australian made I'd probably go with that shoe.

Sarra: Anything else? That's okay. How would you know if your shoe was good or bad? Socially good or bad? You've mentioned a couple of things in your discussions, news stories, other stuff, but is there anything you think the company could do to try to promote if it was good?

Daniel: You could like pay an athlete or someone to say, hey, listen I use Nike, it is the best product or something like that to promote it positively, like other than negative aspects, if we hear something bad about it always comes from Facebook, like the media from Facebook and it spreads like wildfire after that.

Daniel: Especially Facebook, because no one reads the newspaper these days. Yeah.

Anna: Yeah, certainly for athlete is kind of endorsing this shoe, I think you assume it is going to be high quality, it is going to be socially acceptable. Yeah.

Sarra: Okay, so do you think shoe companies should be telling you if they are doing good things?

Tom: I think they should. If it is a point of difference for themselves and the different company then it would impact the consumer, but that is just without saying. A lot of companies nowadays, Australian companies are putting that Australian made symbol on it or like completely Australian products used to make the end product, so I guess you could have that sort of on your box or just more publicly aware that it was clean, Australian made or from not bad conditions.

Samir: I'd rather a third party be telling me about it, yeah, than a sponsored athlete, or the company themselves. Like yeah, if they are telling me that's fine, but I would have a bit of doubt. Maybe I'm a bit cynical, but yeah, I need evidence. I don't know, even that could be just manufactured by a third party sponsored firm. Yeah, if there was a thing, if there was information available that seemed to be pretty individual and not associated with the brand, that were saying positive things about it, then that would be pretty impressive. I think.

Hailey: I'd definitely take the word of an independent body over the word of the actual manufacturer, just because it can seem a bit unreliable coming straight from the manufacturer, they can put out whatever they want to say about their brand, it doesn't necessarily mean it is true, but I'm a bit cynical.

Anna: Yeah, I'd agree with both of them, yeah.

Sarra: Okay, so if we are talking about someone certified, or accredited, can you think of any organisations that might be appropriate?

Samir: Not really off the top of my head.

Tom: The only one I could think of would be like PETA, but then I'm not really sure animals aren't being harmed in production of shoes, I'm not really sure how relevant that is.

Hailey: The only body that's coming to mind is like CCC (Consumer Competition Commission), but I think that might be overstepping their current capabilities, capacity.

Sarra: One organisation that potentially might be appropriate is Fair Trade. Have you seen the fair trade logo?

Daniel: Yeah, it is on coffee jars

Sarra: Do you know what fair trade actually means?

Daniel: Yeah, like we learned about it in geography back in my school. It is about how the farmers are treated and if they are paid properly, then the company gets to put the fair trade logo on their product.

Sarra: Do you think it would make sense to have fair trade with shoes?

Samir: You wouldn't want it on your shoe, but it might be on the box or ads.

Hailey: Or like a tag.

Anna: Yeah, if that comes with the meaning that wages are being paid appropriately and stuff, then yes.

Sarra: If you saw that on a box do you think that ... Or a box or an ad, do you think that would make you think that shoe is a better shoe?

Tom: It would come into consideration for purchasing. It may not be larger or better performance, but consciously you are thinking, okay, I don't have to worry about how the shoe is made, so it might play a more important role in the purchase.

Anna: Yeah again, probably just be if I was separating two shoes, I would go with one that's got the fair trade logo.

Sarra: Do you think the Fair Trade Accreditation would matter how you evaluated the shoe or change which one you preferred?

Samir: I'd say more reliable, like if you are thinking a shoe made by someone that is not getting paid very well, in poor conditions, it may not be made using the best materials or they may not have their heart in it, or something like that, but if you knew they were getting paid well and reasonable conditions I would think it would be more durable, or reliable, that sort of thing, it would last longer.

Tom: Yeah, like whether or not that is true that is the assumption I think I would make as well. That their fair trade logo would represent better wages for employees which would maybe not increase quality, but make sure quality is at the standard that I expect and that I'm paying for, because the employees have more motivation to do the job correctly.

Michael: That wraps up our questions, thank you all so much for your assistance with this project.