Underwear Retailing

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British women are pants at buying underwear

Grey, saggy knickers, holey vests and fraying bra straps don't conjure up the sexiest image. But this is what it takes for British women to go out and get themselves some new underwear. In fact, latest research from MINTEL finds that 60% of women will only ever buy underwear when it needs replacing. By comparison, just three in ten (31%) splash out on bras and pants for special occasions.

"Despite the return of saucy Burlesque shows by Dita von Teese and others, British women still take a functional and practical approach to underwear, and clearly don't see it as something that can be really sexy and alluring," comments Katrin Magnussen, senior fashion analyst at MINTEL.

"The underwear industry needs to encourage women to go out there and spend their hard earned cash on beautiful lingerie that makes them feel really special. We need to see more advertising that is fun but also seductive, as the last time we really saw anything along these lines was the 'hello boys' campaign from Wonderbra, and that came out almost 15 years ago," she adds.

Popular TV programmes such as 'What not to wear' and Gok Wan's 'How to look good naked' recommend that women should always have a combination of structured underwear to look good and sets that are a little racier to feel good. And yet, MINTEL's research shows that only a third (34%) of women buy matching bras and knickers and a similar proportion (36%) still mainly buy multipacks. The message is just not getting through.

Women want more pants for their pound

Britain's women are also not investing in the underwear that they do buy. In fact, MINTEL's research shows that most women (63%) spend less than a tenner a month on their undies, compared to just 7% who spend between Â£21 and Â£40 a month.

What is more, swarms of women are now also buying their smalls from value retailers and supermarkets. In fact, although M&S still leads the way, with 51% of women buying underwear there, almost half (48%) went to Tesco, Matalan, Primark or ASDA for their bras and pants last year.

"Buying underwear at value retailers or down the local supermarket does mean that women get more pants for their pound. But buying cheap often comes at a price, as the underwear is unlikely to last as long as more expensive pieces and will need to be replaced more regularly," explains Katrin Magnussen.

With women increasingly looking to bag a bargain, the market for bras and pants has seen only around 3% growth year on year since 2004, with spending last year reaching Â£1.2 billion.

"To try and stem the trend towards cheaper underwear, retailers including Primark and Topshop, are now introducing more up-market ranges to convince women that they should invest a little more. With some real care and attention going into the design and manufacturing of these ranges, they are also less likely to fall apart quite as quickly as some of the less expensive ones," comments Katrin Magnussen.

Men need to pull their socks up

And while the ladies refuse to shell out for new underwear for themselves, men still depend on other people to do their dirty work. In fact, over one in four (27%) men say that their partner buys their underwear, while 15% receive most of smalls as gifts.

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