

How Image Performance Impact SaaS Landing Pages

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Abstract

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Abstract		
<p>This thesis explores how images performance, specifically load speed and quality, affects how users interact with SaaS landing pages. Through user experience tests and feedback from its survey, the study highlights the role of images in shaping how visitors engage with a page. Images with sharp quality and load fast had the ability to capture attention, keep users engaged, and leave a positive impression of the product, while blurry or slow-loading images frustrated users and reduced their willingness to explore the product further. These findings emphasized the importance of optimizing images as a part of creating an effective, user-friendly landing page. The research provides practical insights for businesses looking to enhance user experience and increase the conversion rate of their landing page, with recommendations for further studies on how visual design elements work together to impact overall success.</p>		
Keywords		
landing page, SaaS, page speed, image quality, image load speed, time on page		

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Appendix 3. User Experience Survey (For the slow loading version of the landing page)

1 Introduction

As technology evolves to its current form, digital marketing vehicles have become the most effective way for businesses to promote their products or services. Mediums such as social media and blogging platforms have been rising in popularity, proving their ability to elevate businesses' marketing efforts. Amongst these digital marketing mediums exist landing pages, a place where businesses can freely communicate to their potential customers, or visitors, what their business is about. Through landing pages, businesses can interact with their customers in unique ways, which is different than their social media pages or blogging articles. This distinctive ability has turned landing pages into one of the most important parts of the success of modern digital marketing.

Looking more closely into the subject, landing pages themselves also have multiple components, and some of them are more important than others when it comes to their overall success. Better wording in copies can better describe its business details to its visitors. The right graphics can make the industry's buzzwords more meaningful to novice visitors. A well-organized information hierarchy can pull visitors away from being lost in the jungle of words. And likewise, an effective selection of pictures can convey more meaning to potential customers than "a thousand words". This research has gone through a series of user experiment (UX) tests and surveys to better understand images, one of the most important components of landing pages. There exists previous research about the topic of images, or visual design as a whole, across many forms of digital mediums; however, the design of images is often discussed, rather than image performances. Images can spike visitors' attention and focus them on certain locations on the landing page where the images are placed (Ash et al. 2012). Images also help businesses explain more about their products and services, sometimes faster than words can. This makes pictures a crucial component in landing pages, especially in Software-as-a-Service businesses (SaaS), the business model that this paper will focus on studying its landing pages for. SaaS businesses provide software to users over the Internet. And because software, is the heart of their service, most of the time, it can be harder to describe through text. This characteristic makes images an important component on SaaS landing pages, and if used effectively, can make a notable difference in the overall performance of the landing pages.

The objective of this article is to understand the impact of image performance on SaaS landing pages' users, by focusing on answering the question: How does image performance, such as load time and quality, affect user engagement on SaaS landing pages? The question can be answered by examining the relation between users' behaviors and key performance indicators (KPIs) such as bounce rate and time on the page.

The topic of research is applicable to be studied in various industries that take in the use of landing pages, but to limit variables and narrow the focus, this research aims towards the Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) industry and their landing pages. The article will be split into multiple parts that will guide the reader through the research processes, including research method declaration, exploring research results, analysis of the findings, and then the final discussions on the overall findings and how the study of this topic should proceed.

2 Conceptual Background and Literature

2.1 What is a Landing Page?

Landing pages are webpages belonging to individuals or organizations, with the purpose for potential visitors to "land" after clicking through its link from various other digital platforms, such as newsletters or social media platforms (Ash et al. 2012, 4). After accessing a landing page, visitors can be further informed about the service or product, exchange their information for trial services, subscribe to the business's newsletter, or contact the vendor for more information (Meesala 2022).

Being a part of the business's main website, or a separate page deliberately designed to capture visitors from across the internet, landing pages are the foremost element in driving the conversion of the business (Ash et al. 2012, 4). Because of that reason, landing pages have long become an indispensable feature in business marketing toolkits.

2.2 Landing Page Design

After the viewer's attention has been captured through external outlets, they are directed to the company's landing page which has the job of prolonging and focusing that attention on certain aspects of the company, with all of them having different goals in the initial designs.

The viewers who visit the landing page are the ones who came from a link from another site. This external platform can either be a blog post, a social media post, or a private message from a trusted person. This makes the landing page's first design decision lie on the choice of its domain name. After the viewer's attention is captured and sent to the landing page through the link, the first section in a typical landing page the viewer would see is the headline. A headline's mission is to confirm to the viewer that they have reached the right website and to provide enough information to further pique their interest to read more about what's left on the site. Below the headline of a landing page is typically a sub-headline that further explains what the page is about. Other key elements of a landing page include a body copy that describes what the product or service can offer, trust indicators such as testimonials and supporting images, and call-to-action buttons or forms to collect the viewer's data. (Teodorescu & Vasile 2015, 363).

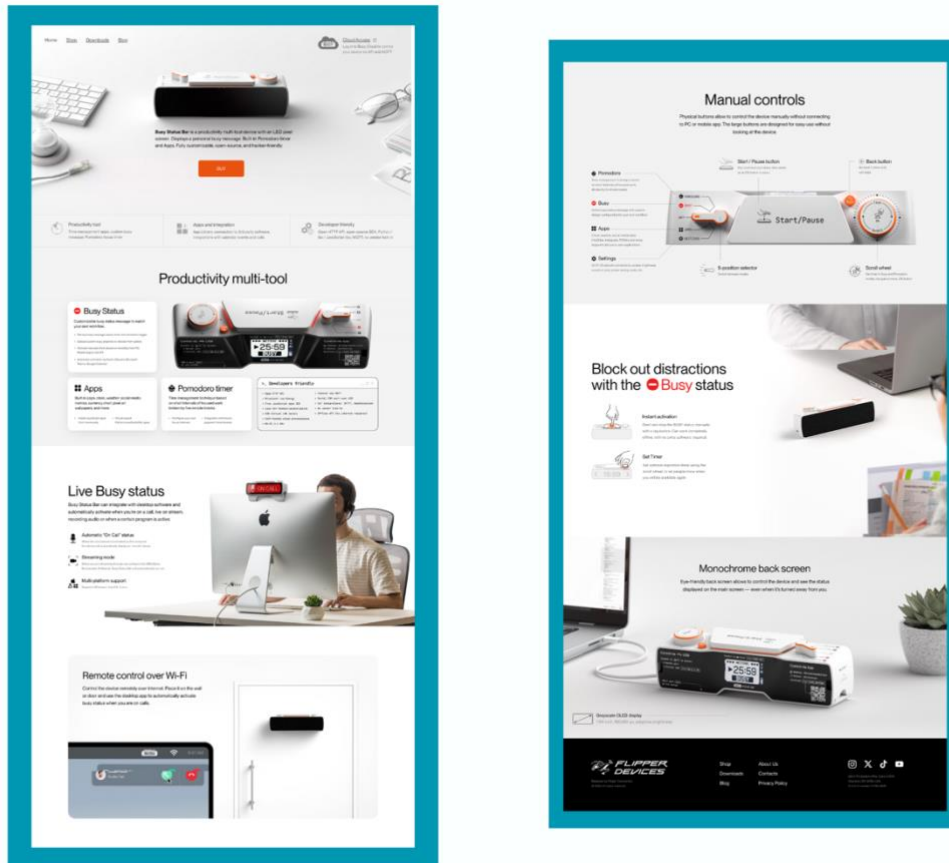


Figure 1. Busy Bar's landing page from Flipper Devices

There are design techniques in a landing page that can influence its viewers into certain behaviors. Tactics that leverage the understanding from other types of websites are also effective in landing pages, such as the primacy-of-warmth effect (Asch, 1946) that states the first impression of the site is the strongest impression of a person on a site, or the Von Restorff effect (MacLeod, 2020), entails that distinguishable items are able to capture attention. Besides the general design aspects, there are several techniques that are specific to creating a successful landing page design. Techniques such as driving attention to call-to-action buttons by applying the same style on them across the page, the inclusion of trust indicators such as testimonials from existing customers to build trust, can be implemented onto landing pages to increase their overall performance, or choosing different colors to evoke different emotions (Teodorescu & Vasile 2015, 363.)

2.3 Software as a Service (SaaS)

According to Kumar (2017), traditional software business models of licensing prebuilt software are gradually declining, being progressively supplanted by the Software-as-a-

Service (SaaS) model. SaaS applications, as Kumar notes, are delivered to their users through the Internet.

Because of that characteristic, SaaS applications offer fewer installation procedures on the user's end and simplify the maintenance process. Furthermore, since the cost of maintaining the software is centralized in the Cloud, users may benefit from reduced prices for the end product that they're using.

2.4 SaaS Landing Page's Success

Being one of the most important components in a SaaS business marketing toolkit, and the one that can raise notably in cost, landing page performance should be measured precisely. And like other parts of the business that need to be closely monitored, metrics can be a useful tool to do such job.

Landing page performance metrics, which are usually named Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), are a list of quantifiable metrics that indicate how effective the operations of a part of the business are performing (Ekholm 2020). The following is the collection of KPIs that are correlated to the success of SaaS landing pages.

2.4.1 Conversion Rate

When browsing the webpage, the visitor makes many interactions with the page from scrolling, and mouse hovering to clicking on multiple locations on the page. For businesses using landing pages, some interactions are preferable to be performed by viewers than others.

If the visitor makes an interaction desired by the webpage's designer, a "conversion" is then considered successful (Saleem et al. 2019, 589). Conversion is commonly known as one of the most important metrics to determine the success of most landing pages, and businesses seek to achieve high measurements of this metric.

2.4.2 Bounce Rate

When entering a landing page, visitors can either interact with the elements of the page or do nothing and leave the page and move on to their next browsing task. This event is called a "bounce" and might happen due to their poor experience after entering the page.

Bounce rate can be measured by taking out the amount of visitors who leave the page after a period of time without interacting anything with it. A low bounce rate can result in a lower

ranking in search engines, poor user experiences, and ultimately leads to lower profits from landing pages (Sculley et al. 2009).

2.4.3 Time on page

Time on page refers to how long a visitor stays on a webpage before leaving. It measures engagement by assessing the page's ability to hold the visitor's attention.

This metric also evaluates content effectiveness in meeting user expectations. As a result, it plays a critical role in understanding visitor retention. (Williams 2023.)

2.4.4 Scroll Depth

Apart from when the webpage fits completely in the height of the viewport, the visitor has to scroll down below the initial position when entering the page to experience more of what the webpage has to offer.

To determine how far the visitor has scrolled down on a specific page, scroll depth can be implemented in the overall measurements. Scroll depth is connected to how engaging the page is to users, and with low scroll depth, the webpage is unlikely to retain its visitors (Grothusen 2020).

2.5 Images on Landing Pages

On April 22, 1993, the NCSA Mosaic 1.0 web browser was released, which unlocks the ability to include images on the same webpage alongside its other contents. Since then, including images on webpages has become a trivial act, and because of that, the impact of images on users of the web is also being realized.

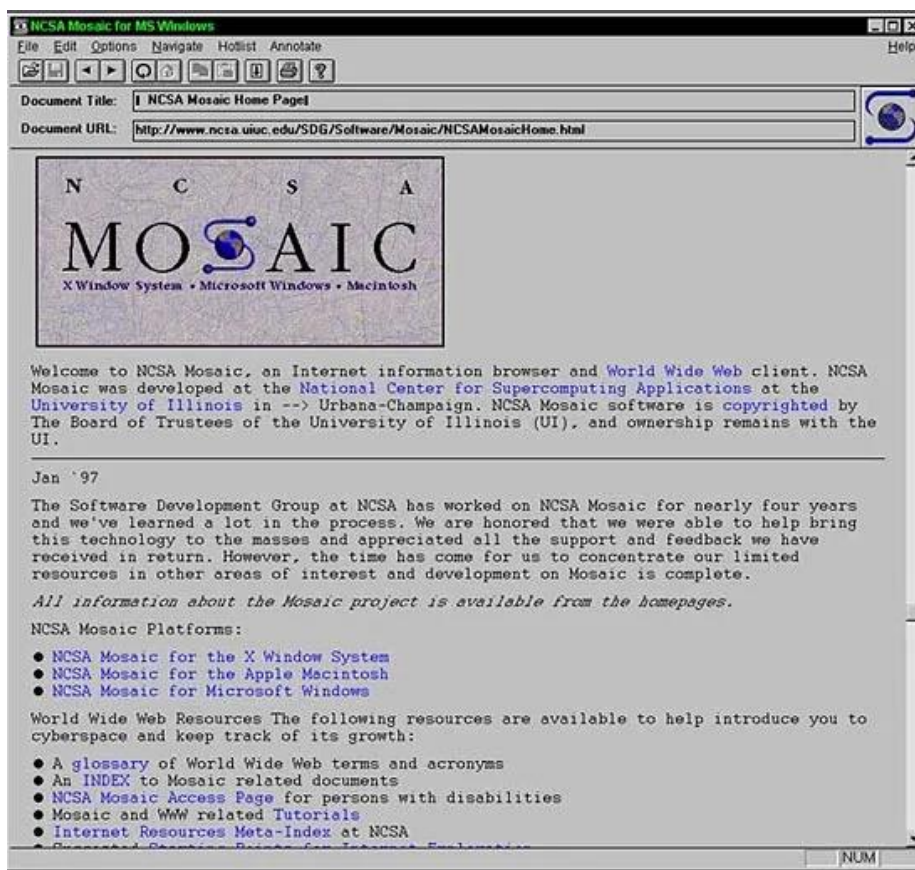


Figure 2. NCSA Mosaic 1.0 web browser (Wired 2018)

According to Pritchard and Whiting (2017), different methods of presenting images on a webpage, and images viewed on different platforms such as smartphones and desktop monitors can evoke different emotions from viewers. Pritchard and Whiting (2017) have also explained that the purpose of images on the webpage is interpreted by the viewers the first time they see the images, be it an image of a product that is being advertised or the member of the company that is being promoted, and that this interpretation can be influenced by the image's caption or descriptive texts next to it.

On landing pages, besides being judged for their purpose by their viewers, images have the role of trust indicators (Teodorescu & Vasile 2015, 363). Trust can be built by putting images

of existing customers using the product or service while portraying the desired emotion that the landing page wants to reach its potential customers. Images of the products themselves, when scattered along the landing page, can also build trust in viewers by allowing them to see the actual product that they are reading about, with its features being shown even before being purchased.

2.6 Image Performance's Effects on Landing Page's User Experience

To make use of the desired effects from images, web developers and designers widely put heavy resources and efforts into implementing the best images onto their SaaS landing pages. However while doing so, they can stumble on some errors or neglect techniques and make those images that they put on the webpage bring in more harm than good.

Quality and loading speed are the two main ways to measure the performance of images. When images are poorly optimized will not only prevent the beneficial traits that a good image brings but also introduce negative user experiences to the page.

2.6.1 Image Quality

Images found on landing pages can come in all levels of quality. All website owners want to have the best possible quality for their images for the benefits that they provide, but not all websites can achieve such goal. The reason for the poor quality of images can come from not using the best techniques for producing that image, either they are a photograph or a digital graphic. Images are also being compressed to reduce the strain of storing and distributing them over the internet, producing smaller and lower quality images as the result (Jamil 2024). However, whether the poor-quality images were included on the page intentionally or unintentionally, they can have an effect on their viewers while they browse the page.

Visual salience is one of the benefits that images can bring to a webpage, and its effectiveness is lowered when the image quality is worsened. Visual saliency is a perceptive quality that can capture attention by separating one targeted item distinctively from the others (Itti 2007). By using images, a landing page can implement visual salience and separate its sections from one another. Landing pages have different sections that serve different purposes, some are crucial to the success of the landing page and others serve as their supporters. The more important a section is to a landing page, the more attention from the viewer should be focused on it, preferably. When the visual saliency of a webpage is low, the viewers of the page can have a harder time distinguishing important sections and its supporting sections (Nothdurft 2000).

Texts are a common component in SaaS landing pages' images, and it is also blurred when image quality is reduced. Web images, in general, contain texts to further declare what the image is about to give better contexts to the subjects in the image if it lacks. In SaaS landing pages, this is also true but to a more specific extent. SaaS products are information technological products, developed with the goal to ease the act of information storing and transaction in a specific industry. Because of this, images on SaaS landing pages that showcase the product usually include text, as they are an integral part of the product. Recent Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software has a great ability to scan for texts from images in different scenarios. However, many OCR software are still not able to reach the human capacity to do their job in many image conditions, including distorted images (Holley, 2008). However with that being said, if images reach a blurriness threshold, humans stop being able to recognize the images' characteristics, including texts (Keelan 2002, 478). This losing ability to read texts in images prevents viewers from performing tasks on the web such as completing Captchas (von Ahn et al. 2008, 1467), making out texts in natural scenes (Galteri et al. 2017, 2401), recognizing texts in product images on SaaS landing pages, and understanding those images themselves as well.

2.6.2 Image Loading Speed

Image loading speed goes the same with quality in terms of its variety on the internet. Webpages, even ones that are parts of the same website, can have images that load at different speeds. However, image load speed is different than quality in the reason why they are slow. Images on webpages are slow usually because their developer does not implement image optimizing techniques, and loads images that are unnecessarily high in quality to the users. Different from image quality, slow-loading images do not usually hold little to no potential benefits, and the page's user experience is worsened the slower the images load. Slow-loading images hinder users' experience on landing pages because users have a limited tolerance threshold. Cumulative Layout Shift (CLS) is also what appears on webpages that have slow-loading images, and negatively affects the user experience of those pages.

Viewers can tolerate a slow-loading webpage to certain points, and after waiting for the page for some amount of time, usually in the span of seconds, negative judgments about the webpage begin to form. Hoxmeier and DiCesare (2000, 142) conducted an experiment with a sample group of 100 participants showing that users almost halved their values for the tested platform when its response time exceeded 9 seconds, then halved again when the response time became 12 seconds. This study also presented that after just 3 seconds of unresponsive time, users valued the system noticeably less than they would have if the

system responded instantly. Hoxmeier and DiCesare (2000, 143) have also pointed out that at the highest threshold of a response time of 12 seconds, some participants prefer not to use the tested system again because of its slow loading time and revert back to analog solutions instead. At the time of writing this manuscript, users have become more adapted to using digital technologies, and the results from Hoxmeier and DiCesare (2000) might have shifted towards the shorter end compared to the time it was created, but there are no similar studies that examine this exact matter recently. Although 12 seconds was the final tolerance threshold (Hoxmeier & DiCesare 2000), the negative effects start at the earlier thresholds of 4 and 8 seconds, and then sustained or even diminish after they have been initialized (Galletta et al. 2004, 19). In other words, slow-loading pages negatively affect users' behaviors and judgments of the page at shorter time thresholds than what developers usually expect. Davis and Hantula (2001, 250) reported that graphics and videos are major parts that make webpages load slowly, then concluded that viewers may not have the patience to wait for images that are not vital to their needs, which is usually the case when viewers browse a SaaS landing page. Combined this understanding with the two previous studies, an image can be viewed as one of the factors that guide viewers into leaving a landing page early and having a bad view of it while browsing.

Layout shift is another way that slow-loading images can negatively affect the user experience of landing pages. Layout shift happens when the positions of elements in a webpage unexpectedly change when a user is viewing or interacting with the page (Edgar 2024). Layout shift is measured by Core Web Vitals, a popular set of user experience metrics initiated by Google, as Cumulative Layout Shift (CLS) (Google 2024). As part of a webpage that has good Core Web Vitals, CLS has to score below 0.1, and a CLS score of anywhere larger than 0.25 will result in a webpage that has poor performance (Webdev 2024). According to Edgar (2024), layout shifts usually happen because of poor performances. JavaScript codes that are loaded after the page has been shown to the user can add more elements to the page, pushing around the layouts of already loaded elements. Slow-loading images and videos can cause the same effects, resulting in unpleasant browsing experiences and unwanted interactions from users.

3 Method

3.1 Research Design

The experiment and the dataset of this study have served the purpose of answering the questions of research. To achieve such a goal, the experiment has gathered a combination of quantitative and qualitative datasets. The experiment was being held online and has been limited to desktops only. The online aspect of the experiment recreates the environment of real-life browsing better than if it is being held on-site. However, because of this online aspect, the participants would pay more attention if they had done the experiment on desktop platforms, instead of going through the experiment quickly on their mobile phones.

Looking further in, the test had two main sections that all participants had gone through. The experiment started with the introduction phase, where the participants were informed about what the study was about, and what to do during the experiment, they were led into the first phase. This is where a landing page of a SaaS product was presented to them.

The participants were instructed to browse the page with the goal of understanding what the product is about. The reason for this instruction is that with a task to perform, participants are more likely to pay more attention to the experience. In contrast, the subjects would not pay much attention if they were freely browsing without a task to perform. This conclusion was reached after multiple pilot tests that yielded results of less time on page, indicating the low attention that the participants have given to the experience.

Then the subjects answered a series of questions related to the experience that they had just gone through, before continuing to the next section of the experience. In the following section, the same landing page will be shown to the participants, and their only task to complete remains the same: pay attention to what the product is about. After the second section, the participants will be asked the same series of questions as they have answered in the first section, which when completed, concludes the experiment.



Figure 3. Participant's journey through the experiment

The difference between the two versions of the same landing page lies in the performance of their images. Although the two versions of the landing page have the same exact texts and images, the images of the first version are noticeably slow but have high quality, whereas the ones in the second version load as fast as the subject's internet bandwidth allows, but their quality is scaled down to where texts in the images are hard to read.

Because the two versions of the landing page have the same content, and the test subjects have the same task to perform in both phases, the first phase is predicted to provide more reliable data points. This is because this first version is their first impression of the landing page, and the participants will have more natural behavior. This mode of behavior can be compared to how users in real life behave when entering a landing page for the first time. When this first version of the landing page is viewed, the participants are likely to be familiarized with the products and the descriptions of it, so their second time viewing the page will be faster because they can already expect what the page is about. This first-impression aspect is the reason why the experiment must also cycle between the two versions of the landing page, alternating the version being shown first between participants. As a result of this additional step, the answers to the research question can become clearer.

To further achieve the neutral response of the participants, the product introduced in the experiment needs to be a more neutral one. Since participants have different views towards different products, due to the differences in their needs at the time of testing, results can be too varied if the type of product is too emotionally attached. By selecting a more neutral product to put into the experiment, the images and texts that describe it on the landing page also need to be neutral. Pictures should not include faces in them, and texts should not include languages that are too emotionally stimulating. When put into effect, the neutral choice of product, images, and texts will elevate the dramatic performance of the images, in order to catch participants' attention and create a more memorable perspective of the images for a more on-topic result.

3.2 Technology Choices

Since the experiment and survey are built from scratch, there are some technological decisions that have been made during the development phase. This experiment's goal is to try to understand user behaviors to web performance, by deliberately slowing down the images on the webpages. Therefore the faster the speed of the webpages, the less diluted the results will be.

There are many techniques that can be applied to achieve a high-performance website, but would take decent time to develop. To reduce the complexity of the project to give way for the analysis and report, one method of optimization is utilized, which is to limit the usage of code libraries and frameworks. The landing pages and survey were built with pure HTML5 and CSS3. There are many front-end libraries and frameworks that accelerate and ease the development processes but have the tendency to underperform pure HTML and CSS, so these two remain as the choices for developing the front end of the test. The back end of the experiment was built with the Go programming language and data was saved onto

SQLite3. Go and its libraries' speed is one of the top among other popular general-purpose programming languages, and SQLite is a lightweight, flexible relational database, hence the decision to adopt them into the development of the experiment.

Another reason for adopting these technologies is their ease to be studied and replicated. Since these technologies are the base layer of popular libraries and frameworks built on top of them, documentation and guides are more readily available. This will not hinder further studies if they want to adjust a part of this already-built experiment, or pull them off of creating an entire new experiment and use this one as an example.

3.3 The Landing Page

In the User Experience test, two versions of the same landing page were presented to the study participants. They are identical in their content, but different in their image's load speed and sharpness. The landing page in the study is for a non-existing SaaS company, providing software that helps its users make better scheduling for their projects, named Planito.

The landing page has five main sections, which lie between the header and the footer. The graphics, layouts, and the proportions between texts and images in these sections replicate common SaaS landing page designs. Located at the top of the landing page is the hero section, designed to give an introduction and a promise of what information the user will get out of browsing this landing page. The following section is the list of Planito's features and its list of benefits. After the viewers' attention has been captivated, next comes a series of Planito's benefits explained in further detail. These feature showcasing sections consist of images of the product on one side and its description on another side. The main goal of these sections is to give the viewer a closer view of what the product can do, and if the user becomes interested in one or more use cases, they would proceed to click on the "call to actions" buttons or links that leads them into either more details information of the product's feature or get the products. The final section is laid after this series of product features. In this final section, a final "call to action" is presented as the final attempt to convert the viewer into a user.

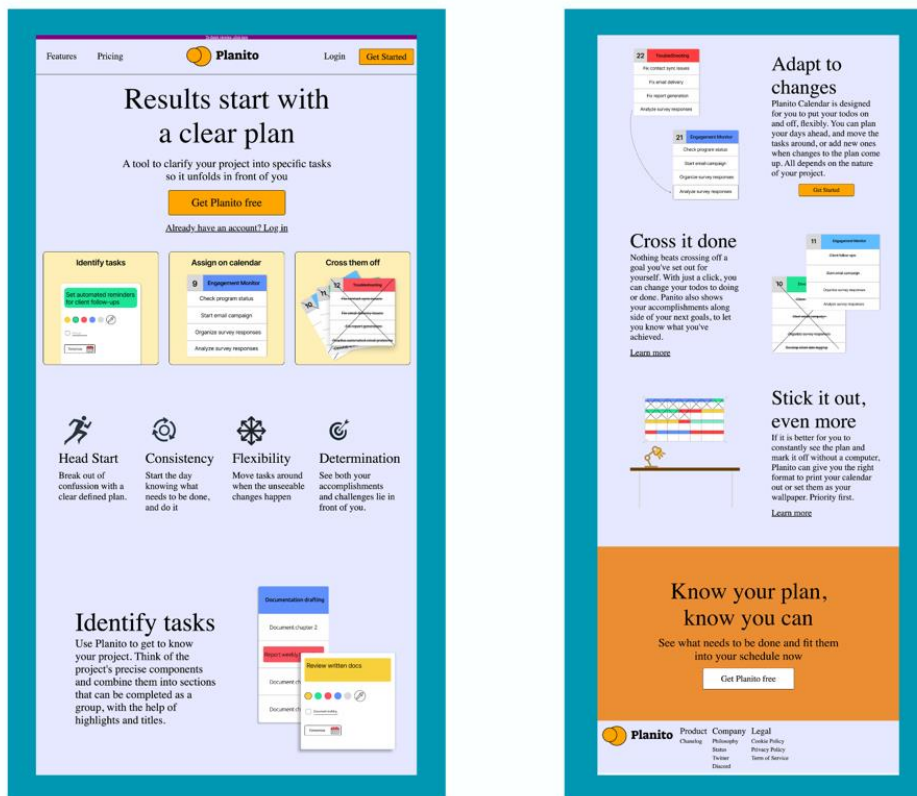


Figure 4. SaaS landing page in the experiment

The three sections that consist of images are meant to captivate the viewers' attention. Although it is the descriptive texts inside or next to the photos are the actual things that give the viewers the information that they need to evaluate the values of the product, the viewers did not do so before they finished scanning for what to read in the first place. The scanning process is accelerated with the images because it is the size, shape, and colors of the images that allow the viewers to quickly evaluate the main purpose of each section. The pictures on the landing page are meant to both present how the product looks at work and to help the viewer search for the information that they are looking for. If they want to know what can the product help them with, they can look at the list of benefits faster by looking at the combination of images and titles that this section has. On the other hand, if the viewer wants to know what exactly the product can do, they can look at the section that contains one big picture of the product to understand that this is about exactly one feature of the product.

The landing page also has been tailored with wordings and images that are not too emotionally engaging, leaving way for the emotions of the participants to focus on the images, which is the only inefficient part of the webpage by design purpose of the test.

3.4 Sampling

In the time of writing, browsing websites is an integrated activity in most of our lives, no matter what the age is. But each age group has tendencies to behave differently than one another when it comes to browsing websites (Hu et al. 2007, 153)

Due to the limited size and resources of this research, its study group is narrowed to a specific demographic group, consisting of university students with ages ranging from 20 to 27 years old. This demographic group, like any other demographic group, has distinct internet browsing habits that can be lightly generalized. Because they have adapted to the internet for a large part of their life, they know what to expect from a website such as the landing page in the experiment. Their mode of browsing landing pages is mostly skimming, and slowing down only when something on the page catches their interest. Their tolerance level of slow loading or low-quality websites varies from person to person like any other demographic group, but overall they lean towards the lower end. Products that are not of interest, lengthy description texts, and low-quality visuals are skipped because of this low tolerance level. This is also the reason why instructing a task for the participants to do can also help extract more information that aligns with the natural behavior outside of the study.

4 Data

4.1 Data Collection

There are two distinct sections in which data are being collected from the experiment, the landing pages that the participants view and the survey they answered.

When the subjects enter either one of the two landing pages, their mouse activities start to be recorded, including their mouse hovering positions and their click counts. To optimize the speed of the experiment and to make the dataset easier to handle, each element of the website is assigned a counter that increases when the mouse is hovered over them and when they are clicked. The alternative to this design is to record these hovering times and click count based on mouse positions, then calculate what element lies on those positions on the server. This alternative option is less optimal because the data weight of each participant increases as they spend more time on the page, whereas the data weight of the chosen option stays constant no matter how long the subjects stay on the page.

After the participant finishes viewing each version of the landing page, a series of questions about the landing page they have just viewed are presented to them. The questions asked the participants for their overall experience of images on the landing page they had just viewed, both on their sharpness and load speed. In the middle of the series of questions, the participant is asked why they spend most of their time on the page hovering over a specific element, which can help confirm the hypothesis in the analysis phase. Overall, the two surveying sections of the experiment are meant to clarify their behaviors and better understand their feelings towards each version of the landing page.

4.2 Data Presentation

After organizing and removing the test rows from the dataset, there exist 38 entries that account for both versions of the landing page. The dataset consists of two main sections, the first being the interaction data measured when the participants are browsing the landing pages. This includes their mouse hovering positions and click counts on each element. The second section of the dataset is the responses from the survey, both numeric and free-form texts.

The user interaction part of the dataset consists of a total of 20 elements being measured for clicks and 45 for hover time. The analysis makes use of the average, highest, and lowest hovering time entries.

	AVERAGE HOVER TIME	HIGHEST HOVER TIME	LOWEST HOVER TIME
Slow version	1.2427	38.806	0.003
Blurry version	0.6796	17.8	0.007

Figure 5. Participant's hovering time on the landing pages

Besides hovering times, the study will also make use of the total time on page (which is named "top" in the dataset). The same entries as the hovering time are used in this criteria: average, highest, and lowest.

	AVERAGE TIME ON PAGE	HIGHEST TIME ON PAGE	LOWEST TIME ON PAGE
Slow version	50.09	192.704	9.052
Blurry version	23.3	52.433	10.171

Figure 6. Participant's time on page on the landing pages

The surveying parts of the experiments are there to both contribute to the analysis of the interaction dataset and to support the claims that arrive from such analysis. Because these questions are asked right after the landing pages are being viewed, participants can evaluate the experience they have just been through and give accurate answers.

ENTRIES COUNT	POSITIVE NUMERATED ANSWER	NEGATIVE NUMERATED ANSWER	SLOW VERSION COMMENTS COUNT	BLURRY VERSION COMMENTS COUNT	FUTHER COMMENTS COUNT
38	149	52	12	11	3

5 Analysis

5.1 Interactive Data

But before jumping into the specific analysis of the dataset, there is a need to zone in the focus area of it. The overall impact of image performance can be measured by combining the data of both the blurry version and slow slow-loading version of the landing page.

After that, to determine the impact of image performance on participants' views of the landing pages, the first aspect that needs to be identified is how what the subject is paying attention to when they browse. There is a high probability that the more time the subject spent hovering over an element, the more attention they have put onto that element. On the other hand, the less hover time the element has, the less attention it has been put on by the participant (Guo & Agichtein 2010).

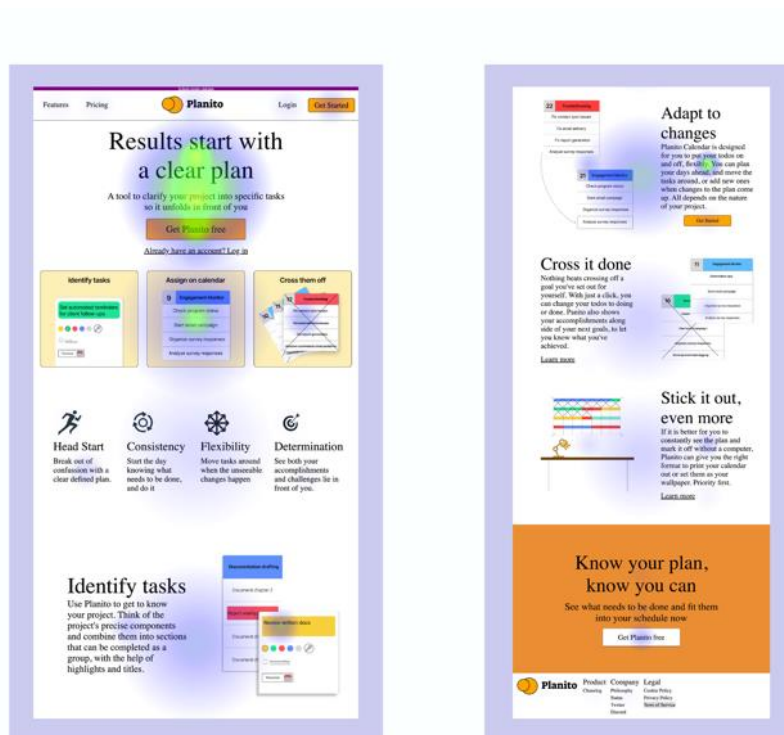


Figure 7. Average hovering time of participants

When looking at the average hover time of all entries, we can see the largest time combined is spent viewing the hero section of the website. This is expected, as it is the first section that shows up to the participants when they enter the site. Combined with the description that promises and gives information on what the site is about, the hero title has been able to capture the users' attention like how it is supposed to be.

To understand which elements or sections of the landing page, further than the hero section, we can follow the users' journey and look at the lower sections as they have also scrolled down. The two most viewed sections besides the hero section are the list of features that consists of three big images right below the hero section, and the big second feature showcasing that includes the image of the feature and a paragraph of description on the right of it, with the title of "Adapt to changes".

These two sections have almost equal hovering time. The benefits list has approximately 3.6 seconds of hovering time, and the feature showcasing has a slightly larger view time being approximately 4.1 seconds. The five hundred milliseconds might seem little at first, but this is actually a notable gap because not only this is the average of 20 subjects, but also the browsing speed and behaviors can vary among participants. Five hundred milliseconds, or half a second can also make or break a viewer's short tolerance threshold of four or eight seconds when bad assumptions about the product and company start to form in the user's mind (Galletta et al. 2004, 19).

What is similar about these two sections is not only their seemingly similar load time but also their image size. Each image of the benefits list is smaller than the one at the feature showcase, but when combined together, they create a whole section consisting of only images. That whole section full of images is larger than the one image in the feature showcase section. The two most notably viewed sections are the ones with images of the larger size. The effects of visual salience may have taken place in these sections with large images, separating them visually from other sections around (Itti 2007). Because of this effect, subjects paid more attention to sections consisting of larger, more detailed images than the sections that had little or no images at all.

When broadening the range from the two most viewed elements that separate themselves from the others, the three elements that have lower hovering time also share this trait. The three other features showcasing sessions have their hovering time of 3.2, 1.93, and 1.87 seconds. These three sections also have big images like the most hovered element at 4.1 seconds, which may have gained their long view time because the users are evaluating the product and the company while looking at these images (Teodorescu & Vasile 2015, 363). However, because of their different positions on the page, their hovering time is different from each other. Sharpness and load speed when combined with positioning can produce this difference in hovering time.

On average, participants pay more attention to sections that have impressive and detailed images than the ones without. To see more precisely how images affect each individual when they browse landing pages, further examinations are needed in one specific

participant entry. First, the highest hovering time entry will be viewed, followed by the lowest hovering time entry.

The proportions of the participants with the highest time on the page are almost the same as the average measurements that have just been analyzed. The benefits list and the "Adapt to changes" feature showcasing remain to be the two longest-viewed sections. In this entry, the attentive participant spent a significant time viewing the section with the big image, with a total of 31 seconds. This amount of time is almost equal to the hovering time of the hero section, which was 38 seconds, and triple the second-highest element of 10 seconds.

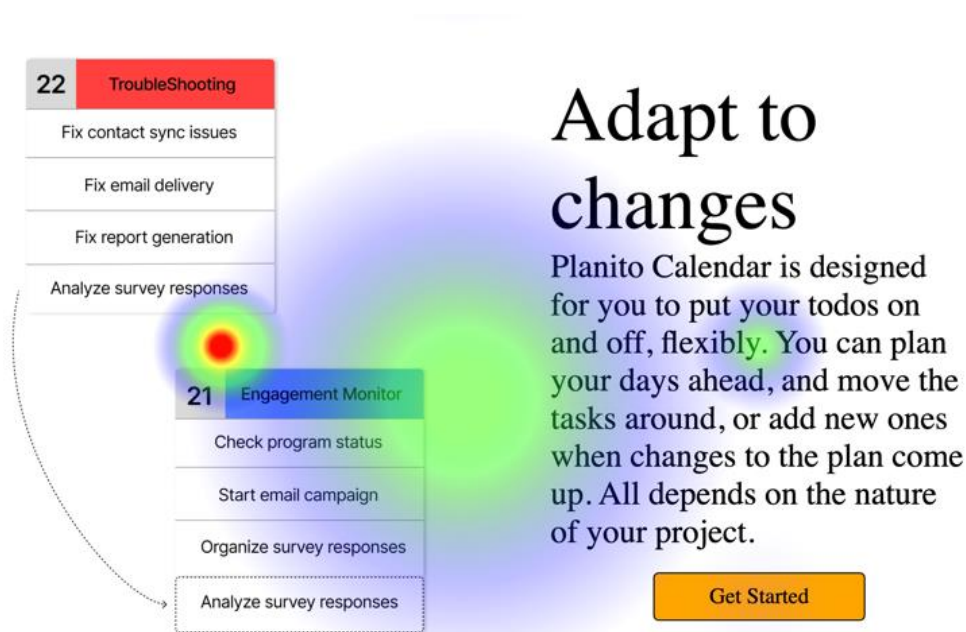


Figure 8. Most hovered section of the highest time-on-page entry

When looking further into the distribution of time this subject has spent for this section, more can be realized. The image of this section is being paid more attention than the descriptive texts that lie next to it. This entry's first version of the landing page shown to this participant is the one with low-quality images. According to Keelan (2002, 478), if texts in images reach a point of blurriness, the human eyes cannot decipher what's being written. Because of this, this participant's long hovering behavior on the image might have happened due to him or her trying to read the blurry text on the images, but unable to, then revert to read the texts that are loaded instantly next to the images instead.

This can be confirmed by the answers they gave to the questions on the survey about this matter. On the question asking for the image's quality, the participants answered with the lowest option of "blurry". But even though the images' sharpness was poor, the participants

answered that those images still made them stop scrolling and read around those blurry images, and the texts next to them, and it didn't make them skip the blurry sections to browse other sections. However, after giving all of this attention, the participants answered that the blurry images were not enough to convince them to know more about the product outside of the landing page and that they did not want to try the product. Finally, they concluded the survey by claiming that it was more appealing for him or her to scan the website with the help of images, but the bad image quality did not support them in understanding the product, which formed a bad impression of the company and the product that was presented.

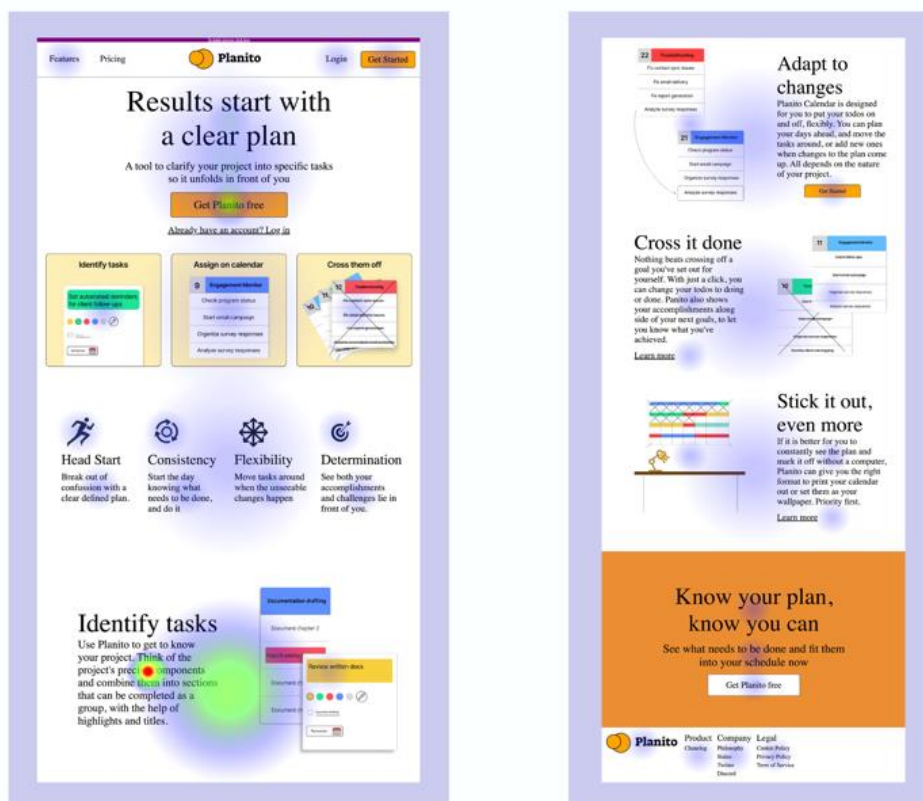


Figure 9. Lowest time-on-page hovering time

The browsing pattern of this participant was rapid and moved quickly throughout most parts of the page, trying to find what was interactive. This is the captured hovering time of the participant with the least time on the page, with a total of only 9 seconds. The session was on the slow-loading images version of the landing page. According to Sundar and Wagner (2009), slow-loading images introduce a scrolling effect when the images are loading. This scrolling effect causes the viewer to be more aroused than usual, which may be the cause

of this fast-browsing behavior. This behavior pattern is the opposite of the previous entry, where they stay calm and read or wait for the images patiently.

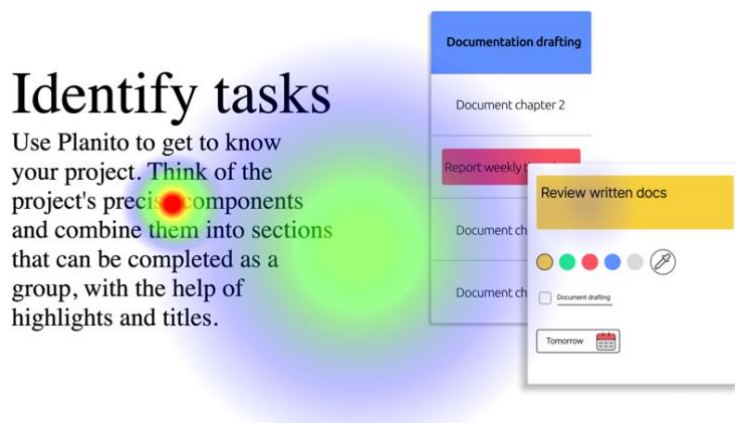


Figure 10. Most hovered element of the lowest time-on-page entry

Although when scrolling to look for information at a fast rate, the longest viewed time on the page was on the first feature showcase. This section is the first of the sections that have a big image as one of its elements. This big image has captivated the attention of the fast-browsing subject, holding them down onto one section for 4.5 seconds, which is half of the total time spent on the page. Compared to other elements that the subject just flicks through for less than a second, this first feature section has done a decent job of holding extended attention. The extended time that this participant spent on viewing this image can be explained by two points. Firstly, while scrolling quickly throughout the site, the viewer still remembers his task of trying to understand what the product is about, but then stops at this big image section to evaluate his impressions of the product by looking at the partially loaded image (MacLeod, 2020). Secondly, it might be the case that after flicking back and forward throughout the page quickly, the participant's tolerance runs out and stops waiting for images to load (Galletta et al. 2004, 19). He or she then turns to the first major section, which is separated by the visual salience effect given by the big loading image, to skim its descriptions to understand briefly about the product before leaving the page (Itti 2007). This understanding is a contribution to clarifying the importance of images on the landing page, and its effect on different user personas. People with different browsing habits can have different perspectives on images, but as in the majority of cases, images are at the core of users' experiences.

In the dataset, there are two participants who have not fully completed the experiment. One of those entries has completed the first version of the landing page but has left before viewing the second version of the page. This means that they have viewed the first version of the landing page, which is the slow-loading version in this entry, and then left the interim in between the two versions. The slow-loading landing page might have caused too much

arousal for the participants, which led to them not being able to continue with the experiment (Sundar & Wagner 2009, 178). The second participant who has not completed the full experiment has viewed the second version of the landing page but has left every survey answer for the second phase empty.

These two entries' time on page was 15 and 44 seconds respectively, which is not the lowest time on page out of all the entries. They have the same aspect lies in having the first feature showcasing section as the most viewed section, and the remaining time on the page is scattered around most elements of the landing page. This can mean that both participants have to browse the page quickly before their attention is captured by a section with a big image (Treue 2003, 429). This can add to the result that the rest of the dataset has been arriving at, that images have an effect on the experience of the viewers viewing a landing page, even to the point that they can't stand and leave the whole experience earlier than expected.

5.2 Surveying Data

The second part of the dataset collected in the experiment is its survey. The survey itself also has two parts, numerical data and free-form text comments.

This section will discover what learning this survey part of the dataset has to support the claims in the interactive part above and extract further understandings. Subsections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 respectively present the learnings after reviewing numerical data points and free-form text comments.

5.2.1 Numerical data

In the survey presented in the experiment, most multiple-choice questions are asked in Likert's scale, which spans from 0 to 5 where answer 0 being "strongly disagree" and 5 being "strongly agree". Since the survey consists of two phases, with one presenting the landing page with slow-loading images to the participants, while the other one presents the version with blurry images, the analysis for this section of the dataset is also split into two sections by following this logic.

The landing page with slow-loading images has negatively affected user experience as expected. Further behavioral effects can be learned from the answers the participants have given in the survey. Most participants answered that when encountered a section with slow-loading images, their patience was not strong enough to stop and wait for them to load. As Hoxmeier and DiCesare (2000, 142) have pointed out in their experiment that it takes less than 10 seconds of delay to make a user leave their system, it might be that case that it

takes even less time for a viewer of a landing page to run out of patient to wait for a loading image. Besides that, more than half of the participants answered that because of these slow-loading images, they would like to leave the page earlier than they usually do.

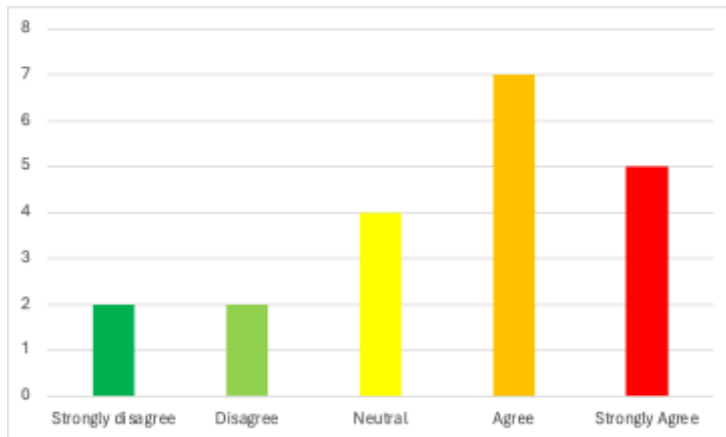


Figure 11. Answer to the question: "The images on this page made you quit the page early without wanting to know more"

After leaving the page, most subjects don't want to know more about the product or company presented on the landing page and don't want to try the product out. Since pictures can evoke lasting emotions from viewers, this effect might have not left the participants even when they have left the page (Pritchard & Whiting 2017). Unexpectedly, after giving negative answers to the slow-loading images throughout the survey, a notable number of participants still answered that the images still made them feel better about the landing page. The familiarity of images and that they have helped the user "picture" the product better might have been the reason for this result.

Blurry images in the experiment have received slightly less hate than the slow-loading ones. Half of the participants answered that the blurriness of the images on the landing page was tolerable, and they stopped at the images to read the texts inside them. While that is the case, the other half of the participants answered that they have not read the texts inside the blurry images, but either read the texts around it or scroll to other sections instead.

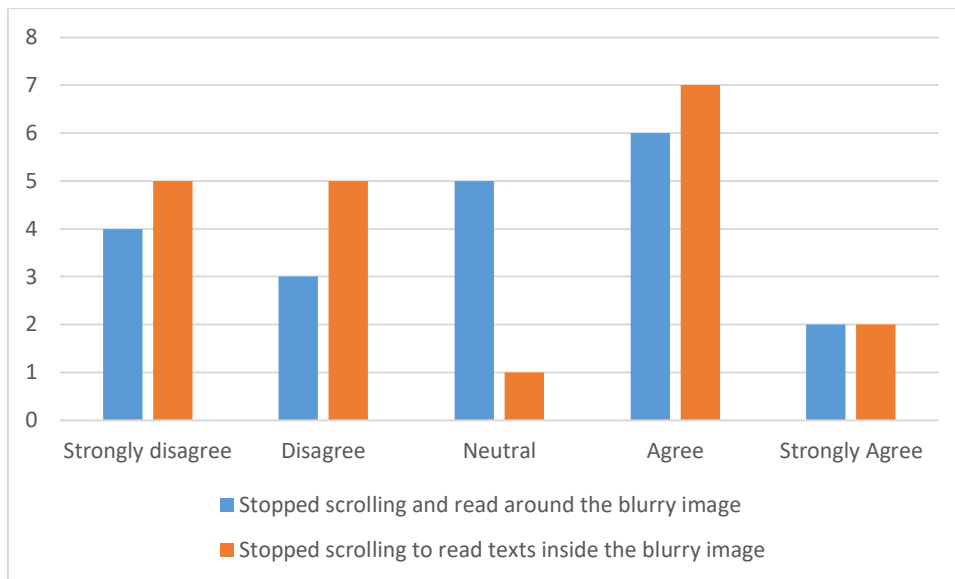


Figure 12. Behaviors of participants when faced with a section with blurry images

Further evidence can be seen by reviewing the answers participants have given to the questions about the section of the landing page that they have spent the most time on. In this section, half of the subjects answered that they had stopped in the section that long to give the blurry image a closer look, and the other half stayed to read the texts next to the blurry image. The blurriness of the images in this experiment has not reached the point where its text is unreadable for humans like what has been pointed out by Keelan (2002, 478), texts in these images are still visible and draw its viewers into examining it more. Both two versions of the landing page in the experiment, with blurry and slow-loading images, were not able to convince the subjects to know more outside of the landing page or try it out. Whether the images are loaded slowly or are blurry, they can capture the user's attention by utilizing the effect of visual salience, according to Itti (2007), they are not able to prolong that captured attention and convert that attention to beneficial actions for the owner of the landing page. To be able to do this, besides creating a meaningful graphic initially, those graphics must both be loaded quickly and have a good amount of sharpness.

5.2.2 Text comments

As the numerical points of the dataset have pointed out, SaaS landing pages perform poorly with both slow-loading and blurry images. How these images have impacted the study participants has been shown in the analysis of the interactive part of the dataset. However, by reviewing the free-form test comments that the participants have answered, these claims can be further proven, and more learnings can be extracted.

Besides these constructive comments, loss of trust is a common issue that exists in both versions of the landing page. Images act as a trust indicator for webpages, according to Teodorescu & Vasile (2015, 362), and trust lost from the images is trust lost to the whole page. Loss of trust came from a slow loading page, as one comment as noted, shows that the company holds little professionalism to their name, that the product or company has poorly invested in the thing that they are trying to promote on their landing page. One participant has even pointed out that the poor-performing landing page, either slow-loading or blurry, is an old product to them. Then they would let the page load while looking for an alternative version in the meantime.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research set out to understand how image performance, specifically loading speed and quality, affects user engagement with SaaS landing pages. Through a structured user experiment and surveying in the middle of it, the study has revealed the influences images have on user interactions and overall impressions of the product being showcased.

The findings indicated that sharp, fast-loading images are important in capturing and maintaining user attention, particularly useful to targeted sections such as the ones containing the selling points of the product. These sections consistently drew longer viewing times and higher levels of engagement when they consisted of relevant images. On the other hand, when image performance was hindered, either through slow loading times or reduced quality, users reported frustrations, spent less time engaging with the landing page, and formed less favorable opinions of the product and company.

This research also highlighted the first-impression significance of landing pages. Initial exposure to poor image performance created a lasting negative impact, even when other elements of the page were well-designed. Furthermore, while high-quality visuals can capture attention and encourage users to read more, subpar visuals deterred users from further interaction, emphasizing the importance of image optimization to raise conversions and reduce bounce rates.

To summarize, optimizing image performance on SaaS landing pages is not just a technical requirement but a strategic necessity. Developers who can create landing pages with clear visual graphics and fast loading times can better convey the value of the company, create positive user experiences, and increase the likelihood of successful conversions. Future studies could expand on these findings by exploring how image performance interacts with other design elements, such as typography, color schemes, and layout, to create a holistic and effective landing page experience.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1. Introduction to the experiment

Thank you for participating. The purpose of this research is to gather insights on user interaction with software business landing pages.

During the test, we will collect data on your usage patterns, interactions, and feedback.

All data collected will be used strictly for academic purposes.

Your data will remain anonymous and confidential; no identifying information will be associated with the results.

Participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, any data collected up to that point will be discarded.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact the study coordinator.

Question: What is your age?

Instructions

Please read before continue

Now a series of web pages will be presented to you.

When something doesn't response or do so poorly, it is likely not because of your device. So don't worry and continue browsing - this just means it's not meant to be clickable or still loading.

The web pages will be describing a product.

Please go through the pages and try to understand what the product is about (e.g. What is it? What can it do?).

Also try to remember how you feel about the web page, as you will tell those feelings again at the end of this experience.

When you don't want to browse the web page anymore, please close that tab by clicking the banner at the top of the page to continue.

When you click the "Next" button below, the first version of the webpage will appear.

You have just gone through one landing page.

Now another version of that landing page will be presented to you.

Now still, please try to remember how you feel about the web page, as you will tell those feelings again at the end of this experience.

APPENDIX 2. User Experience Survey (For the blurry version of the landing page)

1. In the web page you've just saw:
 - a. The images' load speed was:
 - i. Very slow
 - ii. Slow
 - iii. Did not notice
 - b. The images' quality was:
 - i. Blurry
 - ii. Normal
 - iii. Did not notice
2. The images on the webpage made you:
 - a. Stopped scrolling and read around the blurry images
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree
 - b. Stopped scrolling to read texts from the blurry images
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree
 - c. Skipped the blurry sections and scroll to other sections
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree
3. In the web page you've just saw, you spent the most time of _ seconds. You've stopped here for this long to:
 - a. Read around the blurry image
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral

- iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree
 - b. Try to read texts from the blurry image
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree
- 4. The images on this web page made you:
 - a. Want to know more about the product outside of the landing page
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree
 - b. Want to try the product.
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree
 - c. Quit the page early without wanting to know more.
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree
- 5. Overall, the images on the web page made you felt:
 - a. More positive about the product
 - b. More negative about the product
 - c. Didn't further affect your judgement for the product
- 6. You felt so because

APPENDIX 3. User Experience Survey (For the slow loading version of the landing page)

1. In the web page you've just saw:
 - a. The images' load speed was:
 - i. Very slow
 - ii. Slow
 - iii. Did not notice
 - b. The images' quality was:
 - i. Blurry
 - ii. Normal
 - iii. Did not notice
2. The images on the webpage made you:
 - a. Stopped scrolling and read around the loading images
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree
 - b. Stopped scrolling to look at the image and waited for it to load
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree
 - c. Skipped the loading section and scroll to other sections
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree
3. In the web page you've just saw, you spent the most time of _ seconds. You've stopped here for this long to:
 - a. Read around the loading image
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral

- iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree
 - b. Looked at the image and waited for it to load
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree
- 4. The images on this web page made you:
 - a. Want to know more about the product outside of the landing page
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree
 - b. Want to try the product.
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree
 - c. Quit the page early without wanting to know more.
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree
- 5. Overall, the images on the web page made you felt:
 - a. More positive about the product
 - b. More negative about the product
 - c. Didn't further affect your judgement for the product
- 6. You felt so because
- 7. Which of the two versions of the landing pages would you prefer to view than the other?
 - a. First one
 - b. Second one

Anything else you'd like to comment about the images of the web pages that was not asked?

That was the last question of the experiment.

Thank you so much for your participation.

You can now exit this page.