UK Running Culture 2025

Redtorch × RUNNING INDUSTRY ALLIANCE

SPORT ON SOCIAL

Jonny Murch
CEO, Co-Founder

Dear Friends and Colleagues

Following the success of our SportOnSocial Global Running Culture report published in June, we're excited to turn our attention to the uniquely vibrant UK market – once again in partnership with Running Industry Alliance.

This UK-focused report applies the same robust methodology as the global study, leveraging share-of-search data to uncover both functional consumer behaviours and cultural signals expressed through language around motivation, identity and community. To enrich the report, we've incorporated social listening data to provide a broader perspective by capturing conversation themes and community dynamics beyond intent alone.

Our findings reveal a UK running scene that is not only thriving but maturing at pace. Runners are shifting from starting out to pursuing personal improvement, efficiency and self-defined goals with increasing intensity.

This evolution is powered by a rich ecosystem where influential creators play a role as critical as traditional community clubs.

As an independent Research & Creative Agency committed to making sport more relevant, we hope this latest SportOnSocial report equips brands in the running industry with actionable insights to unlock sustainable growth and forge deeper connections with this dynamic audience.

If you have thoughts, questions or feedback I'd love to hear from you. Feel free to reach out at jonny.murch@redtorch.sport

Methodology

Search trends & cultural signals

Google holds over 82% of the global search engine market share and serves nearly 172 million users in the UK – offering a strong view of how people explore running online. Using Google Trends and YouTube data, this analysis tracks search behaviour across the full spectrum of running interest.

Search terms were grouped into themes – from training and performance to lifestyle, wellness, events and gear – to reflect the full spectrum of running interest. These clusters reveal how people talk about motivation, identity and community in the context of running.

Brand presence within running searches was measured, along with social conversations around UK influencers and running culture. Global running interest over the past twelve months was also compared with longer term patterns.

The result is a cultural perspective on search behaviour that highlights the conversations and dynamics shaping the sport.

How does it work?

Indexing interest over time
The most relevant queries around *running* were identified from the past twelve months and compared with five-year trends to show how interest is changing across platforms and markets.

Audience & market lens
The analysis covers the full range of people who search, from committed runners to the simply curious, across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Cultural lens
Running behaviour is influenced by context as much as performance. Cultural signals highlight motivations, barriers and patterns of participation, making it possible to distinguish between passive viewers and active participants.

Measuring brand visibility in search

The study calculates the proportion of running searches that mention specific brands or products to reveal which names appear most often in running conversations.

Brand referenced searches for products like shoes are examined to understand each brand’s share of visibility within each market.

Brand led queries are also separated from product led ones to show whether audiences are searching because of overall brand affinity or a specific product.

Together, these insights reveal top of mind awareness, search relevance and the brands shaping running conversations across markets.

Product/Brand-led Markets

Across the UK, brand visibility is 58% brand-led and 42% product-led. While most markets still gain much of their attention through brand names, an increasing share is driven by flagship products.

Brand-led = searches for generic brand names, e.g. *Nike*, *Nike Store*, etc.
Product-led = searches for specific products, e.g. *Nike Pegasus 41*

Brand-led markets

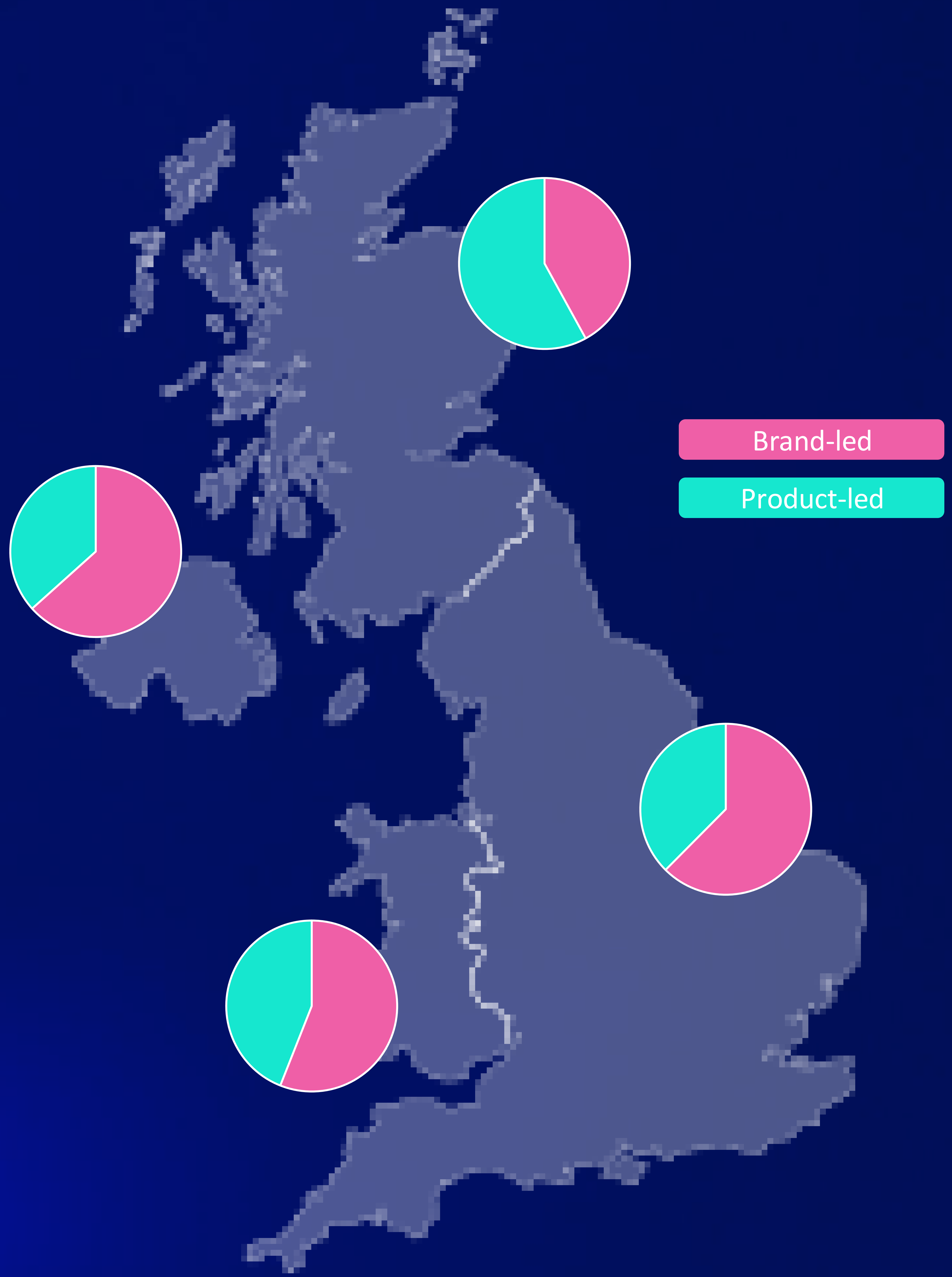
Northern Ireland (64%) and England (62%) are the most brand-led markets, with most of their visibility coming from generic brand searches.

Nike contributes 18% of brand-led visibility in both regions. The remainder is shared across 7+ other brands, including the product-led brand ASICS.

Product-led markets

Scotland is the only region in the UK where product-led searches exceed brand-led; 58% of visibility is driven by flagship products.

Scotland is also the only region where Nike has higher brand visibility than ASICS, and where Nike itself is more product-led than brand-led (63% vs an average 36% throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland).



UK Share of Visibility

Running visibility in the United Kingdom is 58% brand-led and 42% product-led, meaning almost half of all searches now focus on specific models.

We can think of this as two audiences:

1. product-led visibility is driven by informed, performance-focused runners who look for specific products built on credibility to suit their training or racing needs
2. brand-led searches are driven more by lifestyle-focused or newer runners who gravitate towards a brand's overall reputation or search for a product category they associate with the brand (e.g. Nike running shoes)

Top performers

The two leading brands in the UK – ASICS and Nike – each drive visibility in different ways: ASICS is product-led while Nike is brand-led.

- **ASICS** is 68% product-led, driven by the success of its flagship *Novablast* shoes.
- **Nike** mirrors the UK's overall brand/product split – with 58% of its visibility coming from generic brand searches such as *Nike* and *Nike Store.*

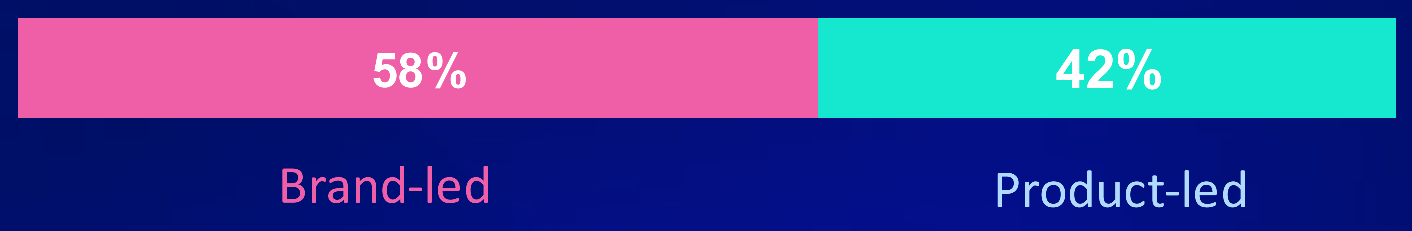
For ASICS, product credibility drives their huge success, but Nike's appeal is broader and has the 'cool' factor – attracting lifestyle-oriented searches.

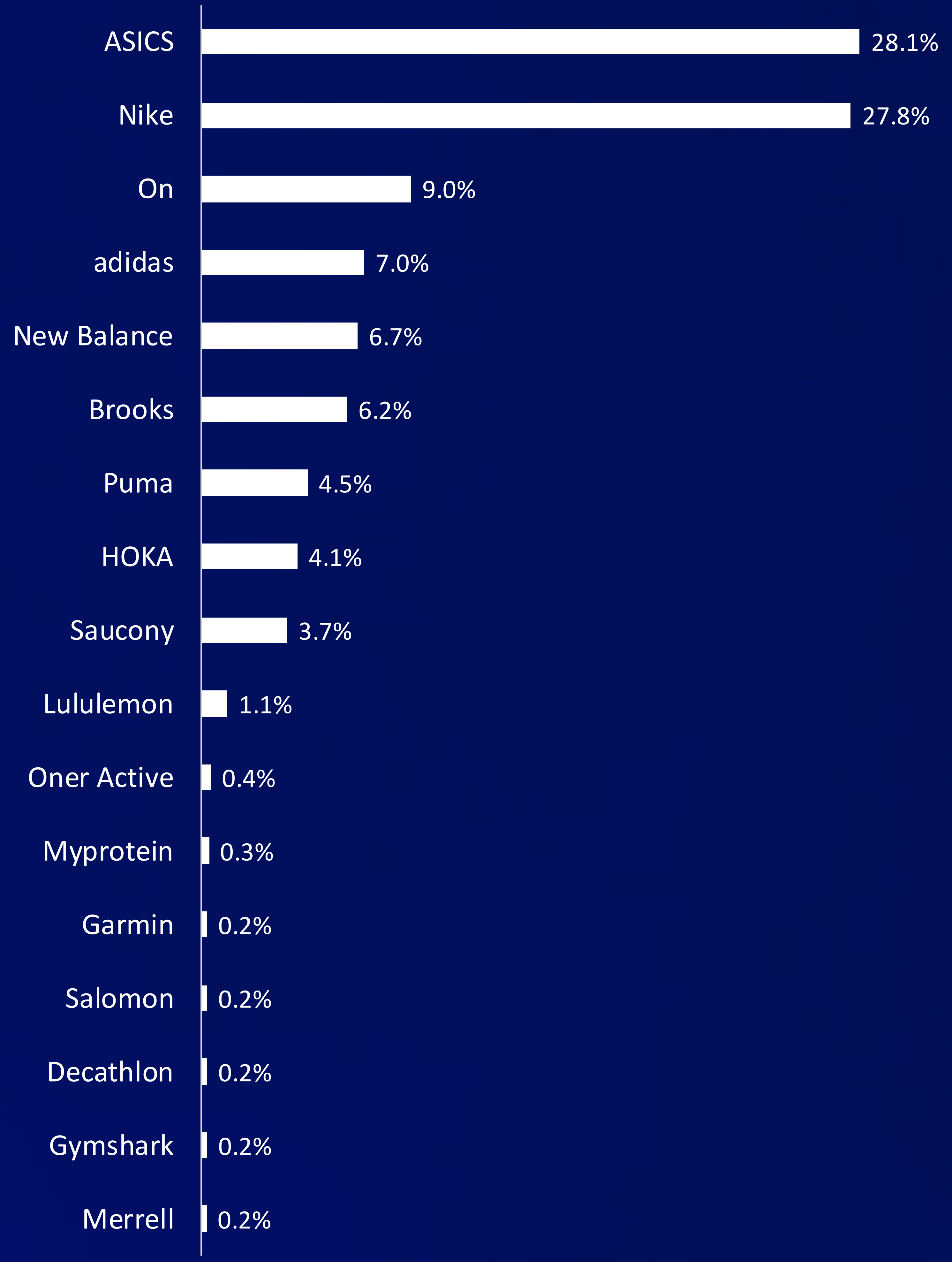
Overperforming brands

Brooks strikes a strong balance between product-led (52%) and brand-led (48%) visibility, driven by searches for their Adrenaline and Glycerin ranges alongside a healthy share of generic brand searches.

Their visibility is strongest in Scotland where they rank third (just behind ASICS) and where product-led visibility peaks at 71%, demonstrating that Scotland is the UK's most product-led market.

Search terms





Google Search Analysis: How People Search Running

Summary

Running is becoming the UK's simplest entry point to fitness

Growth in searches for *running for beginners* and *5k runs near me* across all regions points to strong, ongoing entry-level participation. Running is being embraced as an accessible, local and low-pressure, reflecting a cultural move towards fitness that priorities personal wellbeing over competition.

Runners now shop like tech consumers

Year-tagged searches, e.g. *running shoes 2025* and *best running shoes 2025*, appear consistently across all UK regions, accounting for 15% of searches. This increase in the last 12 months points to a shift in how UK runners filter by model year instead of browsing broad categories and mirrors the way people search for the latest tech releases.

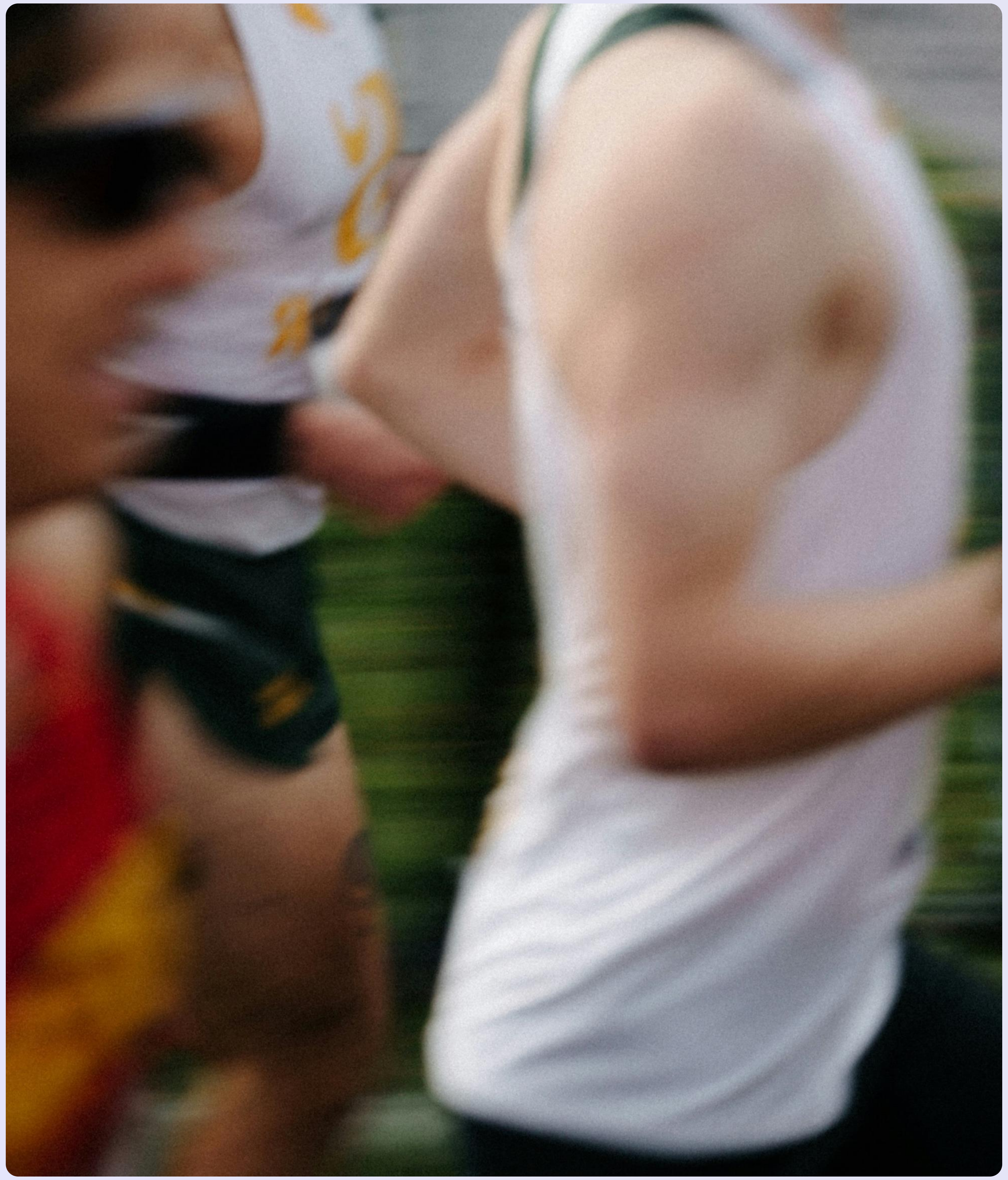
YouTube is now the go-to-platform for product research & purchase decisions

Over 80% of rising product and creator searches are conducted on YouTube, so it has become the UK's go-to decision-making platform. Runners rely on creator tests, reviews and comparisons to judge what's worth buying. This signals a cultural preference for authentic user experiences and trusted voices rather than brand-led marketing.

Creator-educators are replacing traditional coaches

Creator-led searches on YouTube show a substantial collective two-fold increase in the last 12 months for searches like *Ben Is Running*, *Ben Parkes*, *Nick Bester* and *Ashton Hall*. Simultaneously, searches for technique cues, e.g. *proper running form* and *Kipchoge running form*, have witnessed an average +1300% increase. The parallel growth of technique cues and creator–educator searches demonstrates to a shift in how running knowledge is accessed in the UK by emphasising practical, technique-led explanations for everyday learning.

Local Race Pride



What we're seeing

Search behaviour in the UK displays a significant rise of interest in specific regional events, with several races recording some of the largest increases in visibility in the past 12 months. *The Great Scottish Run* and *Auchterarder running festival* appear among the most rapidly rising searches in Scotland; Northern Ireland shows similar patterns with web breakout searches, e.g. *Belfast half marathon 2025*, *Lisburn fun run*; in England, *Bedford running festival* searches are up +110%. All these are examples of event-led intent, not casual browsing.

This pattern aligns with the growing popularity of searches for *running for beginners* and *5k runs near me* in every region. Such trends indicate that runners are opting for easily attainable milestones (e.g. local races), using named events as manageable goals rather than chasing high-pressure, prestige races.

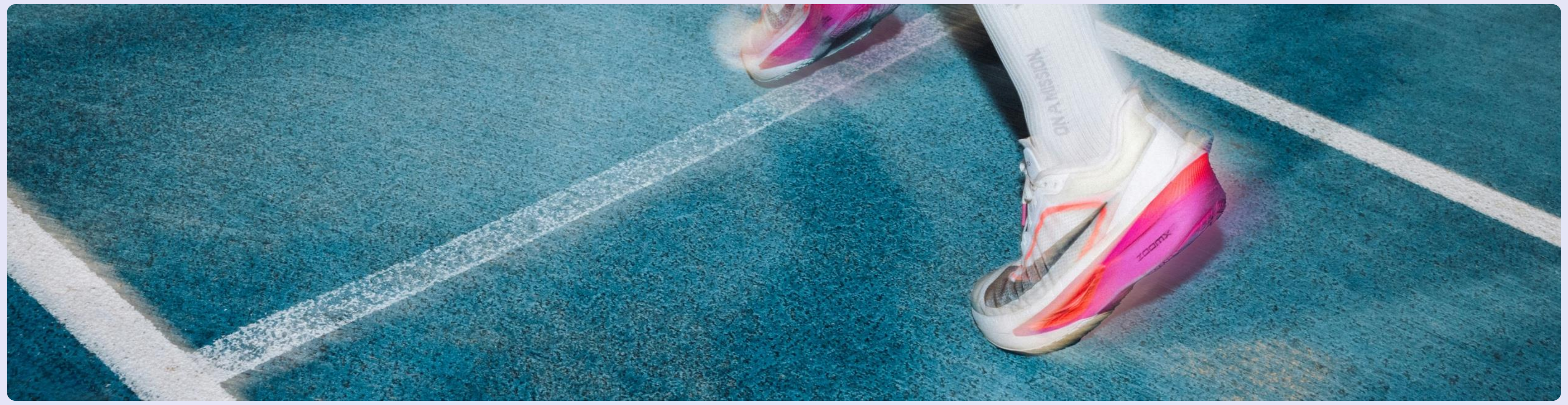
In addition to web searches, local races are being actively consumed on YouTube through course previews, training diaries and race-day vlogs, illustrating how regional events exist as ongoing content as well as one-day experiences.

Why it matters

Regional events are becoming practical entry points for participation, especially for runners seeking accessible, close-to-home milestones. Brands can enhance their value by supporting race preparation; they can provide straightforward city-specific training guides, activate community runs and create race-weekend touchpoints that help runners feel equipped for their chosen event. By aligning with these everyday, achievable goals, brands can position themselves closer to the runners and how they plan and participate in races.

Year-tagged Trends

What we're seeing



Search behaviour in all UK regions suggests a clear lift in year-tagged terms, e.g. *running shoes 2025*, *best running shoes 2025*. These searches have grown faster than generic queries, signalling that many runners are beginning their product research by looking for the newest version rather than browsing broader categories, e.g. *running shoes*. This shift towards model-year filtering mirrors how people track and compare tech releases.

Runners use model-year tags as their initial filter, looking for the latest editions of popular shoes instead of scanning the entire category. This behaviour is evident across regions and platforms (web, YouTube), suggesting that model cycles are becoming an organising principle for how runners perceive the footwear landscape. The same version-first mindset is apparent in how runners compare shoes in creator reviews and comment discussions, further reinforcing that annual updates influences the way choices are taken.

The model-year mindset is reinforced in the creator review comment section, under The Top Shoes I'm Running In So Far in 2025. Here, discussion fluctuates between general opinions and comparisons between editions and includes topics such as:

- durability (top topic, when bounce fades, mileage ranges)
- fit guidance by profile (wide feet, heavy runners, forefoot strikers, stability needs)
- category clarity (daily vs long run vs recovery vs speed vs race)
- price tiers & value picks (best under £100, best outlet buys, best value for performance)
- problem checklists (known issues per model so buyers understand any risks before they buy)

Why it matters

As runners filter footwear through yearly editions, brands need to adjust how they present product updates and guide choices. This can be done in various ways.

1. **Year-tagged searches position the newest edition as the main entry point for discovery.** When runners search for terms like *running shoes 2025*, the model year becomes their frame of reference, so brands must make version updates easily understandable.

1. **Comparison is the primary filter for decision-making.** In review spaces, runners concentrate on edition-to-edition differences, e.g. durability over mileage, changes in fit, updated foams, and whether an upgrade is warranted. Brands that articulate these distinctions minimise confusion and help runners make a quick choice.

2. **Many decisions are made before someone reaches a website or store.** Runners evaluate footwear the way people assess new tech: they seek the latest model, want to know what's different about them, and need confirmation they match their pace and distance requirements. Clear guidance at the point of search determines whether they progress to purchase.

3. **Physical stores are necessary for addressing those questions that runners cannot find the answers to online.** The focus has moved from simply colour choice to whether a shoe is suitable for gait, pace or weekly mileage. Stores that prioritise try-ons, simple movement checks and informed advice are where runners can confirm and personalise their decisions, rather than where discovery begins.

Technique Takes Over

What we're seeing

Technique-focused searches have accelerated sharply across the UK, signalling a shift from learning how to start running towards learning how to run better. Among the fastest-growing technique terms of the year are breakout YouTube searches for *proper running form* and *running* (up over twenty-fold in England and with similar growth across the UK).

Warm-up and recovery searches show the same pattern of rapid expansion. *Warm-up before running* has climbed significantly across all nations, while stretching queries, e.g. *stretching after running* and *post-run stretch*, have sustained breakout growth over a five-year period. Cadence is similarly moving into mainstream behaviour, with terms like *what is cadence in running?* and *cadence meaning in running* rising strongly in Scotland and Wales.

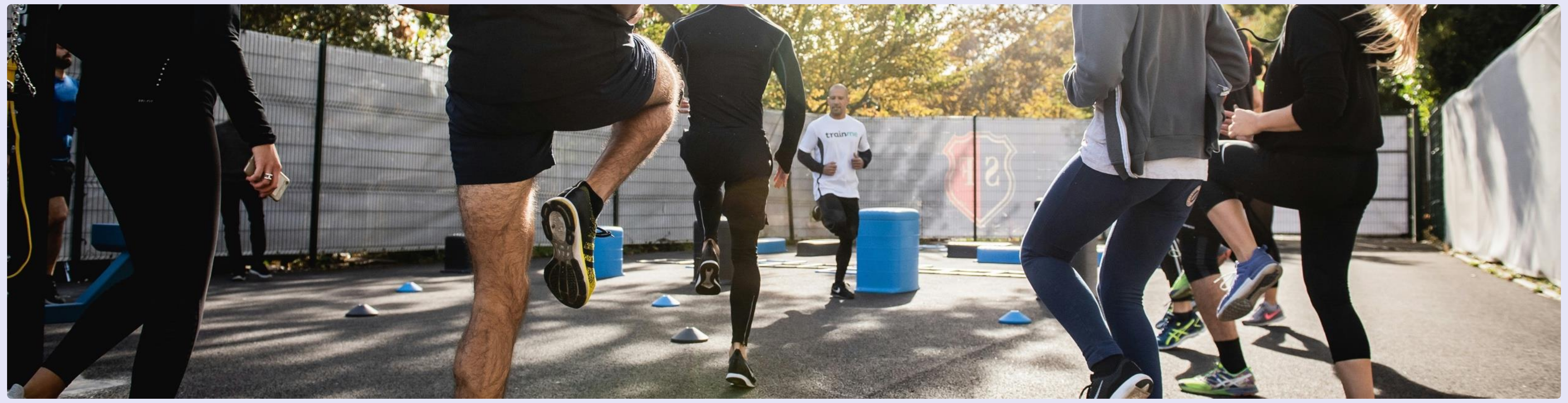
Taken together, these patterns indicate how technique is becoming a full routine that spans pre-run preparation, mid-run cues and post-run resets. Technique is no longer a niche interest but a growing part of the way runners structure their everyday practise.

Why it matters

Technique is being learned through short, creator-led walkthroughs on YouTube as runners search for copyable cues on form, cadence and warm-ups rather than dense explanations. Brands can add real value by offering simple, actionable technique guidance that creators can interpret and runners can apply immediately – making products like shoes, insoles and wearables feel intrinsically connected to movement improvement rather than being seen as a mere pitch.

Creator Coaches

What we're seeing



UK running culture has seen a noticeable rise in the influence of creator-educators. Figures such as Ben Is Running, Ben Parkes, Nick Bester and Ashton Hall have become central voices in how runners encounter training ideas, form cues and day-to-day running advice – doubling over the past year. Their presence is driven largely by YouTube, where their instructional videos have become increasingly visible across UK viewing and search behaviour.

Their content focuses on the same themes that have gained visibility in search behaviour – running form, pacing, cadence and efficient movement – creating a clear link between rising technique interest and the growing influence of creators.

This parallel growth reflects a shift in how running knowledge circulates in the UK. Instructional, experience-led guidance delivered by identifiable creators is becoming a more visible part of the learning environment, sitting alongside more formal sources and shaping how runners pick up technique and training insights.

Global outlook

Creator-educators are influential interpreters of running knowledge in several global markets.

In **Brazil**, creator-led gear reviews are a key influence on purchase decisions, with runners relying on long-form breakdowns to compare super-shoe options and everyday trainers.

In **Germany**, relatable mid-pack creators shape how runners learn through accessible explainer-style guidance that covers kit lists, pacing cues and foundational technique.

In **France**, home-grown YouTube channels act as informal coaches by offering drills, kit tests and race-day walkthroughs. These sit closer to everyday training than traditional brand content.

Why it matters

With creators now driving much of the instruction in running, brands must rethink creator partnerships by moving past promos, supplying deeper insights, and collaborating on the content runners learn from, leveraging the following changes.

1. **Runners first encounter technique advice through creators**. Creators such as Ben Parkes and The Running Channel have seen one of the sharpest lifts (*risin"* search) in search interest this past year, and their videos now surface first for terms like *running cadence* and *running form*, pointing to a strong awareness associated with running technique. Brands that engage creators only for reviews or promos miss the opportunity to embed their own training philosophy, innovation story or performance frameworks into the place where learning occurs.

2. **The creators gaining traction are those who explain running rather than relying on first impressions or haul-style content**. Brands that supply creators with clearer product science, technique cues or coaching insights give them richer educational material to use. That credibility reflects on the brand.

3. **Creators fill an instructional gap that brands rarely occupy directly**. This is demonstrated through video walk-throughs of drills, cadence breakdowns, pace calculators or progression guides. There is also room for brands to co-develop explainers, drills, progression guides or efficiency frameworks for creators to interpret in their own style.

4. **Brands anchored solely in aesthetic or lifestyle collaborations risk missing the behavioural shift**. Creators, e.g. Ben Is Running, Ben Parkes, Nick Bester and Ashton Hall, are seeing increased search interest because they translate running technique into clear, usable guidance. Supporting these voices is now critical for relevance.

Emerging signal: Entertainment-led Kids’ Memory Building

What we’re seeing

Search behaviour shows rising demand for family-friendly movement content shaped by children’s entertainment formats. Breakout searches, e.g. *run the red carpet gonoodle* in Scotland and *encanto run* across the UK, suggest that songs, characters and simple routines are drawing children into movement through play rather than via structured sport. The content is light, musical and repeatable, making it an easy entry point for children who might otherwise not engage in running or physical activity.

This pattern indicates a broader shift, too. Families are turning to playful, entertainment-based movement to get children active in short bursts throughout the day. For many kids, these routines are becoming the moments where movement feels fun, familiar and unintimidating.

Why it matters

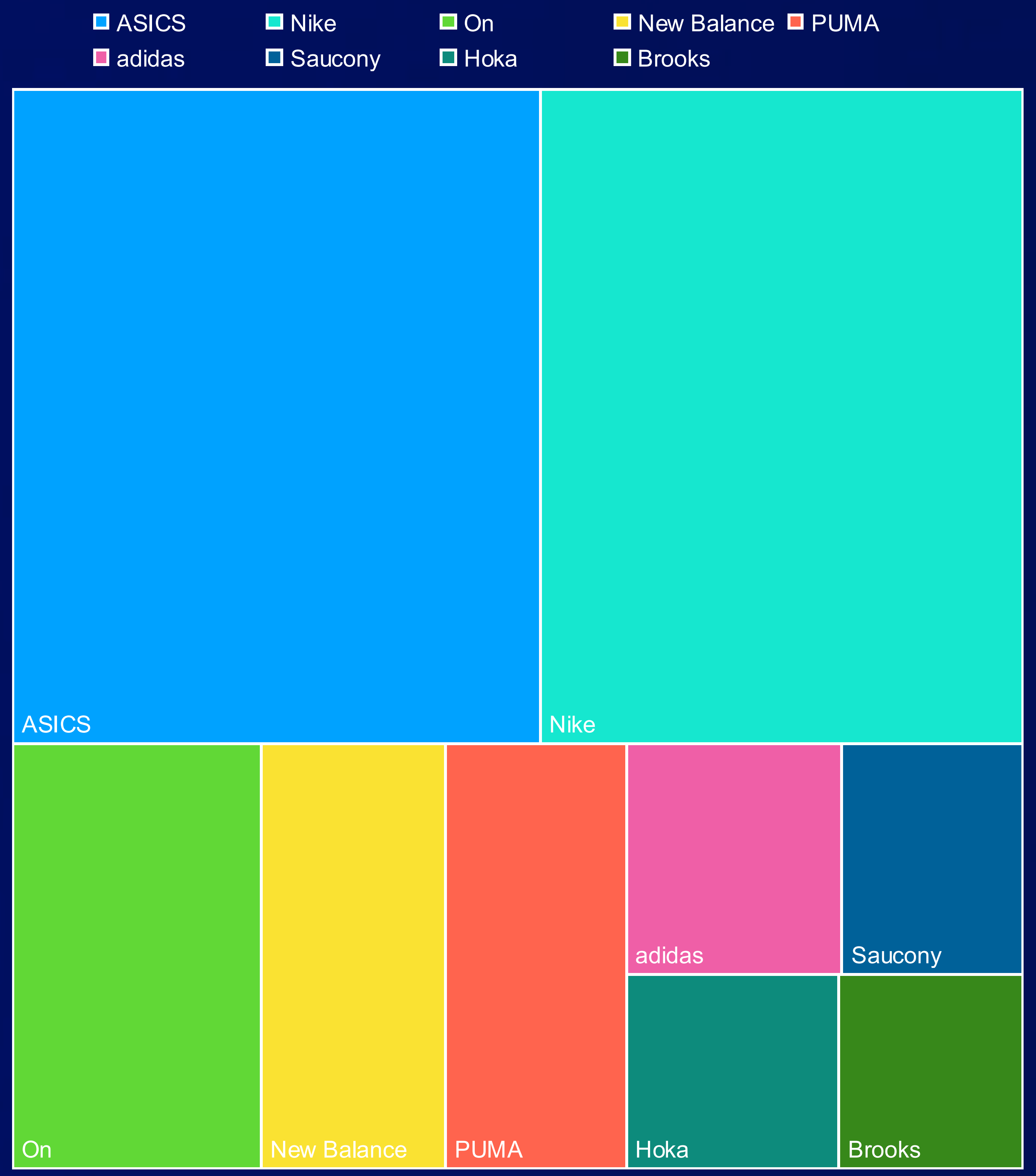
When movement feels like play, children return to it without needing encouragement or structure. Familiar songs, characters and repeatable steps help build confidence and turn short bursts of activity into something children genuinely enjoy. This creates a foundation for positive associations with being active long before “running” becomes a formal skill. Parents also gravitate towards routines that are simple, safe and easy to follow at home or in school settings. Content that gives families a quick, upbeat way to move together fits naturally into everyday life, making activity feel like shared moments rather than arduous tasks.

Differences in Running Culture by Nation

England

Brand visibility

The largest running market in the UK is dominated by the two leaders – ASICS and Nike, whose combined visibility accounts for 61% (the highest of all UK regions). The result? A fragmented field where other brands must compete for attention.



Top performers

ASICS holds 32% visibility, narrowly ahead of Nike at 29% – representing the tightest margin between the two leading brands in the UK.

Their routes to visibility take different approaches:

- **ASICS** is 64% product-led, driven by its Novablast shoe
- **Nike** is 62% brand-led, attracting runners through the broader appeal of its brand name

This contrast shows how the diverse behaviours of UK runners shape the different pathways through which these two brands achieve visibility.

Overperforming brands

Among the fragmented mid-table, On stands out with 10% visibility to rank #3, its strongest position in any UK region and fueled entirely by brand name searches.

In fact, most other brands gain visibility primarily through brand-led searches, with the exceptions of HOKA and Brooks, which show growing interest in the *HOKA Mach 6* and *Brooks Adrenaline* models.

adidas has 5% visibility in England, comparatively lower than its performance in other UK regions where visibility averages at 10%.

Search terms

England:
A Market That Treats Running Like Consumer Tech

What we're seeing

Running culture in England now mirrors consumer tech behaviour. Runners tend to search by year and version rather than broad category, to compare features before committing, and to rely on YouTube in the same way they would for phones or laptops. Searches like *best running shoes 2025* reflect a culture built around comparison.

Such behaviour extends into learning. Searches for *Running Form* are up +2550% in England over the past year, alongside a rising interest in warm-ups and pacing. YouTube has become both a platform for learning and a channel for discovery, with breakout searches for creators like *Ben Parkes* and *Nick Bester* reinforcing the crucial role they play in shaping how runners explore and interpret training advice.

Why it matters

Running in England should be viewed as the first-mover market for new products and innovative storytelling. Runners expect clear explanations of what has changed, why it matters and how a model fits into a running routine. Brands launching in England will benefit from strategic partnerships with creators, early seeding of new models, and search strategies focused on year-tagged queries.

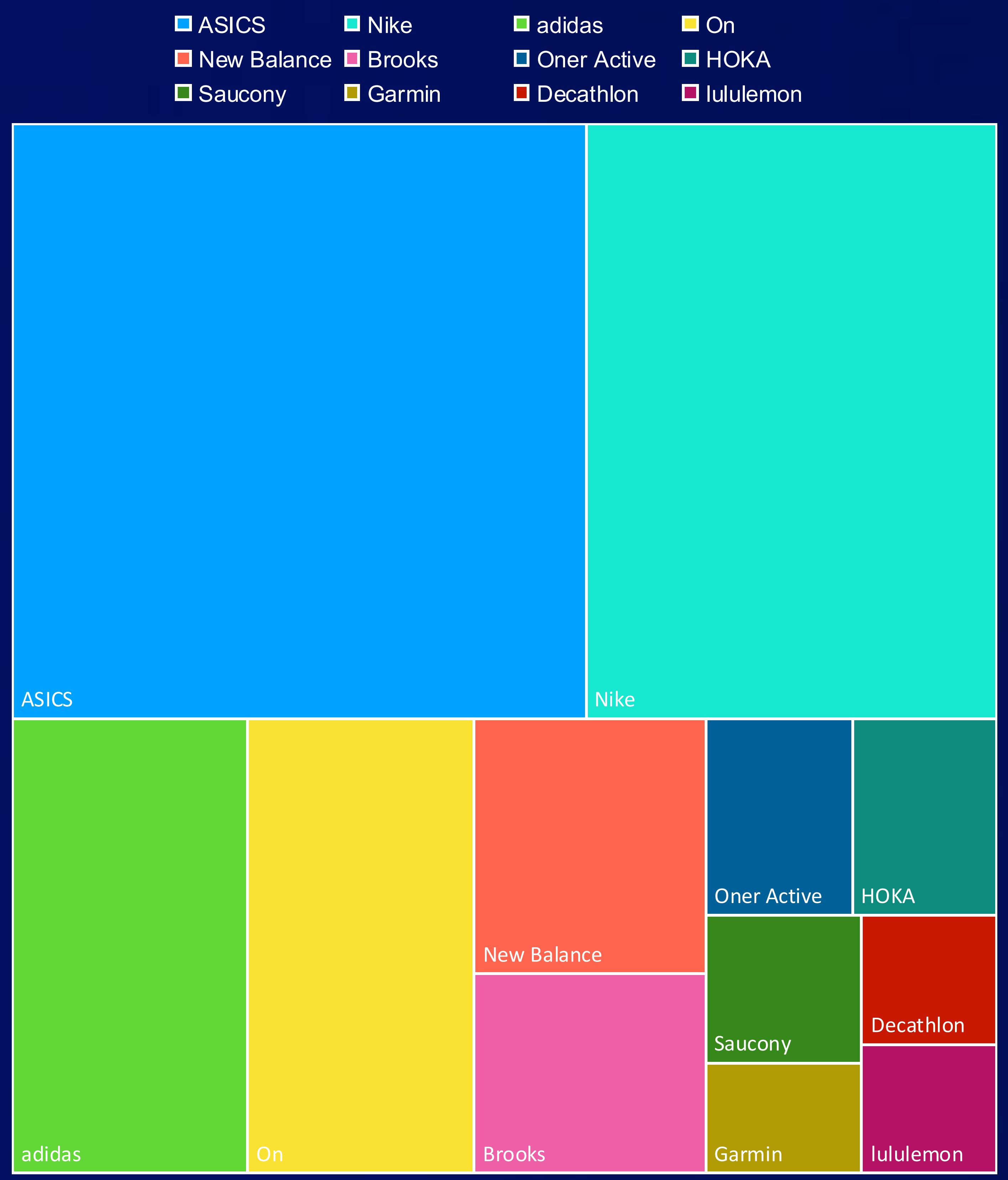
This market is highly receptive to detailed, transparent product communication that treats runners as informed consumers rather than general fitness buyers.

Wales

Brand visibility

Wales is the most evenly balanced region in the UK between brand-led (56%) and product-led (44%) visibility. Nike and adidas mirrored this even split, while ASICS remained mostly product-led.

This suggests early signs of a shift toward product-focused searches in Wales, consistent with runners moving beyond the basics and having more ambitious goals.



Top performers

ASICS has its highest share of brand visibility in Wales (33%), driven by three flagship products – the Novablast and Superblast ranges and the Gel-Kayano – the latter aimed at long-distance runners, reinforcing that product-led visibility comes from informed, committed runners.

adidas also records its highest visibility in Wales, the only UK region where its visibility exceeds 10%. *The Boston 12*, aimed at mid- to long-distance runners, further supports the pattern of informed, performance-focused searches.

Overperforming brands

On recorded 10% visibility in Wales – the highest share in any UK region, slightly ahead of England and driven entirely by brand-name searches.

Garmin appears here with 2% visibility thanks to its *Forerunner 265* running smartwatch – Wales was the only region where running accessories ranked among the top searches.

There is clear interest among runners in Wales for tools like the *Forerunner 265* to track and improve their running, alongside interest in specific shoe models for mid- to long-distance training.

Search terms

Wales:
A Market Moving from Confidence-building to Exploration

What we’re seeing

Search interest in Wales demonstrates a clear pattern of runners progressing from basic knowledge to more ambitious goals. Searches for *couch to 5k* (breakout) and *cadence meaning in running* (+180%) reflect a large audience seeking structure, technique and reassurance. At the same time, rising interest in *ultra running documentaries* (breakout) and trail-oriented kit like head torches (+100%) signals growing curiosity for longer distances and off-road experiences.

This combination of practical learning and adventure-led content suggests that Wales has evolved from a “getting started” market into one where runners want both instruction and inspiration. A comparison over the last five years reveals a significant shift towards narrative-driven exploration and a desire to try new terrain or different formats.

Why it matters

Runners in Wales appreciate brands that help them build confidence and encourage them to be more ambitious. Educational content about warm-ups, pacing and form should sit alongside creative material that presents trail running or ultras as accessible rather than exclusive.

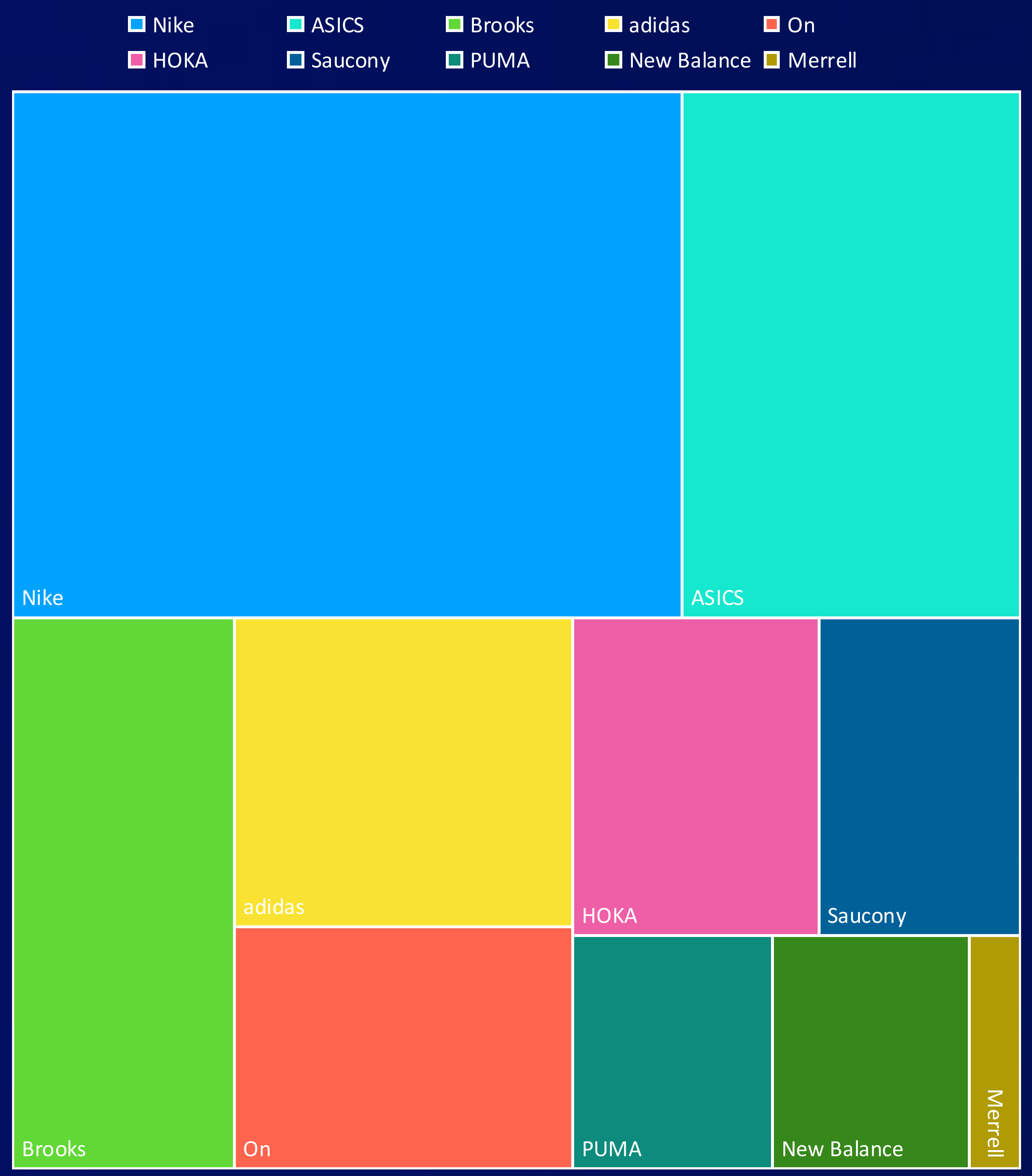
Brands gain the most traction in Wales when they act as supportive guides, helping individuals bridge the gap between everyday running and the sense of discovery that comes with exploring new environments.

Scotland

Brand visibility

Scotland stands out for two reasons as the only UK region where:
1. **product-led visibility exceeds brand-led**
2. **Nike beats ASICS to the #1 spot**

Indicating a market where performance credibility outweighs brand reputation.



Top performers

Nike secured the #1 spot, with 32% visibility – considerably higher than ASICS at 16%, despite ASICS being ahead in every other region.

Scotland has the most product-led market in the UK and it's the only region where this is also the true for Nike – with 63% of visibility driven by flagship models such as the Vomero, Zoom Fly and Pegasus. This model-first behaviour sits alongside rising interest in major road events like the Great Scottish Run, indicating that Scottish runners are especially focused on road-running footwear when researching what to buy.

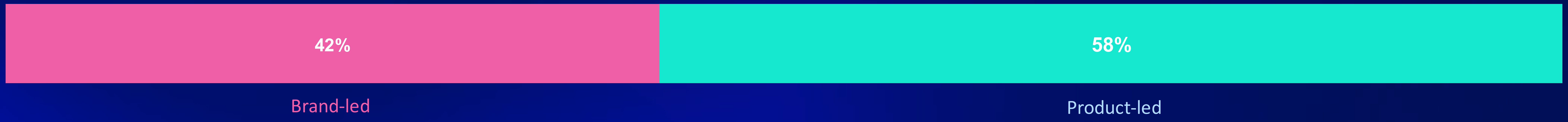
Even with fewer generic brand name searches – where Nike wins in other regions – Nike's strong product interest manages to drive a substantial share of brand visibility in Scotland.

Overperforming brands

Brooks ranked #3 and achieved its highest brand visibility (11%) across all UK regions. Being 71% product-led, its visibility is driven mainly by road models such as the Adrenaline GTS 24 and Glycerin Max.

Brooks' wider reputation for durability and stability across mixed terrain, as well as interest in other brands' terrain-specific gear, e.g. *HOKA Speedgoat 6*, strengthens the appeal for performance-focused, terrain-conscious runners in Scotland.

Search terms



Scotland:

A Running Culture Anchored in Place, Community & Terrain

What we're seeing

Search behaviour in Scotland reveals a running culture closely connected to local events and the region's challenging landscapes. Rising interest in races, e.g. *Great Scottish Run* (breakout), *Edinburgh Marathon* (+40%), along with searches for specific clubs, e.g. *Carnethy Hill Running Club* (+110%), shows that participation in running events is shaped by their physical availability. In other words, if you create an event, people will come.

Moreover, the presence of terrain-specific gear terms, e.g. *HOKA Speedgoat 5* (+1050% over 5 years) and *HOKA Speedgoat 6* (+110% over last 12 months), suggests that Scottish runners actively prepare for the challenge of hills, mud and inclement weather. Compared with the five-year overview, Scotland has clearly shifted from broad training interest to more grounded, place-specific running behaviour that reflects its geography and club structure.

Why it matters

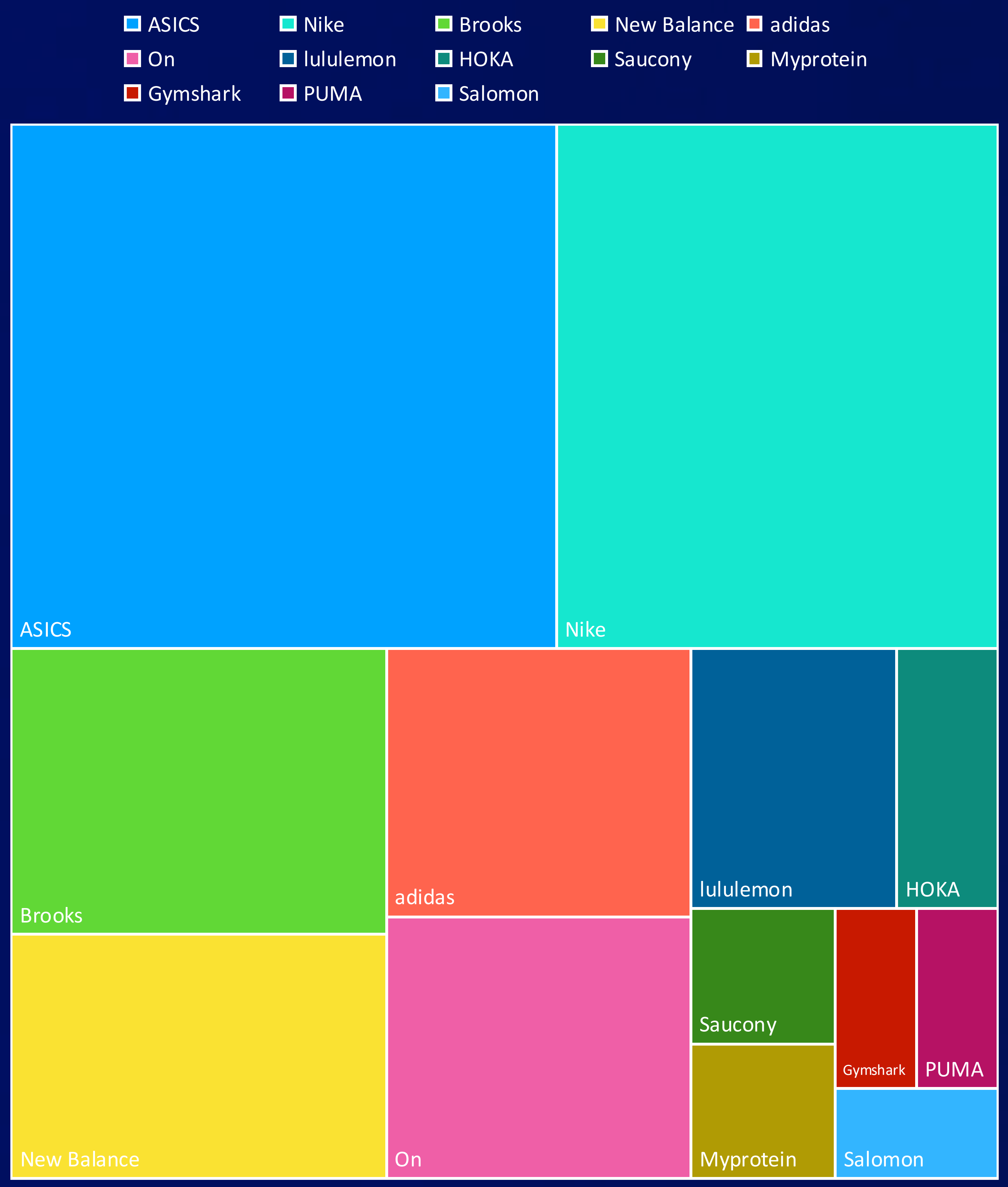
Brands should engage in the Scottish market by focusing on authenticity and community involvement. Interest in flagship road models gives Nike a strong foothold in this region, while rising searches for trail-specific products show that runners are paying attention to both road efficiency and off-road conditions. This dual orientation means Scottish runners expect products that feel grounded in the terrain they actually use.

Campaigns that connect to local routes, weather and training environments will be more effective than broad national messaging. Race partnerships, club-led initiatives and community-focused content help brands show they understand how people run in Scotland. Product communication should speak directly to grip, stability and protection, making an explicit link between footwear choices and the mixed road–trail conditions Scottish runners navigate year-round.

Northern Ireland

Brand visibility

Northern Ireland is the most brand-led region in the UK – with 64% of visibility coming from brand name searches. It also has the widest range of top brands, including fitness and gym-adjacent brands, indicating a wider hybrid approach to running.



Top performers

ASICS ranked #1 for brand visibility, but while Northern Ireland is the most brand-led UK region, it is actually the market where ASICS was the most product-led (77%) – driven once again by the *Novablast* shoe.

Other leading brands in the region (Nike, New Balance, Adidas, On) remain largely brand-led, with high volume of searches for brand names and product categories that consumers associate with them (e.g. *Nike running shoes*).

Overperforming brands

Myprotein (2%) and Gymshark (2%) gained visibility because they tap into the region's hybrid fitness culture. Their appearance reflects how runners here blend strength training, gym routines and general fitness goals with running.

This supports the cultural insight that the region is driven by body-focused training and functional performance rather than traditional running.

Search terms

Northern Ireland:
The UK's Most Hybrid Strength-running Market

What we're seeing

Northern Ireland stands apart for the way its running landscape overlaps with gym culture and body-focused training. Search behaviour indicates rising interest in *Gymshark* (+50%), *Myprotein* (+100%) as well as breakout searches for *strength training*, *Belfast marathon 2025* and *Lisburn fun run*. This trend suggests that running is seen as part of a broader fitness and physique regime rather than a standalone activity. The breakout presence of injury and recovery terms, e.g. *calf pain*, reinforces the intensity and mixed training load typical of hybrid athletes.

Over the past five years, there has been a significant shift away from a focus on road-running towards a culture in which runners treat strength, appearance and performance as interconnected.

Why it matters

Brands should position running as an integral component of a fitness lifestyle in Northern Ireland. Campaigns that combine running with conditioning, mobility and strength will resonate more than those focused on single-discipline narratives. Collaborating with gym-first creators and promoting products that emphasise durability, stability and cross-training suitability will land strongly.

Moreover, tying event participation to broader fitness goals will help brands connect more deeply with this hybrid-minded audience.

Social Listening: Key Trends in Running Conversations on Social Media

How running influencers gain traction on Social Media

Long-distance challenges

The most engaging content in the UK over the past year has centred around long-distance challenges. One notable example is the 100 KM Cycling vs 30 KM Running challenge (a two-creator collaboration), which generated 3.8 million engagements across two posts.

Comments such as "I don't like running or cycling, but I watched the whole video" illustrate how these challenges attract wide-ranging interest, making long-distance running an accessible way for brands to connect with a more extensive audience.

Social media moments, unlike search-driven content, emphasise visually engaging, entertaining, challenge-driven narratives. A higher percentage of viewers are casual ones rather than serious runners, which makes these challenges particularly effective for building brand awareness and introducing entry-level products to a broader audience.

Empowering women's running

Many engaging posts – focused on the history of women's running and the obstacles that women face outdoors – performed exceptionally well. The core audience for these topics is primarily women runners and individuals passionate about women's rights. However, some posts during women's campaigns have sparked adverse reactions, underscoring the need for brands to be cautious in their approach.

Focusing on women's running and the barriers they encounter creates a strong connection for brands targeting female audiences. Research indicates that women are more likely to trust and purchase from brands that support female empowerment and equality. Ads with feminist themes increase brand trust and purchase intent among women who share these values.

Nevertheless, brands must go beyond slogans and demonstrate real action. By authentically supporting women's rights, they can build long-term trust and engagement, directly influencing sales.

Cross-cultural influence

Top mentions highlight how running has become intertwined with music, fashion, football and general lifestyle. British GQ covering Harry Styles' Berlin Marathon finish and Manchester United's collaboration with creator Sam Matthew for an ultra-marathon fundraiser are just two examples. These moments firmly establish running not only as a sport but also as a powerful bridge between different cultural worlds.

When brands align themselves with these cross-cultural moments, they forge much deeper connections with diverse audiences. When linking running to cultural icons and movements, they can engage consumers far beyond the typical athlete community. Brands can partner with music streaming platforms and artists, for example, to curate unique running specific playlists.

This strategic approach offers fresh opportunities for brands to connect with audiences who may not identify with traditional sports but are easily drawn to running through music, fashion or lifestyle affiliations.

Celebrating older athletes

Content featuring older runners performs well regardless of their specific performance results in major events like the London Marathon. The high engagement stems directly from the powerful story of their lifelong running journeys. Such content removes technical barriers and invites a more inclusive audience in through its emotional appeal. It connects with a shared ideal: staying active, independent and healthy for as long as possible.

If brands sponsor older athletes and events (e.g. the World Masters Games), they create a unique opportunity to build trust and loyalty. The inner circle of participants, families and volunteers forms immediate emotional depth, while the wider audience connects through aspiration rather than comparison.

Consistently supporting these journeys allows brands to build a credible human story around longevity and wellbeing.

How People Mention Running Influencers on Social Media*

Athlete-led conversations

Elite athletes account for 45% of influencer mentions and are central to conversations about running. They often focus on competition and achievements, e.g. Eilish McColgan's marathon debut, Alex Yee's breakthrough performances.

Mentions can evoke a sense of national pride as athletes represent Team GB on the global stage. Influencers and their followers also describe elite athletes as role models and use them as sources of inspiration or training benchmarks.

Why it matters

Elite athletes may be followed as national icons and are more commonly featured in big brand campaigns than of influencer content. Nevertheless, brands can still apply influencer strategies by presenting athletes in ways that feel personal and actionable – e.g. training tips, recovery routines, behind-the-scenes glimpses – to bridge the gap between their elite status and their community connections.

Crews, clubs & cheering culture

Influencers are positioned as community leaders, often associated with run crews and clubs. Mentions of groups like *Run Dem Crew* and *Mafia Moves* (and general run club activities) are popular.

Influencers frequently invite their followers to participate in shakeout runs or pre-race meetups, reinforcing their importance to the community culture.

Why it matters

Crews and local running clubs demonstrate how influence translates offline. Partnering with them embeds brands into everyday running culture by delivering consistent community exposure that traditional campaigns cannot necessarily reach.

Causes & charity running

Charity and cause-led running is a smaller but high-impact theme in influencer mentions. Influencers who run for health charities, cancer support, mental health, or NHS-related causes are celebrated, and their posts often include fundraising links and CTAs, with some initiatives created directly by them.

Personal connections to family or community causes make these mentions especially powerful.

Why it matters

When posts include charity links, they are more authentic and emotive. Campaigns that align with causes can cut through commercial noise and generate higher trust, positioning brands as purpose-driven rather than merely transactional.

Big races & marathon culture

Marathons dominate running culture, with 16% of the top 1,000 engaging posts making them the most culturally visible running format in the dataset.

The London Marathon drives the conversation by bringing together the entire running community. Content centres around splits, PBs, weather battles, cheering crowds and the emotions of finishing. Influencers appear not just as participants but as storytellers who document build-up, race and aftermath.

Why it matters

Few other formats can match the cultural scale of marathons, which offer broader reach and stronger emotional pull in a single event than, for example, trail running. Sponsoring a marathon is the most efficient way for brands to generate mass aware through stories that go beyond results, from first-time finishers to charity runs and crowd emotion.

Product & brand mentions

Brands feature in 6.5% of the top 1,000 most engaging posts, with Nike ranked #1.

These mentions primarily focus on race and campaign moments (most), product reviews during training, and sponsorship or corporate collaborations. Unlike other themes, the majority of brand mentions are from media influencers, brands and sellers, e.g. Pro Direct Running, rather than from fans.

Why it matters

Brands want their products to be seen, but how they present them is crucial. Athletes offer reach while creators build community and trust. Too many paid reviews or obvious ads, however, can quickly diminish impact. The strongest visibility comes when products appear organically: the key is to balance presence with restraint to maintain trust.

*This analysis is based on the top 1,000 most engaging social media posts, focusing on how running influencers and creators have been mentioned over the last 12 months.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Redtorch

An independent Research & Creative Agency
dedicated to making sport more relevant.

hello@redtorch.sport
www.redtorch.sport

Unit 37, 1st Floor
Tileyard Studios
Tileyard Road
London, N7 9AH

Maison du Sport
International
Avenue de Rhodanie
54 1007 Lausanne
Switzerland