

Gen Z in the Omnichannel Era: Rethinking Consumer Behavior for Sustainable Business Success

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ABSTRACT: The emergence of the new generation of consumers (born 1997-2012) has transformed the principles of consumer behavior in the world, as the world has switched to the sphere of a digitally native and socially aware generation. Gen Z is projected to transform the concept of retail, marketing, and brand-consumer interaction in the next decade due to the estimated spending capacity of \$12 trillion by 2030 (NASSCOM, n.d.). In contrast to earlier generations, Gen Z prioritizes authenticity, sustainability, transparency, and personalization, with a high emphasis on wellness and social responsibility. This research paper discusses the defining features of Gen Z consumers, the trends that determine the consumption pattern, and the implications for businesses in any industry. Based on the practitioner experience and scholarly opinion, the paper points out the need to adopt digital nimbleness, omnichannel approaches, and purposeful practices by businesses to create loyalty in this extremely volatile consumer population. The results highlight the importance of the fact that the brands that do not adjust to the demands of Gen Z are at risk of becoming irrelevant in a highly competitive landscape that prioritizes experience in the market.

KEYWORDS: Gen Z, Omnichannel, Digital transformation, Consumer behavior

I. INTRODUCTION

The global marketplace is experiencing a profound transformation driven by demographic shifts, technological innovations, and evolving consumer expectations. Among these changes, the growing influence of Generation Z (Gen Z) stands out as one of the most disruptive forces in contemporary marketing and consumer behavior. Gen Z, typically defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents the first fully digital-native generation (Annie E. Casey Foundation, n.d.). Unlike Millennials, who witnessed the rise of the internet and mobile technologies, Gen Z has been immersed in a hyper-connected, social media-dominated environment from birth.

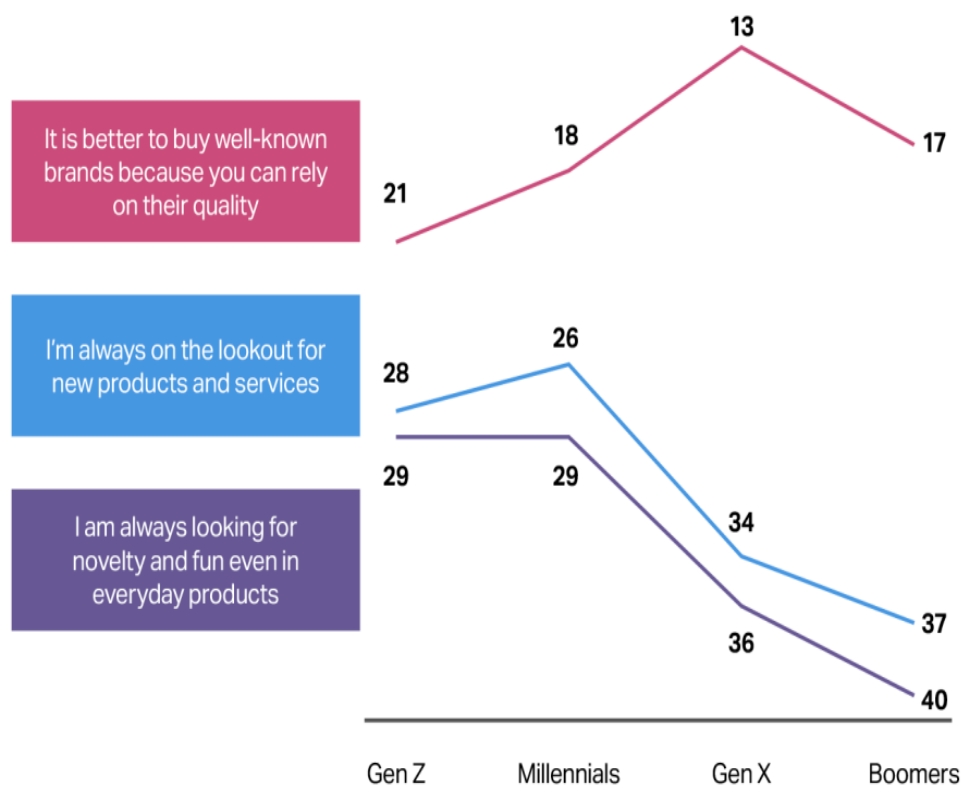
The international market is in the midst of an overhaul that is being initiated by population changes, technological changes, and changing consumer demands. The increased prominence of Generation Z (Gen Z) represents one of the most disruptive marketing and consumer behaviour phenomena today. Gen Z, the roughly defined group of people who are born between 1997 and 2012, is the first entirely digital-native generation (Annie E. Casey Foundation, n.d.). Gen Z has been born into a hyper-connected and social media-dominated world, unlike Millennials, who experienced the emergence of the internet and mobile technologies.

By the year 2030, the spending power of Gen Z is estimated to be close to \$12 trillion, and this would make them one of the most powerful consumer groups in the global markets (NASSCOM, n.d.). Their consumption

patterns are not only big but also unique with regard to scale. Their expectations extend past functional products; they desire authenticity, sustainability, customization, as well as smooth digital experiences. Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat are social media platforms that have become prominent venues in which Gen Z not only socialize but also find, research, and shop products (NielsenIQ, 2024).

The implication of this generational change is very critical to businesses. FMCG companies, retailers, and service providers should re-strategize to meet the expectations of Gen Z. These clients reward brands that have a sense of transparency, social responsibility, and a sense of purpose practices and shun those that do not meet ethical or environmental standards. Moreover, the blending of digital and offline experiences has strengthened the necessity of omnichannel experiences, combining digital convenience and physical interaction.

This paper aims to examine the defining characteristics of Gen Z consumers, the trends shaping their purchasing behavior, and the broader implications for businesses. It contributes to consumer behavior research by bridging theoretical insights with practical strategies for engaging Gen Z in an era of rapid digital and social change.



Source: GfK Consumer Life Global 2023, E1/J1/M1 (global = 18 countries): *based on a list of 43 attitudinal statements

1.1 Characteristics of Gen Z Consumers

It is generally acknowledged that Generation Z is the first, truly digital-native generation, as it has grown up in an environment dominated by mobile technologies, high-speed internet connections, and social media networks (Annie E. Casey Foundation, n.d.). Gen Z has embraced digital technologies as a part of life, unlike previous generations, who adjust to the new digital technologies. They have a few distinguishing

characteristics that shape their consumer behavior in ways that will not resemble Millennials and Generation Alpha.

1. **Digital Natives and Tech-Savvy:** The purchasing behaviors of Gen Z are supported by their smooth association with technology. They demand efficiency and convenience in online shopping to digital payment systems, and loyalty programs via apps. Social media is a marketplace, and platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat have become more than entertainment destinations since they can also be used as product discovery and shopping platforms (NielsenIQ, 2024).

2. **Sustainability and Social Responsibility:** The tendency towards sustainability and ethical consumption of products is one of the brightest features of Gen Z. They also like brands that show transparency in sourcing, environmentally friendly packaging, and quantifiable attempts to minimize carbon footprints (NASSCOM, n.d.). In addition to the environmental issues, Gen Z ethical issues include social justice, inclusiveness, and human rights.

3. **Authenticity and Transparency:** Gen Z consumers want to see real interaction with brands. They are highly sensitive to performative marketing or greenwashing and need clear communication. Authenticity is not just a message, but also brand purpose, credibility of the leadership, and channel consistency (Francis and Hoefel, 2018).

4. **Social Media Impact:** Social networks contribute to the consumer experience at Gen Z in a two-fold way: as a source of social validation and providing decision-making. Online reviews and influencer recommendations, as well as peer-generated content, have a significant effect on buying behavior (Fromm & Read, 2018).

5. **Preference Personalization:** Gen Z people prefer to have personalized shopping experiences. They react well to the suggestions based on their browsing records, lifestyles, and values. Recommendations provided by AI, and product options tailored to the individual or a game-based loyalty program are a strong appeal to this demographic (NielsenIQ, 2024).

6. **Quality Consciousness:** Gen Z has been stereotyped as price-conscious; however, studies have shown that they will focus more on quality rather than cost on the products that satisfy their values.

7. **Social and Political Awareness:** In addition to consumerism, Gen Z is a part of social movements in climate action, racial equity, gender inclusivity, and mental health awareness (Annie E. Casey Foundation, n.d.).

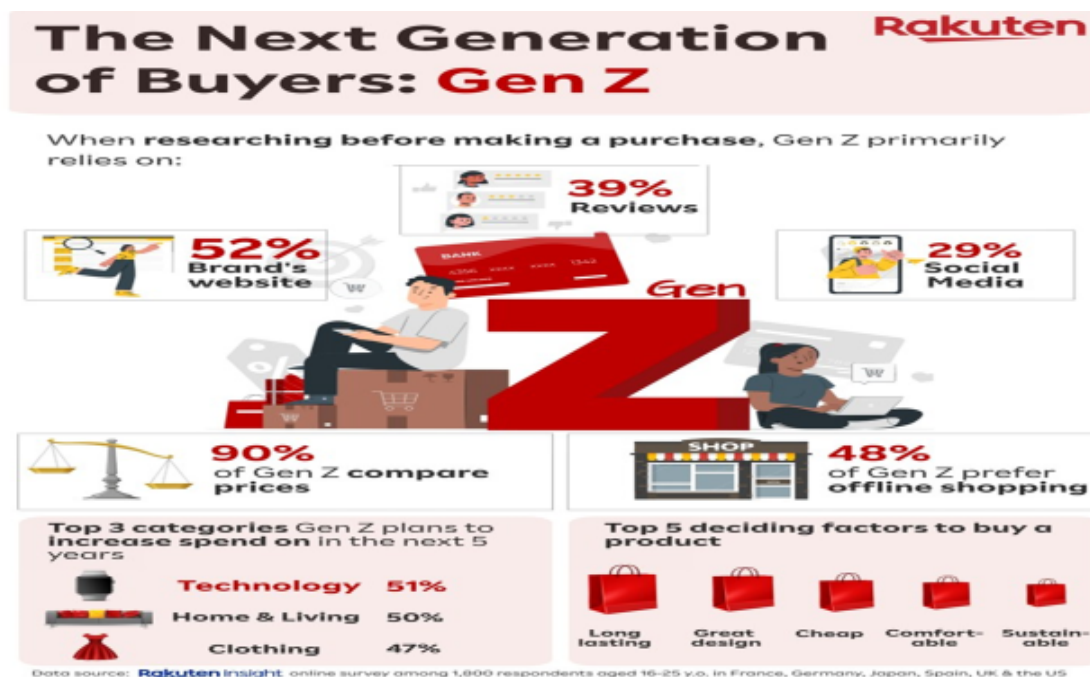
8. **Anthropation of Smooth Digital Experiences:** The one-click purchasing, same-day delivery, and the app-to-store integration are perceived as the standard expectations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The research on Generation Z (Gen Z, born around 1997/2012) has been drawing more and more attention from academic and practitioner research due to their rising purchasing power and their unique consumer characteristics. It is estimated that Gen Z will spend almost 12 trillion in the world by 2030, which makes them one of the most influential consumer groups (NASSCOM, n.d.). The synthesis of the literature review presents the major findings that cut across the themes, such as digital nativity, sustainability, personalization, immersive technologies, heterogeneity, and methodological advances.

2.1 Gen Z characteristics



Generation Z is generally defined as people born after the middle of the 1990s to early 2010s and can be characterized by intensive and regular use of digital technologies and social media, which determine identity and consumption behaviour (Salam et al., 2024). They are demographically heterogeneous across markets, are becoming more powerful in spending and labour markets, and their expectations are pragmatic, cost-sensitive, and values-driven depending on country and life stage (Salam et al., 2024; Coggins et al., 2025). According to empirical syntheses, the hallmarks of Gen Z are a strong immersion in technologies, critical information-seeking, and increased concern with social and environmental problems, which collectively suggest an alternative outlook on their expectations compared to previous generations (Espejo et al., 2024).

The combination of price awareness and readiness to spend on convenience and differentiated experiences, the focus of purchases determined by peer networks, social proof, and platform-native discovery platforms, is the distinctive behaviour of Gen Z guided by the life-course and macroeconomic setting: multiple reviews and empirical reports confirm that Gen Zers were observed to make purchases based on these principles (Espejo et al., 2024; Coggins et al., 2025; Kahawandala et al., 2020). Cross-national research highlights the heterogeneity (e.g., the differences in financial faith, payment preferences, and local brand orientation) and therefore marketers should not make single-market generalisations when characterising Gen Z audiences (Coggins et al., 2025; Espejo et al., 2024).

2.2 Digital Nativity and Social Media as Marketplace

Gen Z is commonly considered to be the first digital-native generation, as they grew up having unlimited access to social media networks and high-speed Internet connectivity, and smartphones (Annie E. Casey Foundation, n.d.). Gen Z has internalized digital ecosystems as their way of life, unlike Millennials, who have gotten accustomed to them. Social media has become a main marketplace of this generation, in which discovery of products, peer validation, and purchasing meet. The key platforms like TikTok and Instagram have become the main channels of impulsive, inspiration-driven purchases, bypassing the conventional purchase funnels, and instead, viewing mobile devices and social platforms as the main sources of information

and transactions rather than entertainment (Espejo et al., 2024; Salam et al., 2024). The second aspect is that Gen Z has to be seen as the first real digital natives who expect mobile devices and social platforms to be the main sources of information and transactions and not the entertainment ones (Espejo et al., 2024). Several researchers indicate the strong use of platform-based search, short-video and social evidence to discover and make quick judgments, and social presence and perceived usefulness are mediators between online interactions and purchase intentions (Latifian, 2024; Salam et al., 2024).

Quantitative research evidence correlates social media usage with increased vulnerability to brand messages, impulse buying, and sharing content with others, and results of structural-equation models show that social presence, perceived usefulness, and trust are important mediators between social engagement and purchase intentions in Gen Z consumers (Latifian, 2024). The amplification of consumptive behaviour by influencer exposure is stronger in cases where the content is common, captivating, and seen as genuine, and micro- and creator-led content endorsements can be more effective than conventional advertising in reach and persuasiveness among this group of consumers (Gunawan et al., 2024; Salam et al., 2024).

2.3 Sustainability, Values, and the Attitude–Behavior Gap



One of the themes that has recurred in the literature is the sustainability and ethical consumption to which Gen Z is orienting. Several studies affirm that Gen Z has a pro-environmental and pro-social attitude compared to the past generations (Francis and Hoefel, 2018; NASSCOM, n.d.). Nevertheless, researchers also note the presence of an attitude-behavior gap: although Gen Z is a supporter of sustainability in principle, they remain limited in their buying behavior by price, product availability, and situational circumstances (Jin et al., 2023). Empirical studies and systematic reviews about electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) research indicate an increasing interest in moderating factors like peer norms and certification belief, in addition to suggesting that, although older consumers have a positive attitude toward sustainability, they may not always promote it online (Espejo et al., 2024; Dabija et al., 2023; Theocharis and Tsekouropoulos, 2025). Nonetheless, it is also evidenced that sustainability is not the only input in the list, as other inputs, such as price, convenience,

experience, etc., are also present, and companies need to focus on tangible measures and not be involved in the greenwashing process to make a difference in the decision to buy (Dabija et al., 2023; Theocharis and Tsekouropoulos, 2025).

The marketing tactics that appear to be appealing to Gen Z involve mobile-first, personalized experiences, coupled with authentic storytelling, creator-led social proof, and transparent sustainability credentials; systematic reviews and industry analysts suggest focusing on authentic two-way communication, platform-native creative content, and high reliability levels of e-commerce services as the means of transforming the interest into loyalty (Salam et al., 2024; Coggins et al., 2025; Theocharis and Tsekouropoulos, 2025). In the case of business practice, industry direction has stressed the need to create a 360-degree consumer perspective, invest in e-service and analytics to tailor value propositions and match portfolio, pricing, and technological capabilities with the expectations of Gen Z in speed, convenience, and purposeful relationship (Coggins et al., 2025; Salam et al., 2024). In the case of mobile checkout and fulfilment, (a) optimisation, (b) co-creation with credible creators and micro-influencers, (c) substantiation of claims about sustainability with metrics, and (d) integration of fast, transparent service as a loyalty driver should be implemented in the firms (Coggins et al., 2025; Theocharis and Tsekouropoulos, 2025; Gunawan et al., 2024).

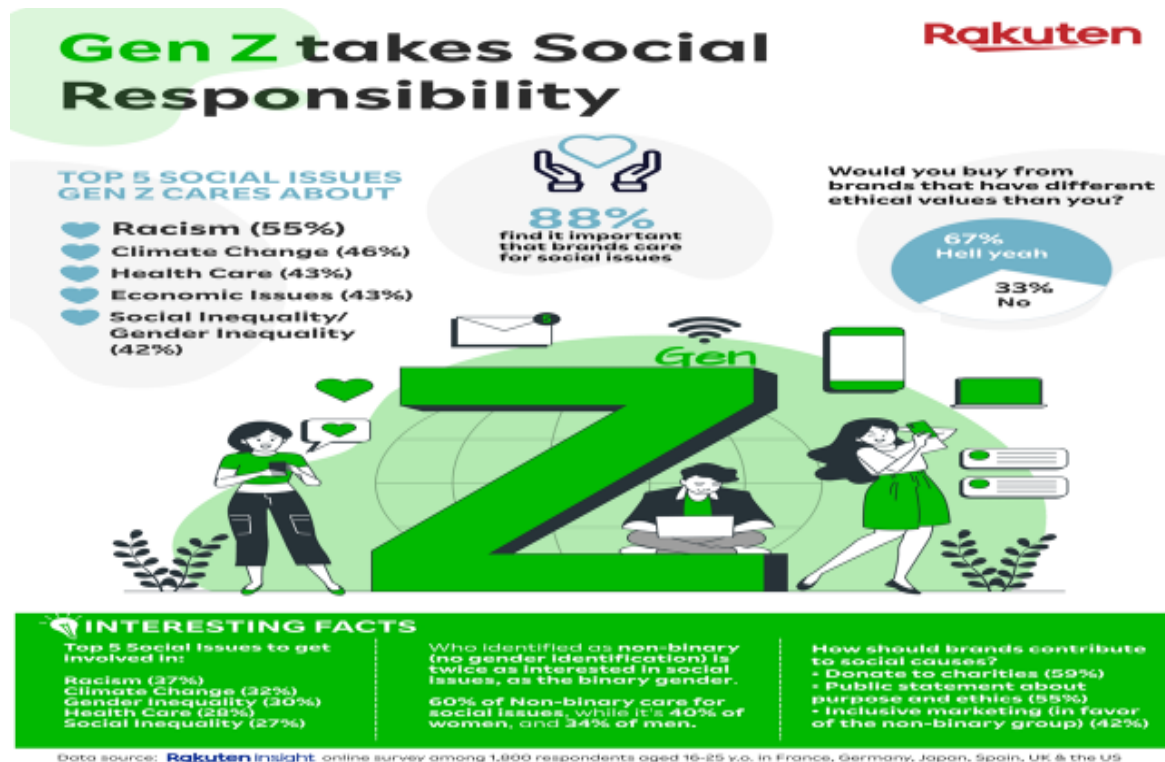
2.4 Personalization, Data, and Trust

Gen Z is more open to personalized shopping experiences than previous generations and is responsive to AI-generated suggestions, focusing on promotions, and using gamified loyalty programs (NielsenIQ, 2024). Individuality can be represented by personalization, which this generation highly values (Fromm and Read, 2018). Nonetheless, this preference is curtailed by the issue of privacy and transparency of the data. Researchers state that effective communication on the use of data is crucial to prevent the feeling of manipulation, and authenticity and transparency are the moderating variables of the personalization effectiveness (Francis and Hoefel, 2018).

2.5 Experience Economy and Immersive Technologies

The other theme that has emerged is the application of AR/VR and gamification in the retail sector. Research has found that the AR characteristics, like the virtual try-ons, increase purchase confidence and minimise returns in such products as fashion and beauty (NASSCOM, n.d.). This fits the tendency of Gen Z to favor experiences over products, which is a continuation of the overall experience economy model (Fromm & Read, 2018). Gen Z consumers have proven to be more emotionally engaged and socially sharing driven to train on branded pop-ups, gamified loyalty programs, and hybrid physical.

2.6 Heterogeneity within Gen Z and Regional Variation



Even though Gen Z has been categorized as one homogenous group, researchers have warned of high levels of heterogeneity in the generation. The levels of sustainability, digital adoption, and personalization influence behavior depending on cultural background, socioeconomic status, and regional retail environments (McCrindle, 2021). As an illustration, the adoption rates of social commerce in developed and emerging markets differ greatly, implying that some form of localized segmentation strategies could be required (Jin et al., 2023).

2.7 Brand relationship and shopping preferences:

Gen Z has shown a high demand for smooth e-commerce experiences and platforms with a high level of e-service quality; empirical research has shown that e-service quality predicts online customer value, e-satisfaction, and eventual e-loyalty among Gen Z shoppers (Kahawandala et al., 2020). Pricing and product characteristics are not the only unimportant factors defining the decision-making process, yet they play along with the digital experience metrics (site/app usability, delivery options, returns) and social validation signals (reviews, influencer content) (Kahawandala et al., 2020; Latifian, 2024). Comparative study also indicates that Gen Z prefers mobile-first and visual product discovery, has a higher preference for impulsive buying based on the trends of the platform, as well as uses online channels extensively in conducting pre-purchase research (Salam et al., 2024; Coggins et al., 2025).

On brand relationship, research is united by reduced automatic brand loyalty and increased experimental switching except when brands provide consistent positive digital experiences and authentic value fit; in digital environments, trust-building through transparency, trustworthy service, and pertinent content is a more reliable means of encouraging repeat purchase than reputation (Theocharis and Tsekouropoulos, 2025; Kahawandala et al., 2020). Online brand experience, image, and trust are branding dimensions that are continuously reported as some of the best predictors of Gen Z purchase intention of new technological and consumer products (Theocharis and Tsekouropoulos, 2025).

III. RESEARCH GAP:

As much as Generation Z has become one of the freighting consumer segments, available literature has shown that there are a number of gaps that only restrict a holistic view of their behavior. Earlier research has indicated that Gen Z has a high score on sustainability and ethics, but there is still a concerning attitude to the behavior gap, as, in fact, their buying behavior is frequently limited by prices, convenience, and product availability. Likewise, Gen Z is mostly considered a homogeneous digital cohort by most studies, even though such a cohort is diverse in terms of culture, socio-economic factors, and the territories where they use the internet, and the dynamics of consumption of those social media platforms, including TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat, vary accordingly. In addition, a lot of the available evidence relies on a cross-section of survey and industry reports that can provide only a picture of behavior and not any longitudinal or causal information about how their values and consumption patterns change with age and the increasing spending power. The other opens in the fact that the omnichannel retailing frameworks have not been fully integrated with the demands of Gen Z to seamless digital-physical experiences, personalization, and authenticity.

This paper fills these gaps through an integrated analysis of Gen Z consumer behavior in the omnichannel framework that connects the theoretical understanding to strategy options that practitioners should consider. It not only contributes to the world of scholarship and practice, but it also demonstrates how businesses can leverage the attitudes of sustainability of Gen Z by translating them into actual purchase behavior through transparent communication, authentic engagement, and intentional branding, as well as the role of digital agility, immersive technologies, and cross-channel integration in developing long-term loyalty among this generation.

Overall, the literature converges on the view that Gen Z is a digitally fluent, socially conscious, and personalization-driven generation whose consumer behavior is reshaping global markets. Yet important complexities remain, particularly the gap between sustainable attitudes and behaviors, the influence of platform-specific features, and within-cohort heterogeneity. Addressing these gaps requires longitudinal, cross-cultural, and mixed-method research to advance both theory and managerial practice.

IV. KEY TRENDS IN GEN Z CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

1. Sustainability and Ethical Consumption: Gen Z wants brands that show environmentally friendly behavior, such as recyclable packaging and ethical sourcing (NASSCOM, n.d.).
2. Digital Hyper-Connectivity and Immersive Technology: Gen Z likes to feel immersive experiences by using augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), which combine both physical and online interactions.
3. The Personalized Shopping Experiences: Personalized recommendations, promotions, and loyalty rewards are messages that go well with this generation (NielsenIQ, 2024).
4. Rise of the Experience Economy: Gen Z experiences prefer memorable experiences (pop-up experiences, workshops, and gamified interactions) instead of material possessions (Fromm & Read, 2018).
5. Mental Health and Wellness Priorities: Gen Z makes mental health and wellness an inherent part of daily consumption and prefers brands that help them achieve holistic well-being (NASSCOM, n.d.).

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESSES



1. Adopting Digital Channels and Omnichannel Retailing: The companies need to design crossbreeding experiences between online and offline touchpoints (NielsenIQ, 2024).
2. Marketing through Social Media: The Social media sites are important marketplaces of discovery and purchase.
3. Putting Authenticity and Transparency First: Transparency in the operations and ESG practices enhances credibility (Francis and Hoeffel, 2018).
4. Providing Personalization at Scale: Customization based on data generates loyalty, though it needs to consider the privacy issue (NASSCOM, n.d.).
5. Investing in Wellness-Oriented Branding: Consistent associations between products and campaigns and wellness stories form better consumer relationships.
6. Remaining Nimble to New Trends: Companies should embrace new technologies such as AR, VR, and gamification, and remain a culturally appropriate entity.

VI. DISCUSSION

A comparison of Gen Z, Millennials, and Generation Alpha shows that there are both opportunities and challenges. Millennials were the first generation of digital communication, whereas Gen Z requires transparency and customization, and Gen Alpha is expected to accept even more innovative technologies (McCrindle, 2021).

The opportunities are innovation in the omnichannel, purposeful branding, and integration of technology. Some of the challenges are limited attention span, online burnout, and high velocity cycles.

VII. CHALLENGES:

There are certain difficulties encountered by retailers and CPG manufacturers in reaching Gen Z consumers. Among the major challenges is the high demands of the generation in terms of digital experiences. Gen Z has grown up with convenient, fast, and easy online communication, so any delay in the site functionality, inability to work through a phone, or usability issues can turn them off easily. Besides, their preference for a personalized shopping experience demands the investment in high-level data analytics and technologies to track and predict their needs in an accurate manner.

The other obstacle is the requirement of genuineness and honesty. Gen Z is especially skillful at sniffing out insincerity and is less tolerant of brands that do not keep to their promises. Ethical practices, sustainability, and social responsibility are important to this generation, which questions brands based on their contribution to society and the environment. Retailers and manufacturers have to make sure that their operations, marketing strategies, and products are consistent with these values, and it can be a rather serious burden that can force them to alter their sourcing, production, and communication practices. Adherence to these standards is very important, though it may be a costly and complicated process to achieve effectively.

VIII. OPPORTUNITIES:

There exist numerous opportunities that can be exploited by retailers and CPG manufacturers that effectively use the marketing channels to attract the Omni shopping behavior of the Gen Z consumers. The flawless use of both online and offline shopping necessitates the brands to offer a unified experience in all touchpoints of Gen Z. This implies streamlining of e-commerce and physical outlets so that promotions, branding, and stockage of products are interrelated and aligned. Social media is especially a key factor in shaping the choices of Gen Z when it comes to buying a product, and it is urgent that the brands have a strong presence on such platforms as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Indeed, Gen Z includes online reviews left by other shoppers as the most essential shopping parameter. This type of interaction will allow retailers to provide interactive and personalized shopping experiences to attract online and in-store traffic by reaching Gen Z via these channels.

The Gen Z consumers who are seeking value without necessarily compromising on quality provide an opportunity for private label brands to win their loyalty. Gen Z is becoming more and more aware of the quality and uniqueness of the products created by the company itself, as opposed to name-brand products, which are treated as more expensive options. Amazingly, 67 percent of Gen Z believe that the quality of the product of a national brand is exactly as high as the quality of the products of the private label. By investing in the innovation and differentiation of the products of the private label, the retailers will be able to satisfy the needs of this inexpensive but quality-conscious generation. Also, the presentation of the products in the label of a company can be oriented in accordance with the Gen Z values, like sustainability and health, which can additionally strengthen their interest. It can include emphasizing such elements of the product, such as organic ingredients, environmentally-friendly packaging, and responsible sourcing in own-label brands, which will appeal to Gen Z buyers, who base their purchasing behavior on it.

IX. CONCLUSION

Generation Z represents a transformative force in global consumer behavior. Understanding the purchase patterns of Gen Z compared to other generations is essential for retailers and CPG manufacturers looking to capitalize on this market. Gen Z's preference for an omnichannel shopping experience, driven by technology and social media, contrasts with the more linear shopping journeys of older generations. Retailers must

analyze and adapt to these patterns, ensuring that they provide a seamless, integrated shopping experience that resonates with Gen Z. Additionally, retailers should consider how Gen Z's values and preferences differ from those of Millennials, Gen X, and Boomers. For example, Gen Z is more prone to brand exploration, and they look for novelty and fun in everyday products. By tailoring strategies to address these unique purchasing behaviors, retailers can better meet the needs of Gen Z while maintaining appeal across all generations. Their projected \$12 trillion spending power by 2030 underscores their significance (NASSCOM, n.d.). They demand sustainability, personalization, and authentic engagement. Businesses that adapt with omnichannel strategies, purpose-driven branding, and technological agility will succeed in building long-term loyalty.

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