



Analyzing Gen Z Consumer Behavior in India: A Study of Fashion Retail in Navi Mumbai Malls

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ABSTRACT :

This study investigates Generation Z (Gen Z) consumer behavior within the fashion retail environment of Navi Mumbai shopping malls. With India hosting approximately 116 million Gen Z consumers, understanding their unique preferences and purchasing patterns is essential for retail success. Through a survey of 100 Gen Z shoppers across Navi Mumbai malls, this research examines demographic characteristics, shopping frequency, purchase motivations, social media influence, and attitudes toward sustainability and in-store experiences. Findings reveal that respondents aged 19-21 (40%) constitute the largest shopper segment, with monthly mall visits (42%) being most common. Price (26%) and trend-following (25%) emerge as primary purchase drivers, closely followed by social media influence (21%). Instagram dominates (48%) as the most influential platform for fashion choices, while discounts and promotions significantly impact purchase decisions for 88% of respondents. Growing sustainability awareness is evident, with 78% considering eco-friendly factors at least sometimes. Store experience satisfaction shows room for improvement, with 50% reporting neutral experiences. This research provides actionable insights for fashion retailers seeking to effectively engage this digitally-native yet mall-frequenting generation through omnichannel strategies, value-oriented pricing, and enhanced in-store experiences.

Introduction

Background on Gen Z in India

Generation Z, comprising individuals born roughly between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, represents a significant demographic in India's consumer landscape. With an estimated 116 million Gen Z consumers, India boasts one of the world's largest youth populations, with two out of every five urban Indian consumers aged between 15 and 55 falling into the Gen Z category^[1]. In comparison to developed nations, India has a higher proportion of Millennials and Gen Z individuals, collectively constituting approximately 52% of the country's population^[1].

Born during a period of unprecedented technological advancement and globalization, Indian Gen Z exhibits unique characteristics that distinguish them from previous generations. They are digital natives who have never known a world without internet connectivity and social media platforms^[2]. This constant connectivity has shaped their consumption patterns, communication preferences, and overall worldview. As noted by industry observers, "Gen Z in India never ceases to surprise. They are trendsetters who buck tradition", making them a distinctive consumer segment requiring specialized marketing approaches.

Retail Landscape in India with Focus on Malls

Despite global shifts toward e-commerce, India's physical retail sector continues to demonstrate remarkable resilience and growth. The demand for retail space in malls consistently outstrips supply, even as mall developments in many other countries struggle due to the rise of online shopping^[4]. According to recent reports, over 6.5 million square feet of organized retail space was leased across major Indian cities in 2024, significantly exceeding new supply and bringing mall vacancy levels down to 7.8% from 15.5% in 2021^[4].

Navi Mumbai, a planned satellite city adjacent to Mumbai, has emerged as a significant retail hub with numerous shopping malls catering to the affluent suburban population. Malls such as Raghuleela Mall in Sector 7^[5] have become popular destinations for fashion retail, offering a mix of international brands, national retailers, and local boutiques that appeal to diverse consumer segments, including the discerning Gen Z shoppers.

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Analyze the shopping patterns and preferences of Gen Z consumers in Navi Mumbai malls
2. Identify key factors influencing Gen Z's fashion purchase decisions
3. Examine the role of social media in shaping Gen Z's fashion choices
4. Assess the importance of price, trends, sustainability, and store experience for Gen Z shoppers

5. Provide actionable insights for fashion retailers to effectively engage with Gen Z consumers

Significance of the Study

Understanding Gen Z consumer behavior is crucial for retailers and marketers for several reasons. First, this demographic represents the future of consumption, with increasing purchasing power as they enter the workforce. Second, their shopping preferences differ significantly from previous generations, requiring adapted retail strategies. Third, as trendsetters who actively engage with brands across multiple platforms^[3], Gen Z's influence extends beyond their immediate purchasing decisions to shape broader market trends.

For fashion retailers in Navi Mumbai malls, this research offers valuable insights into capturing and retaining this coveted demographic. By understanding Gen Z's preferences, motivations, and pain points, retailers can develop targeted strategies to enhance customer experience, optimize product offerings, and build lasting brand relationships with this digitally native generation.

Literature Review

Gen Z Characteristics and Consumer Behavior

Gen Z in India is characterized by their unique blend of purchasing power, tech-savvy mindset, and strong values. Unlike previous generations, they are comfortable making purchases online, often influenced by social media, and they seek brands with a purpose and products that resonate with their individuality^[6]. They are also known for their passion for sustainability, actively seeking brands that minimize their environmental impact^[6].

As digital natives, Indian Gen Z has been exposed to unprecedented levels of information and entertainment. They possess the ability to quickly embrace trends, staying constantly informed and entertained with just a swipe of their finger^[1]. This generation has never known a world without social media or the internet, which has become enmeshed in their daily lives and serves as their go-to channel for information—even surpassing popular search engines^[2].

Social Media Influence on Fashion Choices

Social media plays a pivotal role in shaping Gen Z's fashion choices and purchase decisions. According to recent research, 89% of Gen Z social media users are on Instagram, 84% are on YouTube, and 82% are on TikTok, making these platforms the most popular among this generation^[2]. Gen Z consumers report TikTok is their favorite channel for product discovery, closely followed by Instagram^[2].

The strong digital presence of Gen Z has made social commerce a crucial channel for fashion brands. They discover and interact with brands primarily through platforms like Instagram and YouTube, engaging with content, virtual try-ons, and influencer collaborations^[6]. This has led to the rise of brands that bridge the gap between e-commerce and social media, such as Nykaa, whose "Shop Social" feature allows users to shop directly from influencer-curated looks^[6].

Mall Culture and Shopping Patterns in India

Despite the global shift toward e-commerce, mall culture continues to thrive in India, particularly among younger demographics. The Indian retail sector is witnessing strong growth, driven by urbanization, rising affluence, and evolving consumer preferences^[4]. Recent industry reports highlight continued leasing momentum in organized retail, with demand outpacing supply for the third consecutive year.

For Gen Z, malls represent more than just shopping destinations; they are social spaces for meeting friends, experiencing new products, and engaging with brands in a physical environment. This generation values experiential retail that offers something beyond the transactional nature of e-commerce, explaining the continued relevance of mall shopping despite their digital preferences.

Sustainability and Ethical Consumption

Gen Z has demonstrated growing concern for sustainability and ethical consumption practices. The revival of thrifting culture among this generation is seen as both an eco-conscious choice and a way to express individuality^[6]. India is witnessing a surge in thrift platforms, fueled by Gen Z's demand for unique, sustainable pieces.

Platforms like Relove, which enables brands to offer resale options, cater to Gen Z's desire for pre-owned products from their favorite brands at reduced prices^[6]. This trend reflects the generation's increasing awareness of fashion's environmental impact and their willingness to make consumption choices that align with their values while still satisfying their style preferences.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional survey design to examine the consumer behavior of Gen Z shoppers in Navi Mumbai malls. This approach allowed for the collection of standardized data from a significant sample size, facilitating statistical analysis and the identification of patterns in shopping behaviors and preferences. The research design focused on capturing current attitudes, behaviors, and preferences rather than changes over time.

Sampling Method and Participant Selection

The research utilized a purposive sampling technique targeting Gen Z consumers (aged approximately 16-25 years) who shop at malls in Navi Mumbai. The sample size was set at 100 respondents to allow for meaningful statistical analysis while remaining manageable within the research constraints. Participants were approached in various shopping malls across Navi Mumbai, including but not limited to Raghuleela Mall, Inorbit Mall, and Seawoods Grand Central. The selection process ensured representation across the Gen Z age spectrum, though with natural concentration in specific age brackets based on mall visitor demographics.

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected through structured questionnaires administered in person at mall locations. Research assistants approached potential participants, explained the purpose of the study, and requested their participation. Upon consent, participants completed the survey either on tablet devices or paper forms. The data collection was conducted over a four-week period during February-March 2025, covering weekdays and weekends to capture diverse shopping patterns. The timing of data collection was strategically planned to avoid sale periods or major festivals that might skew regular shopping behaviors.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was developed based on existing literature on consumer behavior and adapted to address the specific research objectives. The questionnaire consisted of multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions covering the following areas:

1. Demographic information (age, gender, occupation)
2. Shopping frequency and patterns in malls
3. Factors influencing purchase decisions
4. Social media usage and its influence on fashion choices
5. Attitudes toward discounts and promotions
6. Consideration of sustainability in fashion purchases
7. Satisfaction with in-store experiences

A pilot test was conducted with 10 participants to ensure clarity, relevance, and effectiveness of the questionnaire. Based on feedback from the pilot test, minor modifications were made to improve question wording and response options.

Data Analysis

The collected data was processed and analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics were generated to summarize demographic information and response distributions. Frequency distributions and percentages were calculated for categorical variables, while means and standard deviations were computed for continuous variables. Cross-tabulation analyses were performed to identify relationships between variables, such as age and shopping frequency or social media influence and purchase decision factors. The results were then interpreted in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks to derive meaningful insights about Gen Z consumer behavior in the context of fashion retail in Navi Mumbai malls.

Results and Analysis

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The survey captured responses from 100 Gen Z customers shopping in Navi Mumbai malls, revealing that the largest segment of respondents was aged 19-21 years (40%). This predominance of early college-aged shoppers indicates high mall engagement during a life stage characterized by increasing independence in purchasing decisions and active identity formation through fashion choices. The concentration of respondents in this age bracket aligns with broader observations about Gen Z's significance in the retail landscape, as noted by industry reports stating that "over 100 million Gen Z consumers in India are redefining norms, making it a group very hard to ignore when chalking out marketing strategies"^[3].

Shopping Frequency and Patterns

Analysis of shopping frequency revealed that monthly shopping was the most common pattern among respondents (42%), followed by weekly visits (28%). This finding suggests that while Gen Z consumers in Navi Mumbai maintain regular mall engagement, their visits are purposeful rather than habitual daily or bi-weekly occurrences. The preference for monthly shopping cycles may correlate with factors such as college schedules, monthly allowances or income, and the release cycles of new merchandise in fashion retail.

The predominance of monthly shopping has significant implications for retailers regarding inventory turnover, visual merchandising refresh cycles, and promotional planning. This pattern suggests that retailers have approximately 12 key opportunities annually to capture each customer's attention and spending, making each visit a critical touchpoint for building brand loyalty and driving conversions.

Factors Influencing Purchase Decisions

The survey identified price (26%) and trend-following (25%) as the primary factors influencing purchase decisions among Gen Z shoppers in Navi Mumbai malls, with social media influence (21%) following closely behind. This trio of dominant factors illustrates the multifaceted decision-making process of Gen Z consumers, who simultaneously consider economic constraints, social relevance, and digital validation in their fashion choices.

The nearly equal weighting of price and trend factors challenges the stereotype of Gen Z as purely trend-driven consumers and highlights their practical approach to fashion consumption. As noted in industry observations, while Indian Gen Z consumers enthusiastically embrace trends, they haven't "particularly turned their backs on tradition either"^[12], suggesting a pragmatic balance between innovation and value.

The significant influence of social media (21%) confirms the integration of digital channels into the physical shopping experience, with many purchase decisions pre-influenced by online content before consumers ever enter the mall environment. This finding aligns with research indicating that Gen Z "uses social for everything and they expect brands to use it for everything, too—from customer service to commerce, discovery to community"^[12].

Social Media Influence on Fashion Choices

Instagram emerged as the dominant platform influencing Gen Z fashion choices, with 48% of respondents identifying it as their primary source of style inspiration. This finding aligns with broader research indicating that 89% of Gen Z social media users are on Instagram^[12], making it a crucial channel for fashion discovery and brand engagement. The visual nature of Instagram, with its emphasis on aesthetics and lifestyle content, makes it particularly well-suited to fashion marketing and trend dissemination.

The primacy of Instagram has significant implications for fashion retailers in Navi Mumbai malls, suggesting that maintaining an active, engaging Instagram presence is not merely optional but essential for capturing Gen Z attention. The platform serves as a virtual catalog and style guide that shapes expectations and preferences before consumers physically interact with products in stores.

YouTube and TikTok also registered as influential platforms, reflecting Gen Z's preference for video content that showcases products in use and provides more dynamic fashion inspiration than static images. This preference for multi-format content across platforms indicates that retailers should develop diversified social media strategies rather than concentrating exclusively on a single channel.

Importance of Discounts and Promotions

The survey revealed that discounts and promotions play a crucial role in Gen Z shopping decisions, with an overwhelming 88% of respondents indicating they are either very or somewhat important. This finding underscores the price sensitivity of Gen Z consumers, even within mall environments typically associated with premium retail experiences.

The high value placed on discounts correlates with price being identified as the top factor (26%) influencing purchase decisions, reinforcing the economic pragmatism of Gen Z shoppers. Despite their interest in trends and brand experiences, financial considerations remain paramount in their consumer behavior. This finding has particular relevance in the context of India's retail landscape, where "Fashion Factory is Reliance Retail's multi-brand fashion discount retail chain that has an eclectic assortment of top international and national brands in fashion wear...at unbeatable prices"^[13], indicating that major retailers already recognize and cater to this preference for value.

Sustainability Considerations

A notable finding emerged regarding sustainability awareness, with 48% of respondents considering environmental factors sometimes and 30% always taking sustainability into account when making fashion purchases. This combined 78% represents a significant majority demonstrating at least some level of eco-consciousness in their consumption patterns.

This finding aligns with broader observations about Gen Z's values, particularly their "passion for sustainability" and tendency to "actively seek brands that minimize their environmental impact"^[16]. The substantial percentage (30%) of respondents who always consider sustainability suggests the emergence of a dedicated segment for whom environmental responsibility is a non-negotiable aspect of fashion consumption.

However, the larger percentage (48%) who consider sustainability only sometimes indicates that while environmental awareness is growing, it may still compete with other priorities such as price and trend-relevance. This presents an opportunity for retailers to educate consumers about sustainable fashion and develop offerings that satisfy multiple priorities simultaneously—providing trend-relevant, affordably-priced items with improved environmental credentials.

Store Experience Satisfaction

The analysis of store experience satisfaction revealed a mixed picture, with 35% of respondents reporting high satisfaction, 50% neutral, and 15% expressing dissatisfaction. The predominance of neutral responses suggests that many Gen Z consumers in Navi Mumbai malls find current retail environments adequate but not exceptional or memorable.

This finding represents both a challenge and an opportunity for fashion retailers. The substantial neutral response indicates that while current store experiences are not actively driving customers away, they may not be creating the strong positive impressions necessary to build lasting brand loyalty among Gen Z consumers who have high expectations shaped by digital experiences. The 15% expressing dissatisfaction signals specific pain points that require attention, potentially including customer service quality, store layout, fitting room experiences, or checkout efficiency.

The relatively modest percentage (35%) reporting high satisfaction suggests significant room for improvement in creating engaging, distinctive retail environments that resonate with Gen Z preferences. This finding takes on particular importance considering that despite their digital nativity, 42% of respondents still visit malls monthly, indicating that physical retail remains relevant but must evolve to meet changing expectations.

Discussion

The Digital-Physical Shopping Nexus

A key insight emerging from this research is the interconnected nature of digital and physical shopping experiences for Gen Z consumers in Navi Mumbai. The strong influence of social media platforms, particularly Instagram (48%), on fashion choices demonstrates that the shopping journey begins online well before consumers enter the mall environment. As observed in industry research, Gen Z uses social media "for discovering new products, keeping up with the news and reaching out to brands with customer care needs"^[2].

This digital-physical nexus requires retailers to develop integrated strategies that create seamless transitions between online discovery and in-store purchase. The monthly shopping frequency pattern (42%) suggests that while digital platforms provide continuous engagement, physical retail interactions occur at specific intervals, making each store visit a critical opportunity to convert online inspiration into actual purchases.

Successful retailers will likely be those who view their physical and digital presences as complementary rather than competitive, creating cohesive brand experiences across channels. This might include in-store displays featuring Instagram-worthy photo opportunities, QR codes linking to social media content, and sales associates knowledgeable about the brand's online presence and current social media campaigns.

Price Sensitivity Amid Mall Shopping

The identification of price (26%) as the primary purchase factor and the high importance placed on discounts and promotions (88%) reveals a fundamental characteristic of Gen Z shoppers in Navi Mumbai: despite their trend-consciousness and mall shopping habits, they remain highly price-sensitive. This finding challenges the assumption that mall shoppers are less price-conscious than those who frequent other retail channels.

This price sensitivity may reflect broader economic realities for young consumers in India who, despite their interest in fashion and trends, must operate within budget constraints. As noted by retail observers, what distinguishes certain successful retail concepts is "our unique offering of fashion 365 days, 20-70% discount, and the best of brands", indicating that value remains a compelling proposition even in mall environments.

For fashion retailers, this suggests the need for strategic pricing approaches that communicate value while maintaining profit margins. Rather than competing solely on lowest price, which may be difficult against online fast fashion retailers, mall-based brands can focus on value-added offerings such as superior customer service, exclusive in-store items, or shopping experiences that justify moderate price premiums.

Balancing Trends, Price, and Sustainability

The nearly equal importance of trend-following (25%) and price (26%) in purchase decisions, alongside growing sustainability consciousness (78% considering it at least sometimes), presents retailers with the challenge of satisfying multiple, sometimes competing priorities. This balancing act reflects the complex values system of Gen Z consumers, who desire fashionable items at affordable prices without compromising their environmental principles. The finding that sustainability is "always" considered by 30% of respondents while "sometimes" considered by 48% suggests different segments within Gen Z with varying degrees of environmental commitment. This presents an opportunity for retailers to develop tiered approaches to sustainability, offering options ranging from fully eco-friendly premium lines to more affordable items with incremental sustainability improvements.

As noted in research on Gen Z consumer behavior, this generation has "revived the thrifting culture, seeing it as both an eco-conscious choice and a way to express individuality"^[6]. Mall-based retailers might explore this interest through initiatives such as clothing exchange events, upcycled collections, or dedicated sections for sustainable options, thereby addressing multiple Gen Z priorities simultaneously.

Enhancing In-Store Experiences

The predominance of neutral responses (50%) regarding store experience satisfaction represents a significant opportunity for fashion retailers in Navi Mumbai malls. Gen Z consumers, having grown up with highly personalized digital experiences, bring heightened expectations to physical retail environments. The gap between these expectations and current realities is reflected in the relatively modest percentage (35%) reporting high satisfaction. To convert neutral impressions into positive ones, retailers should focus on creating memorable, shareable, and personalized in-store experiences. This might involve leveraging technology such as smart mirrors or augmented reality features, training staff to provide personalized styling advice, creating Instagram-worthy visual merchandising, or hosting in-store events that create community around the brand.

The importance of enhancing physical retail is underscored by research indicating that despite digital trends, many in Gen Z are experiencing "an overwhelming need to touch grass" and showing interest in "event marketing and IRL meetups"^[2]. Fashion retailers that can create third-space environments offering genuine connection and authentic experiences may gain advantage with a generation seeking balance between digital engagement and real-world interaction.

Conclusion

Summary of Key Findings

This research has provided valuable insights into the consumer behavior of Gen Z in the context of fashion retail in Navi Mumbai malls. The findings reveal a demographic that balances digital influence with physical shopping experiences, price sensitivity with trend consciousness, and growing sustainability awareness with practical purchasing considerations. Key characteristics identified include:

1. Predominance of 19–21-year-olds (40%) among mall shoppers, representing a critical early adult consumer segment
2. Monthly shopping patterns (42%) creating predictable retail engagement opportunities
3. Price (26%), trends (25%), and social media (21%) as the primary purchase decision drivers
4. Instagram's dominance (48%) as the fashion influence platform of choice
5. High importance of discounts and promotions (88%) despite mall shopping contexts
6. Growing sustainability consciousness (78% considering it at least sometimes)
7. Room for improvement in store experiences, with 50% reporting neutral satisfaction

These findings collectively paint a picture of Gen Z as pragmatic, digitally-influenced consumers who maintain meaningful engagement with physical retail while bringing new expectations shaped by online experiences and evolving values.

Limitations of the Study

This research has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size of 100 respondents, while sufficient for preliminary insights, may not capture the full diversity of Gen Z consumers in Navi Mumbai. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the study provides a snapshot of current behaviors but does not track changes over time or seasonal variations in shopping patterns. Third, the focus on mall-based retail excludes Gen Z consumers who primarily shop online or in other retail formats. Finally, self-reported data may be subject to social desirability bias, particularly regarding sustainability considerations.

Implications for Fashion Retailers

For fashion retailers operating in Navi Mumbai malls, this research offers several actionable implications:

1. Develop omnichannel strategies that seamlessly integrate Instagram content with in-store experiences, acknowledging the platform's significant influence on fashion choices
2. Create pricing strategies that communicate value while addressing Gen Z price sensitivity, potentially through creative approaches to discounting that maintain brand positioning
3. Refresh merchandise monthly to align with the predominant shopping frequency pattern and maintain customer interest
4. Integrate authentic sustainability messaging and initiatives without sacrificing trend relevance or affordability
5. Invest in transforming neutral store experiences into memorable, shareable moments that distinguish the brand in a competitive retail landscape
6. Target marketing efforts toward the 19-21 age demographic, which shows highest mall engagement
7. Leverage the growing interest in sustainability to differentiate from competitors and build brand loyalty with conscientious consumers

By understanding and responding to the complex needs and preferences of Gen Z consumers, fashion retailers in Navi Mumbai malls can position themselves for success with this influential demographic, creating shopping experiences that resonate with their digital expectations while fulfilling their desire for meaningful physical retail engagement.

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