A Comparative Analysis of Online and Offline Textile Purchasing Behaviour Among Gen Z College Students in Vijayawada

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Abstract

The Generation Z college students represent an appreciable consumer category to the textile and apparel industry due to their shopping behavior being dictated by digital connectivity, social media, price comparison activities, convenience features and ongoing interaction with physical retail environments. A comparative study is proposed to assess the purchasing behavior of Generation Z college students for online versus offline textile shopping. The study will focus on purchase frequency, channel preference, price sensitivity, product variety, perceived quality, convenience, trust, social-media influence, fitting and trial experience, return policies, customer service and overall satisfaction. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design is proposed, using a structured questionnaire administered to a sample of college students falling within Generation Z. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, chi-square tests, independent-samples tests or paired comparisons, correlation and regression may be utilized, depending on the final sample size and measurement structure. The proposed study builds upon existing research identifying that Gen Z apparel behaviors are influenced by brand-related considerations, shopping orientation, website characteristics, social influence, perceived quality, price consciousness and convenience. Recent Indian studies have also assessed online and offline clothing satisfaction in Gen Z consumers directly. The proposed research offers value through its focus on college students and the investigation of both channels within one comparative frame. The manuscript includes a research framework, hypotheses, questionnaire, sampling plan, data-analysis scheme and publication-ready structure. Empirical conclusions must be added only after primary data collection and statistical testing.

Keywords: Generation Z; college students; textile shopping; apparel; online shopping; offline shopping; consumer behaviour; omnichannel; India.

1. Introduction

The retail environment for textiles and apparel has changed considerably with the expansion of e-commerce, mobile commerce, social media and digital payments systems. At the same time, physical textile stores still offer experiences that digital channels cannot wholly produce, including physically touching fabrics, checking quality, trying garments, instant customer service and obtaining products without delivery delays. Consumers may therefore move between online and offline channels rather than only one mode.

Generation Z is highly relevant due to young consumers frequently encountering fashion information on digital platforms but also participating in conventional retail environments. A study of Indian Gen Z apparel consumers identified uniqueness, self-concept, brand image, word of mouth and perceived quality as relevant to clothing interest and purchase intention, with price consciousness affecting the relationship between interest and intention. A 2025 study of Gen Z online apparel shopping also found direct effects from website characteristics, brand-related factors, individual factors and shopping orientation.

The comparison between online and offline shopping is important as the benefits of one channel may correspond to the drawbacks of the other. While online shopping can offer variety, convenience, fast price comparison and promotional offers, offline shopping can reduce uncertainty about fit, fabric, colour and quality. A study of Gen Z clothing satisfaction

in Ahmedabad recently reported that respondents valued online convenience, discounts and variety, while expressing concerns about security, product quality and fit.

This study therefore examines the textile purchasing behaviour of Generation Z college students within a comparative online-versus-offline framework. It measures stated preference, purchase frequency, perceived advantages and disadvantages of each channel, and the importance students place on discounts, reviews, returns, physical examination, trial and sales-staff interaction. The remainder of the paper reviews the literature (Section 2), states the research gap, objectives and hypotheses (Section 3), describes the methodology (Section 4), reports the results (Section 5), discusses the findings and their implications (Sections 6 and 7), and concludes with limitations, future research directions and conclusions (Sections 8 to 10).

2. Review of Literature

Early work on Indian college-goers established apparel as a significant consumption category and examined purchase frequency, store choice, apparel categories and the influence of shopping companions. That study was qualitative and predated the current e-commerce environment, but it provides an early context for apparel behaviour among Indian students. Research on Indian youth has examined other aspects of clothing choice, including the antecedents of organic cotton clothing purchase.

More recent work has concentrated on Generation Z fashion consumers in India. Using a questionnaire and structural equation modelling (n = 211), Singh, Chakrabarti and Tripathi (2023) found that uniqueness, self-concept and brand image predicted clothing interest, and that price consciousness affected the link to purchase intention. Kaur, Malik and Singh (2024) surveyed 500 consumers across generations on quality, price, impulsive purchase and brand loyalty and reported that Gen Z had a higher online inclination. Prashar and Kaushal (2025), in a vignette experiment (n = 252), showed that verbal nudges affected sustainable fashion choices among Gen Z consumers, with effects varying by environmental orientation and fashion familiarity. These studies establish what shapes Gen Z clothing interest and intention, but they do not compare shopping channels.

A second group of studies focuses on online fashion retail. Jahanvi and Sharma (2025), using an online survey (n = 390) and multiple regression, found that website characteristics, brand factors, individual factors and shopping orientation influenced Gen Z online apparel behaviour. Saini (2025) highlighted digital literacy, personalisation and social-media influence in Gen Z online fashion shopping in India. Kaushik and Ahuja (2026) examined website aesthetics, trust, influencer impact, product variety and price sensitivity among Gen Y and Gen Z in Delhi and found that Gen Z responded more strongly to social-media cues and personalisation. These models are largely online-only, and the last focuses on digital women's apparel and includes both generations.

Only a few studies set the two channels side by side. Mandavia, Vaghela and Vidani (2024) studied Gen Z clothing satisfaction in Ahmedabad and reported that respondents valued online convenience, discounts and variety, while quality, fit and security were concerns. Mahalakshmi et al. (2026) surveyed 50 college girls and found that online apparel was preferred for convenience, selection, discounts and price comparison, whereas stores were important for trial and quality checking. Baxi and Tiwari (2026) examined channel switching and omnichannel purchase behaviour among digital-native consumers in Ahmedabad. These comparisons are limited by a single-city context, a small and female-only sample in one case, or a focus on omnichannel switching rather than the specific drivers of each channel.

Taken together, the literature suggests that Gen Z apparel behaviour is multidimensional. Online shopping is associated with convenience, assortment, price comparison, digital information and social-media influence, whereas physical retail provides sensory inspection, fitting and immediate possession. Recent studies also suggest that Gen Z should not be considered a homogeneous, digital-only group, and that channel switching and omnichannel behaviour deserve explicit measurement.

3. Research Gap, Objectives and Hypotheses

3.1 Research gap

Existing studies tend to focus on either online shopping, on a single city or platform, on sustainability or on one demographic subsection. Few explore both online and offline textile purchasing within one framework for college-going Gen Z consumers, and even fewer measure both digital factors (discounts, reviews, return policies) and physical-store factors (examination, trial, sales assistance) in the same instrument. Omnichannel behaviour is increasingly important but can be better captured by distinguishing between online/offline categories. This study addresses these gaps by studying college students and measuring both channels in a single questionnaire.

3.2 Objectives

1. To profile the textile purchasing behaviour of Generation Z college students including product type, purchase frequency, online platforms and offline store formats.

2. To compare the stated preference and frequency of use of online and offline textile shopping.

3. To identify the main reasons that attract students to, and the main disadvantages that deter them from, each channel.

4. To examine how the importance of discounts, reviews, return policies and quality-related concerns relates to online purchase frequency.

5. To examine how the importance of physical examination, trying on and sales-staff interaction relates to offline purchase frequency.

6. To examine whether channel preference and purchase frequency differ by gender, age, educational level and spending capacity.

7. To compare students' perceptions of which channel offers better variety and better value for money.

3.3 Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested with 5% significance. Because the survey used single-item measures for each construct, the hypotheses are expressed in terms of the available items.

H01: Students' stated preference is equally distributed across online, offline and both-equally options.

H02: There is no difference in purchase frequency between online and offline textile shopping.

H03: Preferred shopping channel is not associated with gender.

H04: Monthly spending capacity is not related to purchase frequency in either channel.

H05: The importance attached to discounts and offers is not related to online purchase frequency.

H06: The importance attached to customer reviews and to easy return/refund options is not related to online purchase frequency.

H07: Concern about online product quality and about differences between displayed and received products is not related to online purchase frequency.

H08: The importance attached to physical examination of fabric, trying on clothes and sales-staff interaction is not related to offline purchase frequency.

H09: Students do not perceive either channel as offering better variety or better value for money.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research design

A descriptive and analytical cross-sectional survey design was used. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered online to Generation Z college students in the Vijayawada region of Andhra Pradesh.

4.2 Sample and sampling technique

Convenience sampling was used because a complete student sampling frame was not available. The survey was conducted between 5 October 2026 and 7 October 2026. The form returned 68 responses, none of which were a duplicate submission, and all 68 were retained for analysis. The achieved sample is smaller than the 200–400 responses that would be desirable for multivariable modelling; thus the analysis was restricted to descriptive and non-parametric bivariate methods and no regression model was estimated. The names collected by the form were excluded from the analysis and are not reported.

4.3 Research instrument

The questionnaire included 25 closed-ended items (Appendix A) in four groups: (i) respondent profile (age, gender, educational level, monthly personal spending capacity); (ii) general shopping behaviour (purchase frequency, most frequently purchased product type, preferred mode, frequency of online and offline purchase); (iii) online shopping (most used platform, main reason for preferring online, importance of discounts, reviews and returns, concern about quality and about differences between displayed and received products, biggest disadvantage); and (iv) offline shopping (main reason for preferring offline, preferred store type, importance of physical examination, trial and sales-staff interaction, biggest disadvantage), followed by two comparative items regarding which channel offers better variety and better value for money. Textile products were described to respondents as clothes, footwear, bags and accessories.

Importance and concern items were answered on five-point verbal scales and coded 1 to 5 (for example, 1 = not important at all, 5 = very important; 1 = not concerned, 5 = very concerned). Purchase-frequency items were coded 1 = never to 5 = very frequently. Spending capacity was coded 1 to 4 across its four bands, and overall purchase frequency was coded 1 = rarely to 5 = weekly.

4.4 Data analysis

Data were analysed in Python (pandas and SciPy). Categorical variables are reported as frequencies and percentages of valid responses. Ordinal variables are summarised with means, standard deviations and medians and analysed with non-parametric methods: Spearman rank correlation, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test for paired channel comparisons, the Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal–Wallis tests for group comparisons, and the Friedman test for comparing items within respondents. Associations between categorical variables were tested with chi-square tests (Cramér's V as effect size) and Fisher's exact test; a chi-square goodness-of-fit test and exact binomial (sign) tests were used for single-variable distributions. Internal consistency was assessed with Cronbach's alpha. Missing responses (one for spending capacity, two to three for items in the offline and comparison sections) were handled by using all valid responses for each analysis; no values were imputed. Because 14 correlations were examined, a Bonferroni-adjusted threshold of $\alpha = .0036$ is also noted for readers who prefer a conservative reading.

5. Results

5.1 Respondent profile

Table 1 below provides the respondent's profile. Three quarters of the participants were male (75.0%) and 58.8% of the respondents were between 18 and 19 years old. Most of the respondents were undergraduates representing 89.7%. Almost half (49.3%) of the monthly individual spending capacity fell below 2,000 rupees, while 20.9% had above 6,000 rupees. The overall textile purchase frequency was spread across all tiers, with the first quarter of the respondents buying "once in 2-3 months" (26.5%) and 16.2% buying on a weekly basis. Casual wear was the most commonly purchased clothing type (58.8%), while formal wears were the second most bought at 23.5%.

Table 1. Respondent profile ($N = 68$)

Variable	Category	*n*	%
Gender	Male	51	75.0
	Female	17	25.0
Age	18–19 years	40	58.8
	20–21 years	20	29.4
	22–23 years	6	8.8
	24 years and above	2	2.9
Educational level	Undergraduate	61	89.7
	Postgraduate	5	7.4
	Other	2	2.9
Monthly spending capacity (n = 67)	Below ₹2,000	33	49.3
	₹2,001–₹4,000	12	17.9
	₹4,001–₹6,000	8	11.9
	Above ₹6,000	14	20.9
Overall purchase frequency	Weekly	11	16.2
	Monthly	14	20.6
	Once in 2–3 months	18	26.5
	Occasionally	16	23.5
	Rarely	9	13.2
Most frequently purchased product	Casual wear	40	58.8
	Formal wear	16	23.5
	Ethnic/traditional wear	8	11.8
	Sportswear	3	4.4
	Accessories	1	1.5

Note. Percentages are of valid responses and may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

5.2 Preference of channel and frequency of use

The stated channel preference was split (Table 2; Figure 1). The biggest category of participants (39.7%) were equally in favor of online and offline channels, 35.3% preferred offline channels whereas 25.0% online. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test indicated that the distribution did not significantly differ from an equal distribution, $\chi^2(2) = 2.32$, $p = .313$; thus H01 cannot be rejected. No single channel can be identified as the main preference.

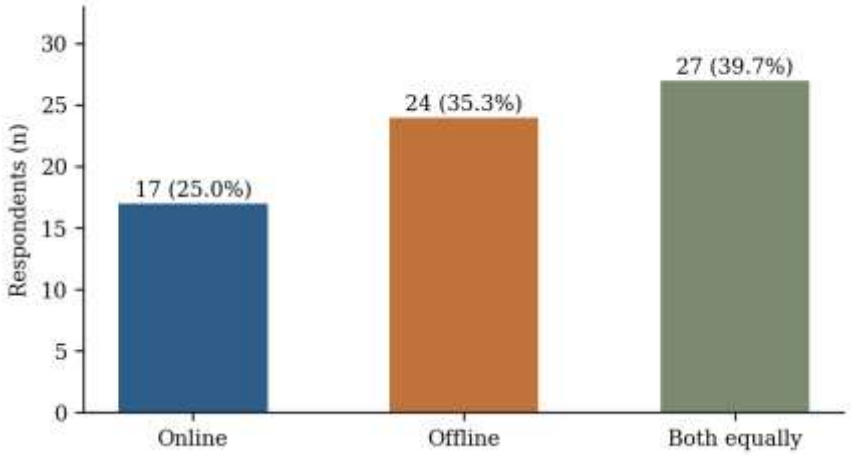


Figure 1. Preferred mode of textile shopping (N = 68)

The mean number of purchases made through online and offline channel was similar (Figure 2). The mean frequency of purchase through online channel was 3.56 (SD = 1.06), while that of the offline channel was 3.46 (SD = 1.10). Thus, 47.1% of the respondents indicated that they purchased textiles "frequently" or "very frequently" from both channels. The frequency of purchase from both channels was identical among 31 respondents, whereas 19 respondents indicated that they purchased more frequently through the online channel, while 18 purchased more frequently through the offline channel. The paired difference was not significant (Wilcoxon W = 309.0; $p = .505$). Thus, H02 was not rejected. The frequency of purchase through the online and offline channels was positively correlated ($\rho = .34$, $p = .004$). Students who purchased more frequently tended to purchase more in both channels, suggesting that the channels are complementary to each other.

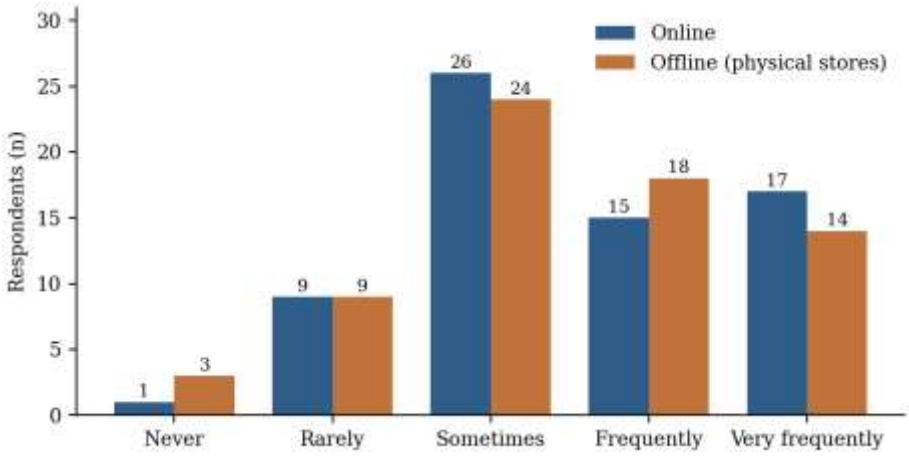


Figure 2. Frequency of textile purchase online and in physical stores (N = 68)

The stated preference was reflected in behaviour only for online shoppers. Students who preferred online reported a higher online purchase frequency (M = 4.41) than those who preferred offline (M = 3.21) or both channels (M = 3.33); the difference was significant, Kruskal–Wallis $H(2) = 15.26$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .23$. By contrast, offline purchase frequency did not differ significantly across the three preference groups (M = 3.59 for online-preferring, 3.67 for offline-preferring and 3.19 for both-equally students; $H(2) = 4.06$, $p = .132$). Even students who preferred online therefore continued to buy from physical stores at a similar rate to other students.

Table 2. Channel preference, platforms and store formats

Variable	Category	*n*	%
Preferred mode (*N* = 68)	Both equally	27	39.7
	Offline	24	35.3
	Online	17	25.0
Frequency of online purchase (*N* = 68)	Very frequently	17	25.0
	Frequently	15	22.1
	Sometimes	26	38.2
	Rarely	9	13.2
	Never	1	1.5
Frequency of offline purchase (*N* = 68)	Very frequently	14	20.6
	Frequently	18	26.5
	Sometimes	24	35.3
	Rarely	9	13.2
	Never	3	4.4
Most used online platform (*N* = 68)	Myntra	21	30.9
	Amazon	17	25.0
	Flipkart	12	17.6
	Ajio	5	7.4
	Brand websites	5	7.4
	Meesho	2	2.9
	Other	6	8.8
Preferred offline store (*n* = 66)	Shopping malls	25	37.9
	Brand outlets	20	30.3
	Local shops	18	27.3
	Department stores	1	1.5
	Other	2	3.0

Note. Percentages are of valid responses for each variable.

Myntra (30.9%), Amazon (25.0%) and Flipkart (17.6%) were the most popular online platforms accounting for nearly three-quarters of all respondents. As for the preferred type of shopping, organised retail sales in shopping malls (37.9%) and branded shops (30.3%) were more popular than local stores (27.3%).

5.3 Online shopping: attractions, concerns and disadvantages

The most common reasons for preferring online shopping were its convenience (26.5%), variety (23.5%), low prices and discounts (16.2%), ease of comparison of different products (14.7%) and doorstep delivery (13.2%) (Figure 4a). Students also evaluated the importance of assurance factors related to online shopping (Table 3; Figure 3). Thus, 77.9% thought that customer reviews and ratings were important or very important, while 75.0% highlighted the importance of easy returns/refunds. As for discounts and special offers, 67.6% of students said they were important. At the same time, 79.4% of respondents were concerned or very concerned about textiles' quality bought online, and 76.5% were worried about a possible discrepancy in the received/ordered goods. The five online shopping items not differ significantly in their impact on students' purchasing choices. mean ratings (Friedman $\chi^2(4) = 7.30$, $p = .121$), indicating that no single factor dominated.

Table 3. Importance and concern ratings (1 = lowest, 5 = highest)

Item	*n*	*M*	*SD*	Median	% rating 4 or 5
Online shopping					
Importance of discounts and promotional offers	68	3.91	0.96	4	67.6
Importance of customer reviews and ratings	68	4.13	1.14	5	77.9
Importance of easy return and refund options	68	4.06	1.06	4	75.0
Concern about quality of textiles bought online	68	4.13	1.06	4	79.4
Concern about displayed vs received product	68	4.07	0.94	4	76.5
Offline shopping					
Importance of physically examining fabric	65	4.06	1.12	4	75.4
Importance of trying on clothes	66	3.86	1.12	4	65.2
Importance of interaction with sales staff	66	3.76	1.10	4	60.6

Note. Scale: 1 = not important/not concerned, 5 = very important/very concerned. Cronbach's α = .85 for the five online items and α = .79 for the three offline items.

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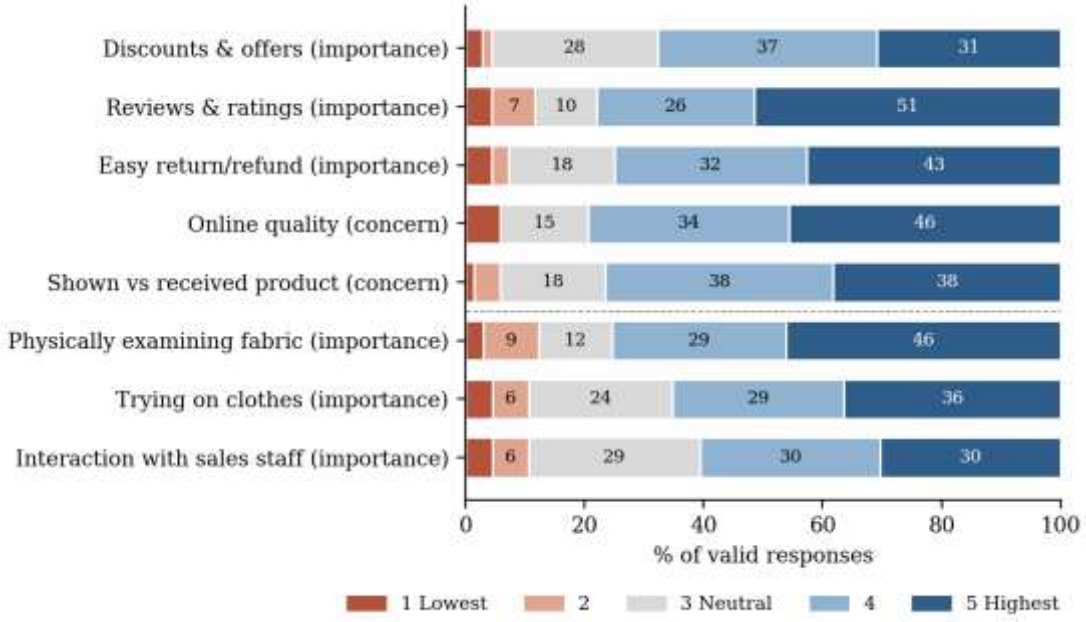


Figure 3. Distribution of importance and concern ratings (% of valid responses; values under 6% not labelled)

The biggest disadvantages of online shopping were its inability to allow examination of the product (30.9%) and size or fit issues (27.9%), together accounting for 58.8% of responses. Colour differing from the picture (14.7%) and quality concerns (13.2%) followed, whereas return or exchange difficulties (4.4%) and delivery delays (2.9%) were rarely named (Figure 4b). The most frequently named online disadvantages are thus tactile and fit-related rather than logistical.

5.4 Offline shopping: attractions and disadvantages

Among the 66 respondents answering the offline items, the most frequently cited reasons for preferring physical stores were seeing and touching the product (37.9%) and the opportunity to try it (28.8%), followed by a better understanding of quality (13.6%) and immediate purchase (10.6%); personal assistance from sales staff (4.5%) and trust in the store (1.5%) rarely the main reason (Figure 4c). Ratings agreed with these: 75.4% considered physical examination of fabric important or very important, 65.2% the same of trying on clothes and 60.6% interaction with sales staff. The three offline items differed significantly in importance (Friedman $\chi^2(2) = 8.52$, $p = .014$, $n = 65$), ranking physical examination of fabric highest ($M = 4.06$) and sales-staff interaction lowest ($M = 3.76$). The importance of physical examination was almost identical across the preference groups ($M = 4.07$ for both-equally, 4.09 for offline-preferring and 4.00 for online-preferring students; $H(2) < 0.01$, $p = .999$), meaning even students preferring online shopping valued the chances to inspect fabric.

The main disadvantages of offline shopping were its time-consumption (27.3%), limited variety (21.2%), the need to travel (15.2%) and higher prices (15.2%); crowded stores (6.1%) and limited discounts (4.5%) mentioned less often (Figure 4d). Time and travel account for 42.4% of the responses.

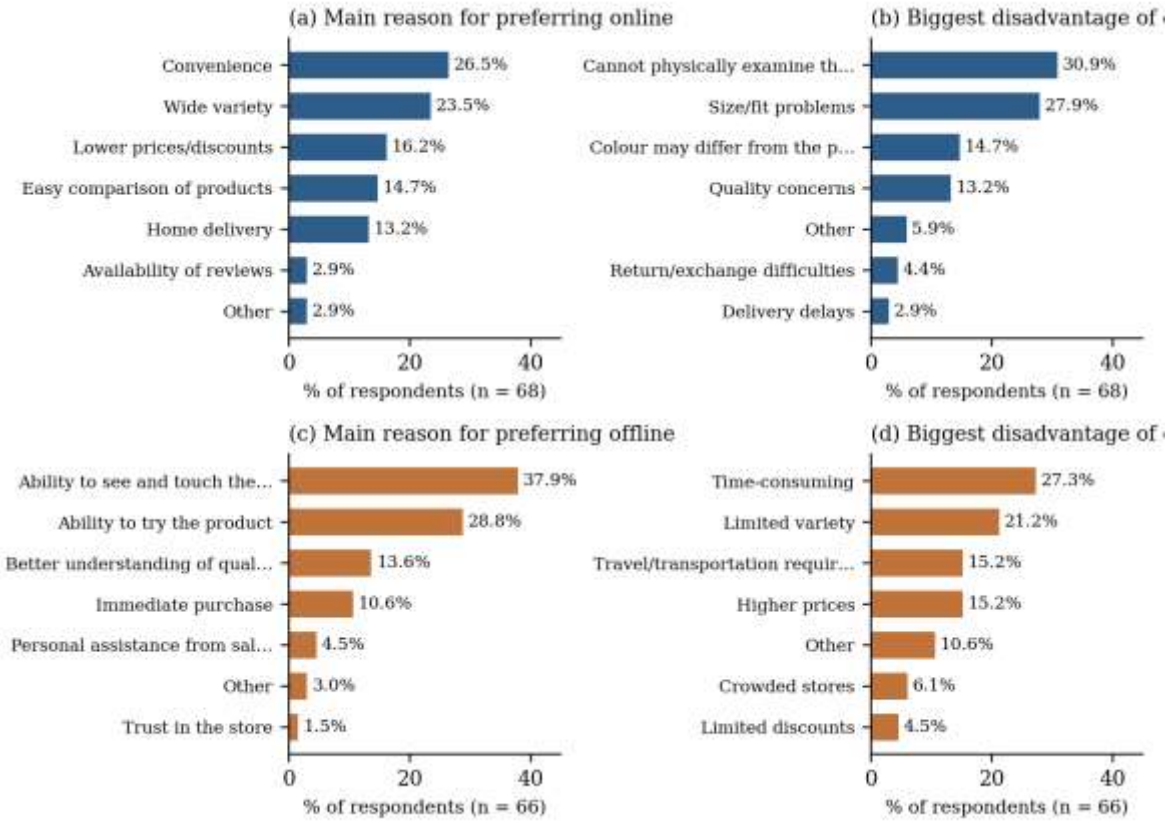


Figure 4. Main reasons for, and disadvantages of, online and offline textile shopping (% of respondents)

5.5 Perceived variety and value for money

Students were asked which channel provides better variety and better value for money (Figure 5). For variety, 43.1% named online, 30.8% both equally, 16.9% offline and 9.2% unsure (n = 65). For value for money, 46.2% online, 30.8% both equally and 23.1% offline (n = 65). Among those naming a channel, online was preferred to offline for variety (28 vs 11; p = .009) and value for money (30 vs 15; p = .036). H09 is rejected: online was seen as better on both attributes.

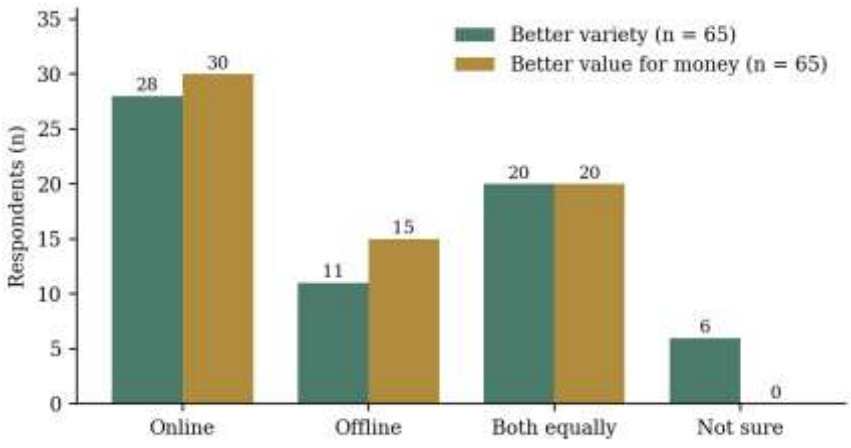


Figure 5. Perceived better channel for variety and for value for money (n = 65)

5.6 Demographic differences in channel preference

Table 4 shows the cross-tabulation of preferred mode by gender. Women were more likely to have a preference for both channels equally (58.8%) whilst only 5.9% of women preferred online compared to 31.4% of men (16 out of 51). The overall association was not significant at the 5% level, $\chi^2(2) = 5.40$, p = .067, Cramér's V = .28, and a Fisher's exact test comparing online preference with all other preferences gave p = .051; H03 is not rejected, although the result was borderline significant and the number of women was small. Purchase frequency was also not significantly associated

with gender (online: U = 538.5, p = .122; offline: U = 436.5, p = .971). Gender was not associated with age group ($\chi^2(4) = 5.60$, p = .231, V = .20), educational level ($\chi^2(2) = 0.50$, p = .777, V = .09) or spending band ($\chi^2(6) = 4.57$, p = .600, V = .18); note that the last three tables have some cells with expected counts below 5 and so the results should be treated as indicative only.

Table 4. Preferred mode of shopping by gender, *n* (row %)

Gender	Online	Offline	Both equally
Male (*n* = 51)	16 (31.4)	18 (35.3)	17 (33.3)
Female (*n* = 17)	1 (5.9)	6 (35.3)	10 (58.8)
Total (*N* = 68)	17 (25.0)	24 (35.3)	27 (39.7)

Note. $\chi^2(2) = 5.40$, p = .067; Fisher's exact test (online vs other), p = .051.

The product type was descriptively associated with the preference (although not formally testable given the small cell sizes). Specifically, none of the 16 students who most often bought formal wear preferred online (9 preferred offline and 7 both equally), while 6 of the 8 students who most often bought ethnic or traditional wear preferred both channels equally. The students who most often bought casual wear were distributed across the three preference groups (15 online, 12 offline, 13 both).

5.7 Correlates of purchase frequency

Table 5 reports Spearman correlations between the importance and concern ratings and the purchase frequency of the relevant channel. While discounts were positively but weakly associated with online purchase frequency (ρ = .25, p = .043), this finding does not withstand the Bonferroni adjustment, and thus H05 cannot be rejected at the 5% level (although it does withstand it at the 10% level). Neither reviews (ρ = .15, p = .207) nor the importance of return/refund were significantly related to online frequency, and thus H06 is not rejected. For H07, concern about product quality was positively and significantly related to online purchase frequency (ρ = .36, p = .003) while concern about displayed-versus-received products was not (ρ = .18, p = .134); thus, H07 is partially rejected. Concern about quality was also related to offline frequency (ρ = .32, p = .008), suggesting that it represents engagement with textile shopping in general rather than a specific deterrent to online purchase.

Table 5. Spearman rank correlations with purchase frequency

Rating / characteristic	Purchase frequency of	ρ	*p*	*n*
Importance of discounts and offers	Online	.25	.043	68
Importance of reviews and ratings	Online	.15	.207	68
Importance of easy return/refund	Online	.17	.171	68
Concern about online quality	Online	.36	.003*	68
Concern about displayed vs received product	Online	.18	.134	68
Importance of physically examining fabric	Offline	.28	.026	65
Importance of trying on clothes	Offline	.43	<.001*	66

Rating / characteristic	Purchase frequency of	ρ	*p*	*n*
Importance of sales-staff interaction	Offline	.37	.002*	66
Monthly spending capacity	Online	−.17	.174	67
Monthly spending capacity	Offline	−.35	.003*	67
Importance of physically examining fabric	Online	.10	.436	65
Importance of trying on clothes	Online	.14	.252	66
Concern about online quality	Offline	.32	.008	68
Monthly spending capacity	Overall purchase frequency	.03	.832	67

Note. p* below the Bonferroni-adjusted threshold of .0036 (14 tests). The last four rows are exploratory.

5.8 Summary of hypothesis tests

Table 6. Summary of hypothesis tests

No.	Test	Result	Decision
H01	Chi-square goodness of fit	$\chi^2(2) = 2.32$, $p = .313$	Not rejected
H02	Wilcoxon signed-rank	$W = 309.0$, $p = .505$	Not rejected
H03	Chi-square; Fisher's exact	$\chi^2(2) = 5.40$, $p = .067$; Fisher $p = .051$	Not rejected (borderline)
H04	Spearman correlation	Online $\rho = -.17$, $p = .174$; offline $\rho = -.35$, $p = .003$	Partially rejected (offline)
H05	Spearman correlation	$\rho = .25$, $p = .043$	Rejected (weak)
H06	Spearman correlation	Reviews $\rho = .15$, $p = .207$; returns $\rho = .17$, $p = .171$	Not rejected
H07	Spearman correlation	Quality $\rho = .36$, $p = .003$; displayed vs received $\rho = .18$, $p = .134$	Partially rejected (quality)
H08	Spearman correlation	Examination $\rho = .28$, $p = .026$; try-on $\rho = .43$, $p < .001$; staff $\rho = .37$, $p = .002$	Rejected
H09	Exact binomial (sign) test	Variety 28 vs 11, $p = .009$; value 30 vs 15, $p = .036$	Rejected

- **6. Discussion**

- **Channels are complementary rather than competing**. The key finding is that no channel dominated. Stated preference was spread across online, offline and both-equally frequencies were positively correlated. Even students who preferred online shopped in physical stores at a rate similar to other students. This supports the view in the recent literature that Gen Z should be treated as an omnichannel consumer group rather than a digital-only one (Baxi & Tiwari, 2026), and it qualifies the finding of higher online inclination among Gen Z reported in generational comparisons (Kaur, Malik, & Singh, 2024): in this college sample, online was the least frequently preferred of the three options.

- **Online wins on perceived assortment and price**, but not on assurance. Students judged online shopping better for variety and value for money and convenience, variety, discounts and comparison were the main reasons given for choosing online. These themes match the online advantages reported for Gen Z in Ahmedabad (Mandavia, Vaghela, & Vidani, 2024) and among college girls (Mahalakshmi et al., 2026). Yet the same students were widely concerned about online quality and about received products differing from what was displayed, and the leading online disadvantages were the inability to examine the product and size or fit problems, not delivery or returns. Online retail therefore appears to hold a perceived advantage in what can be assessed on a screen (range and price) and a perceived disadvantage in what must be felt or tried (fabric, fit and colour). The gap between the perceived online advantage and the larger share of students who still preferred offline over online suggests that the tactile uncertainty outweighs assortment and price for a substantial share of students.

- **Physical inspection and trial keep stores relevant**. The reasons for preferring physical stores were overwhelmingly sensory, namely seeing and touching the product and trying it on. The importance of trying on clothes was the strongest correlate of offline purchase frequency, followed by sales-staff interaction and fabric examination. The importance of fabric examination did not vary with channel preference, which indicates that students who prefer online accept a risk that they would nevertheless prefer to reduce. Organised formats (malls and brand outlets) were preferred to local shops by roughly seven in ten students answering the offline questions, which may reflect expectations of consistent quality, trial facilities and variety, although the survey did not test this. The disadvantages of stores were time, travel and limited variety, which are largely costs of access rather than of the product experience.

- **Quality concern reflects engagement, not avoidance**. Concern about online quality was positively related to online purchase frequency, and also to offline frequency. A plausible reading is that students who shop more often are more aware of quality risks in whichever channel they use, rather that concern keeps them away from online shopping. The cross-sectional design cannot establish the direction of this relationship. The weak association between the importance of discounts and online frequency ($\rho = .25$) is consistent with price consciousness playing a role in Gen Z fashion behaviour (Singh, Chakrabarti, & Tripathi, 2023), but it is modest and should not be over-interpreted. Customer reviews and return policies were rated as important by around three-quarters of students but were not related to how often students bought online, suggesting that they function as near-universal hygiene factors rather than as differentiators of heavy and light online buyers.

- **Gender and product type**. Women in the sample were less likely than men to prefer online shopping exclusively and more likely to prefer both channels, a difference that was borderline significant and is based on only 17 women. The descriptive product-type pattern, in which no formal-wear buyer preferred online, is consistent with the idea that fit-sensitive and occasion-specific garments are more strongly tied to trial and inspection, but cell sizes were too small for testing. Higher spending capacity was associated with less frequent offline purchase; the data do not explain this relationship, and it may reflect differences in budget, product mix or access that merit separate investigation.

7. Implications

- The following implications are drawn from the observed patterns and are suggestions rather than tested interventions.
- For online retailers. Since the leading complaints concern examination, size/fit and colour accuracy, investment in detailed fabric descriptions, accurate colour photography, size guides and customer photos and reviews is likely to address the barriers students name most often. Easy return and refund options were rated important by three-quarters of respondents, so visible and simple return terms may reduce perceived risk.
- For physical retailers. Stores should lean on what online channels cannot offer, namely touch, trial and assistance, while addressing the costs students attribute to them: time, travel, limited variety and perceived higher prices. Shorter trial and billing queues, wider assortment (including in-store access to online ranges) and competitive promotions are plausible responses.
- For omnichannel businesses. Because students use both channels at similar rates and many treat them equally, consistent pricing, stock visibility, and services that link the two (such as try-at-store or exchange-in-store arrangements) are likely to match how this segment actually shops.

8. Limitations

- The sample is small (N = 68) and was obtained by convenience sampling, so the results cannot be generalised to all Gen Z college students and statistical tests have limited power.
- The sample is predominantly male (75.0%), young (58.8% aged 18–19) and undergraduate (89.7%), and the questionnaire did not record institution or city, so geographic and institutional coverage cannot be verified from the data.
- Each construct was measured with a single item, and satisfaction, trust, social-media influence and purchase intention were not measured; the objectives and hypotheses were therefore limited to the items available.
- Self-reported frequency on verbal scales may differ from actual purchase records, and "textile products" covered clothes, footwear, bags and accessories, which may behave differently.
- Several cross-tabulations have expected cell counts below 5, and 14 correlations were examined, so isolated significant results should be treated as exploratory.
- The cross-sectional design supports associations only and not causal interpretation.
- Two or three respondents did not answer some of the offline and comparison items, and one did not report spending capacity.

9. Scope for Future Research

•Replicate the survey with a larger probability sample from several colleges, cities and states, and with more balanced gender representation.

•Add multi-item scales for satisfaction, trust, social-media influence and purchase intention to allow for regression or structural equation modelling.

•Examine webrooming and showrooming and other forms of channel switching directly.

•Study product-specific behaviour (for example formal versus casual wear) with samples large enough to test for differences.

•Compare Gen Z with Millennials using the same instrument, and use purchase records to compare stated and actual behaviour.

•Investigate the relationship between spending capacity and store-based purchase frequency observed here.

10. Conclusion

This study compared online and offline textile purchasing among Generation Z college students, using survey data from 68 respondents. Both channels were found to be preferred: the preference was split, purchase frequencies were similar and positively correlated, and most students seem to use both channels. While online shopping was credited with better variety and value for money, concerns about quality, product mismatch, fit and the impossibility of physical examination remained widespread, and the importance of trying clothes on and examining fabric were the strongest correlates of store-based purchasing. For this segment, online and offline retail fills different needs, and businesses that combine the assortment and price advantages of digital channels with the tactile and fit assurance of physical stores are best placed to serve it. Given the small convenience sample and the exploratory nature of the tests, these conclusions should be confirmed with larger and more representative samples.

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