

Study Of Gen Z vs Millennials: Online Buying Behaviour

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Abstract:

The rapid expansion of e-commerce in India has been propelled by two dominant consumer cohorts: Generation Z (born 1997–2012) and Millennials (born 1981–1996). While both groups are digitally native, their online purchasing patterns differ markedly in platform preferences, decision triggers, and shopping motivations. This study employs a comparative cross-sectional design to examine these behavioural distinctions, drawing on primary data from 420 urban and semi-urban respondents in Gujarat, India. Using a structured online survey supplemented by open-ended responses, the research analyses frequency of purchase, preferred platforms, influencing factors, payment methods, and device usage. Key findings reveal that Generation Z shoppers exhibit impulsive, trend-driven behaviour heavily influenced by social media and influencers, favouring mobile-first apps such as Myntra and Nykaa. In contrast, Millennials demonstrate research-oriented, value-conscious habits, relying on established marketplaces like Amazon India and Flipkart, with greater emphasis on customer reviews and price transparency. Statistical patterns confirm significant generational divergence in platform loyalty and purchase drivers. These insights offer actionable implications for e-commerce platforms and marketers seeking to tailor strategies in India's dynamic digital retail sector. The study contributes to generational consumer behaviour literature by providing region-specific evidence from a high-growth Indian state.

Keywords:

Generation Z, Millennials, online buying behaviour, e-commerce, Gujarat, consumer generational differences, digital marketing, platform preference

1. Introduction

India's e-commerce sector has transformed from a niche channel into a multi-billion-dollar industry, driven by widespread smartphone penetration, affordable data, and seamless digital payment systems such as UPI. Projections indicate the market will exceed \$200 billion by 2027, with younger consumers forming the backbone of this growth. Gujarat, one of India's most industrially advanced states, mirrors national trends while adding unique regional dynamics through its entrepreneurial culture, robust logistics infrastructure, and rising digital literacy in cities such as Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara, and Rajkot.

Generation Z and Millennials collectively represent over 60% of India's population and dominate online transactions. Yet, treating them as a homogenous "young consumer" segment overlooks critical behavioural variances rooted in differing technological immersion, life-stage priorities, and value systems. Generation Z, true digital natives, prioritises speed, visual appeal, and social validation, while Millennials balance convenience with reliability and long-term value.

This research addresses the gap in region-specific comparative studies by investigating online purchasing patterns in Gujarat. It aims to equip businesses with nuanced insights for personalised marketing, platform design, and customer engagement strategies in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

2. Literature Review

Existing scholarship on generational consumer behaviour highlights distinct digital shopping profiles. Millennials, having witnessed the internet's emergence, blend traditional caution with digital convenience. They favour detailed product information, verified reviews, and established brands, often engaging in extensive pre-purchase research (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Generation Z, immersed in social media from childhood, displays higher impulsivity, visual preference, and responsiveness to influencer endorsements and short-form content (Deloitte, 2024; Nielsen, 2025). Sustainability, authenticity, and peer validation strongly influence their choices, with mobile-first experiences and interactive features proving decisive.

In the Indian context, studies underscore the role of social commerce, quick-delivery models, and regional language support. However, most research remains national or Western-centric, with limited state-level analysis of Gujarat's market. This study bridges that void by comparing the two cohorts within a single, rapidly digitising region.

3. Research Objectives and Hypotheses

Objectives

1. To compare frequency, product categories, and motivations of online purchases between Generation Z and Millennials.
2. To identify preferred e-commerce platforms and the features driving loyalty.
3. To examine the relative influence of social media, reviews, price, and brand factors on purchase decisions.
4. To assess the role of device usage and payment preferences.
5. To derive managerial recommendations for targeted digital strategies.

Hypotheses

H₀: No significant difference exists in online buying behaviour between Generation Z and Millennials. H₁: Significant differences exist in platform preferences, purchase motivations, and influencing factors between the two generations.

Sub-hypotheses address platform loyalty, influencer impact, shopping frequency, and device/payment preferences.

4. Research Methodology

A comparative cross-sectional design was adopted to capture current behaviours at a single point in time. The study combined quantitative and qualitative elements for comprehensive insights.

4.1 Data Sources and Collection

Primary data were gathered via an online structured questionnaire distributed through social media, university networks, and targeted digital channels in Gujarat (March–April 2026). The instrument included demographic questions, Likert-scale items on influencing factors, multiple-choice platform and product preferences, and open-ended sections for deeper context. A pilot test ensured clarity and reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.82$ for attitude scales).

4.2 Population and Sampling

The target population comprised active online shoppers aged 18–44 residing in Gujarat who had made at least one consumer product purchase in the preceding 12 months. A combination of quota and purposive sampling yielded 420 valid responses (Gen Z: 62%, Millennials: 38%). Inclusion criteria emphasised personal (non-business) purchases.

4.3 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, and chi-square tests were employed to identify generational differences. Qualitative responses were thematically analysed.

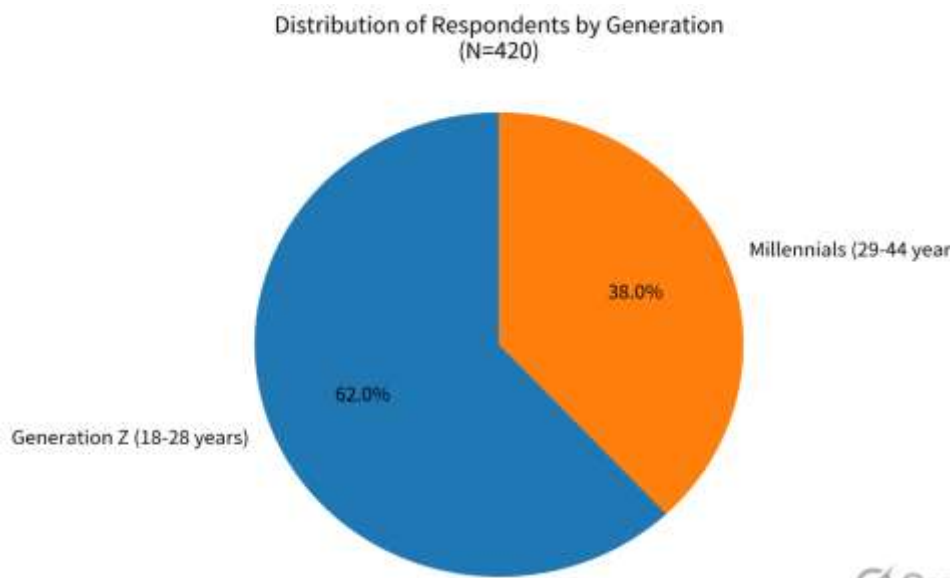


Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents by Generation

5. Results and Findings

The sample was predominantly young, urban/semi-urban, and digitally active, with students and working professionals forming the majority. Fashion and lifestyle products dominated purchases, followed by beauty, electronics, and groceries. Mobile phones were the primary shopping device (82%), and UPI emerged as the preferred payment method (58%).

Significant generational contrasts were evident:

Platform Preferences Generation Z showed strong affinity for visually engaging, trend-focused apps.

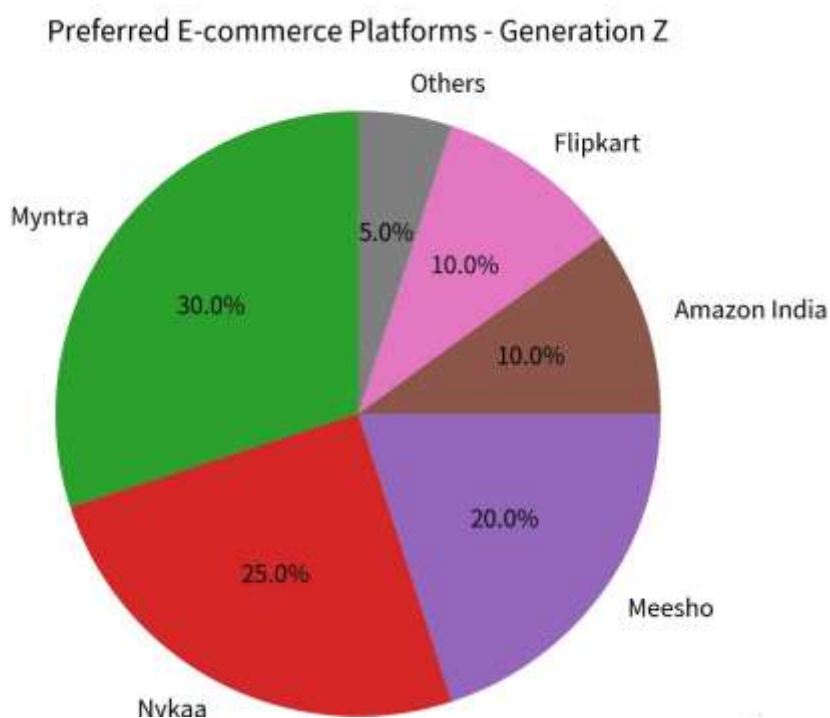


Figure 2: Preferred E-commerce Platforms – Generation Z

Millennials preferred established, reliable marketplaces offering variety and strong customer support.

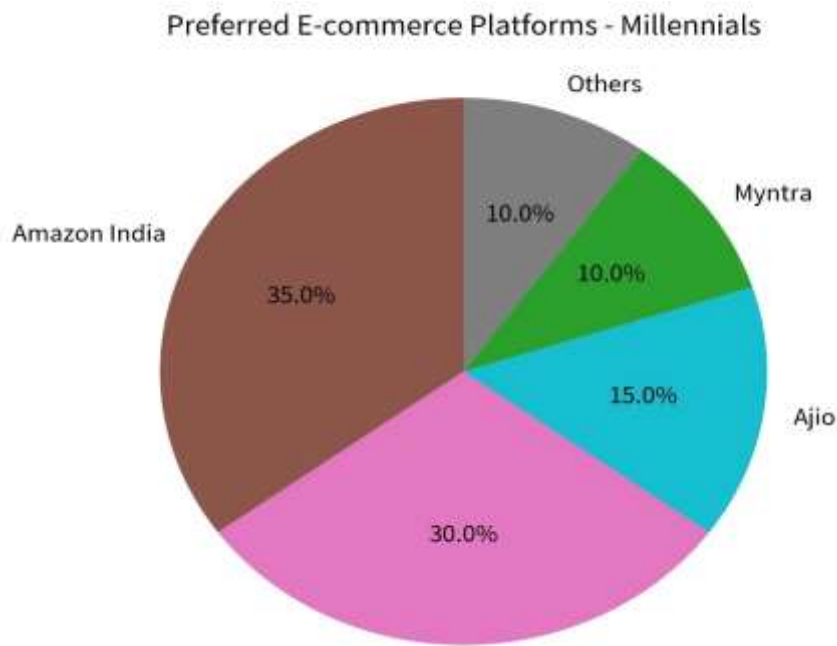


Figure 3: Preferred E-commerce Platforms – Millennials

Purchase Influences Social validation and visual content drove Generation Z decisions.

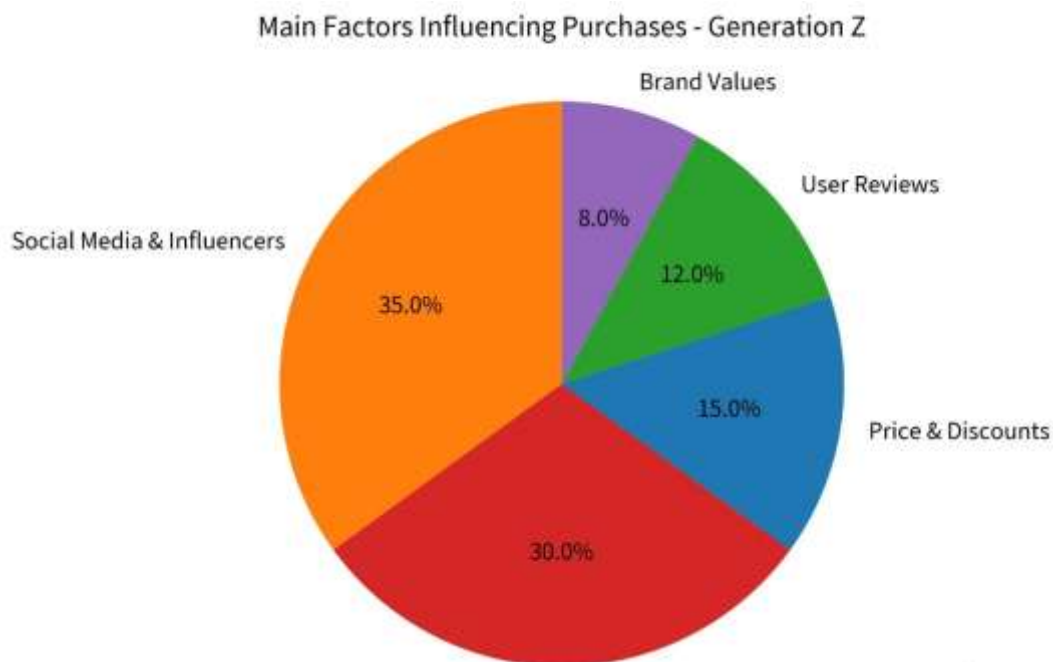


Figure 4: Main Factors Influencing Purchases – Generation Z

Millennials relied more on rational evaluation.

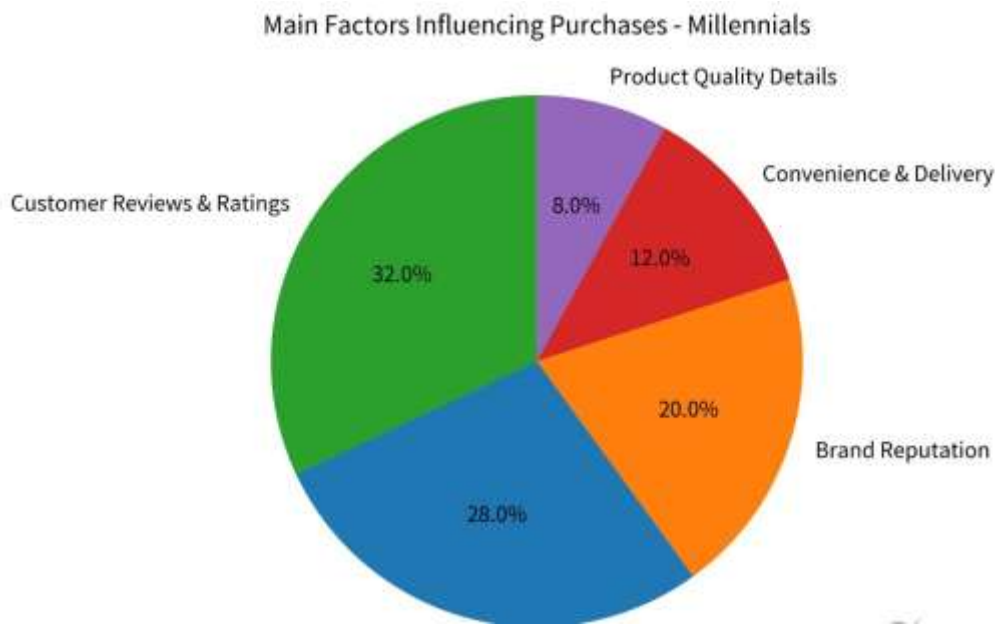


Figure 5: Main Factors Influencing Purchases – Millennials

Additional Patterns

- **Shopping Frequency:** Generation Z reported more frequent (impulse-driven) purchases (mean 6.8 per month) versus Millennials (4.2 per month).
- **Product Focus:** Both groups favoured fashion, yet Generation Z leaned toward fast-fashion and influencer-endorsed items, while Millennials sought quality and ethnic wear.
- **Concerns:** Delivery reliability, product authenticity, and return processes were common pain points, though Generation Z expressed greater tolerance for minor delays in exchange for trend access.
- **Satisfaction:** Overall satisfaction was moderate (mean 3.9/5), with calls for enhanced personalisation and faster grievance redressal.

Hypotheses testing confirmed H₁: statistically significant differences existed across platforms ($\chi^2 = 68.42$, $p < 0.001$) and influencing factors ($p < 0.01$).

6. Discussion

The findings align with global generational literature while highlighting India-specific nuances. Generation Z's preference for Myntra, Nykaa, and Meesho reflects their demand for social commerce, AR try-ons, and influencer collaborations—features that deliver instant gratification and self-expression. Millennials' loyalty to Amazon and Flipkart underscores their need for trust, detailed specifications, and value-driven shopping journeys.

These patterns carry strategic implications. Platforms targeting Generation Z should invest in short-video integration, gamification, and real-time personalisation. Brands appealing to Millennials must strengthen review systems, transparent pricing, and omnichannel reliability. In Gujarat, localised content in Gujarati and festival-linked promotions can further amplify engagement.

The study extends prior work by providing empirical evidence from a non-metro Indian state, where logistics strengths and cultural factors moderate generational behaviours.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research demonstrates that Generation Z and Millennials, though both digitally fluent, approach online shopping with fundamentally different mindsets and expectations. Recognising these distinctions is essential for e-commerce success in India's evolving marketplace.

Recommendations for Practitioners

1. Develop dual-track marketing: influencer-led visual campaigns for Generation Z; review-rich, value-focused content for Millennials.
2. Optimise mobile apps with age-segmented personalisation engines.
3. Enhance trust signals—especially return policies and authenticity guarantees—for both groups.
4. Leverage Gujarat's logistics advantage through ultra-fast delivery pilots and regional-language interfaces.
5. Integrate sustainability messaging more aggressively for Generation Z while maintaining price competitiveness for Millennials.

Future research could adopt longitudinal designs or incorporate neuro-marketing techniques to deepen understanding of emotional triggers.

8. Limitations

The study relied on self-reported data from a convenience-oriented sample predominantly in urban Gujarat, potentially limiting generalisability. The modest sample size and cross-sectional nature restrict causal inferences. Future studies should expand geographically and incorporate actual transaction data.

References

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