

Consumer Product Usage - Key Drivers and Product Disposal Behaviour of Generation Y and Generation Z

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ABSTRACT

Consumer product usage is a fundamental aspect of understanding consumer behaviour, encompassing factors that influence how and why consumers adopt and interact with products. This research article examines the primary factors that drive consumer product usage, including psychological, socio-cultural, technological, and environmental influences. By exploring both individual and contextual factors that shape consumption patterns, this paper provides insights into how businesses can optimize product development, marketing strategies, and customer satisfaction. Through an analysis of existing literature and theoretical models, this study highlights the dynamic nature of consumer behaviour and the multifaceted elements that contribute to product usage decisions. Product disposal behaviour encompasses how consumers manage products at the end of their lifecycle, including reuse, recycling, donation, or disposal. Understanding generational differences in this behaviour is crucial for promoting sustainable consumption practices. This review examines recent studies focusing on Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z, highlighting their disposal habits, motivations, and the factors influencing their decisions.

Keywords: fundamental, consumer behaviour, psychological, Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the factors that influence consumer product usage is crucial for marketers, product designers, and businesses seeking to improve customer satisfaction and product adoption rates. Consumer behaviour theories have long emphasized the complex interplay between external and internal influences that determine how and why individuals use certain products. Factors such as perceived value, social influences, personal preferences, and the ease of use significantly impact consumer decision-making and subsequent product usage. This research article seeks to identify and analyze the key determinants of consumer product usage, presenting a comprehensive review of factors that shape consumer behaviour and consumption practices.

I. FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER PRODUCT USAGE

1. Psychological Factors

Psychological influences are critical in determining why consumers engage with specific products. These factors relate to the internal decision-making processes that guide consumer behaviour:

- **Perceived Value:** Consumers assess the value of a product based on its quality, price, and perceived benefits. According to the **Value Perception Theory**, consumers will only adopt and use a product if they perceive it provides a favourable balance of cost and benefit (Zeithaml, 1988). Perceived value can also be influenced by brand reputation, emotional appeal, and the fulfilment of consumer needs.
- **Motivation and Needs:** Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs suggests that consumers make product choices based on their level of need fulfilment, from basic physiological needs to self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Products that satisfy higher-level needs, such as self-esteem or personal growth, are often used more frequently by consumers.

- **Attitudes and Beliefs:** Consumers' attitudes toward products—shaped by personal beliefs and past experiences—can greatly affect usage. A positive attitude toward a product or brand often leads to higher usage frequency and brand loyalty (Ajzen, 1991).

2. Social and Cultural Influences

Social and cultural factors are essential drivers of consumer behaviour. These factors not only affect the adoption of new products but also shape how frequently and in what context products are used.

- **Social Influence:** Peer pressure, social norms, and reference groups play a crucial role in product adoption. Consumers often turn to friends, family, or online reviews to gauge the desirability and usefulness of a product. The concept of **Social Proof**, as described by Cialdini (2009), explains that individuals are more likely to adopt products endorsed by people they trust or who belong to their social group.
- **Cultural Trends:** Culture shapes consumer preferences and usage patterns by influencing values, traditions, and lifestyle choices. For instance, products associated with sustainability and environmental friendliness are gaining popularity due to the rise of eco-consciousness in many societies (Schwepker, 2019).
- **Lifestyle and Social Identity:** Products often become extensions of a consumer's identity and lifestyle. For example, fitness-related products may be more frequently used by individuals who identify with a health-conscious lifestyle (Richins, 1994). These products align with personal values, contributing to their constant use.

3. Technological Factors

In today's fast-evolving market, technology plays a crucial role in consumer product usage. The rapid development of digital technologies has transformed how consumers interact with products and services.

- **Ease of Use and Accessibility:** The adoption of products is influenced by how easy they are to use. According to the **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)**, ease of use and perceived usefulness are key predictors of consumer adoption of new technology (Davis, 1989). Products that are intuitive and require minimal effort for usage see higher engagement rates.
- **Innovation and Product Updates:** The continuous improvement of products through technological upgrades or innovative features encourages repeated use. For example, smartphones are frequently upgraded with new features that enhance usability, leading to sustained product engagement (Venkatesh & Bala, 2008).
- **Connectivity and Integration:** With the rise of the Internet of Things (IoT), many products today are connected and integrated with other devices, enhancing their functionality and encouraging continuous usage. Products like smart home devices or fitness trackers, for example, offer enhanced utility through connectivity, leading to frequent usage (Perrons, 2020).

4. Environmental and Situational Factors

External factors, including environmental and situational elements, also play a significant role in consumer product usage patterns. These factors can either facilitate or inhibit product usage depending on the context.

- **Availability and Accessibility:** The physical availability of a product, including distribution channels, location, and delivery options, influences product usage. Products that are readily available and easy to access, such as online shopping platforms, encourage frequent usage (Kotler & Keller, 2016).
- **Economic Factors:** Economic conditions, including consumer income, price sensitivity, and overall economic stability, can affect how often consumers use certain products. Luxury goods, for example, may be used less frequently by individuals with lower disposable incomes, while essential goods like food and healthcare products are more frequently consumed (Jain & Batra, 2018).

- **Time and Convenience:** The convenience of a product in terms of time-saving benefits can significantly drive usage. For instance, ready-to-eat meals or ride-sharing apps like Uber are adopted more frequently by consumers seeking convenience and time-saving solutions (Stone, 2017).

5. Product Characteristics and Design

The intrinsic characteristics and design features of a product can determine how often it is used by consumers. Products that offer greater utility, superior design, or aesthetic appeal are more likely to be engaged with regularly.

- **Functionality and Durability:** The functionality of a product, particularly its ability to meet consumer needs over time, influences repeated usage. Durable products that provide long-term benefits tend to have a higher frequency of usage (Baker & Churchill, 1993).
- **Aesthetic Appeal and Design:** The visual appeal of a product, along with its ergonomic design, can increase consumer satisfaction and encourage frequent use. Design-conscious consumers may engage more with products that align with their tastes and preferences (Norman, 2004).

II.PRODUCT DISPOSAL BEHAVIOUR

1. Generation Z (Born 1997–2012)

1.1 Recycling and Disposal Practices

Despite being perceived as eco-conscious, Generation Z exhibits behaviors that contradict this image. In the UK, 92% of Gen Z individuals admitted to discarding items due to the inconvenience of cleaning them, highlighting a significant barrier to recycling efforts. Additionally, 65% of Gen Z Americans reported throwing away wearable clothing items monthly, a rate higher than that of Millennials (55%) and Gen X (36%).

1.2 Second-Hand Shopping and Sustainability

Contrasting with their disposal habits, Gen Z shows a strong preference for second-hand shopping. In the UK, 66% of Gen Z shoppers prefer purchasing pre-loved items, and 40% believe that the majority of their purchases will be second-hand by 2027. This indicates a growing trend towards mindful consumption, despite challenges in disposal practices.

1.3 Environmental Concerns and Mental Health

The pressure to engage in fast fashion has been linked to mental health issues among Gen Z. A study found that 50% of Gen Z individuals believe that the pressure from the fast fashion industry harms their mental health, and 47% expressed disgust over its environmental impact. This highlights the complex relationship between consumption habits and environmental consciousness in this generation.

2. Generation Y (Born 1981–1996)

2.1 Sustainable Purchasing Decisions

Sustainability plays a significant role in the purchasing decisions of Millennials. In the United States, 80% of Millennials reported that sustainability is a driving factor behind their purchasing decisions. This indicates a strong inclination towards environmentally friendly products, which may influence their disposal behaviours.

2.2 Second-Hand Shopping and Sustainability

Millennials also engage in second-hand shopping, though at slightly lower rates than Gen Z. In the UK, 59% of Millennials intend to buy more pre-loved items in the next two years, aiming to cut down on new purchases. This trend reflects a shift towards sustainable consumption patterns within this demographic.

3. Comparative Insights

Behaviour/Attribute	Generation Z (Born 1997–2012)	Generation Y (Born 1981–1996)
Recycling Habits	Lower engagement	Higher engagement
Second-Hand Shopping	66% prefer pre-loved items	59% intend to buy more pre-loved items
Sustainability in Purchases	66% driven by sustainability	80% driven by sustainability

Mental Health Concerns	50% affected by fast fashion pressure	Data not specified
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DISCUSSION

Consumer product usage is driven by a variety of factors that encompass psychological, socio-cultural, technological, and environmental influences. Understanding these factors is critical for businesses seeking to increase product adoption, enhance consumer satisfaction, and optimize their marketing efforts. Psychological factors such as perceived value and motivation, along with social influences, technological advancements, and product characteristics, all play essential roles in shaping consumer behaviour. Additionally, situational factors such as product availability and economic conditions can influence how frequently products are used. By addressing these factors, businesses can create products that meet consumer needs and encourage higher levels of usage. Recent studies indicate that both Generation Z and Generation Y exhibit environmentally conscious behaviours, yet their practices vary. Generation Z shows a strong preference for second-hand shopping and expresses concerns over the environmental impact of fast fashion, yet their recycling habits are less consistent. Millennials demonstrate a higher engagement in sustainable purchasing decisions and second-hand shopping, reflecting a more consistent approach to eco-conscious consumption. Understanding these generational differences is essential for developing targeted strategies to promote sustainable product disposal practices across different consumer segments.

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