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# STRATEGIC RELEVANCE OF THE PHYSICAL STORE IN THE PURCHASE JOURNEY OF GENERATION Z IN AN EMERGING COUNTRY

## RELEVÂNCIA ESTRATÉGICA DA LOJA FÍSICA NA JORNADA DE COMPRA DA GERAÇÃO Z EM PAÍS EMERGENTE

## RELEVANCIA ESTRATÉGICA DE LA TIENDA FÍSICA EN EL RECORRIDO DE COMPRA DE LA GENERACIÓN Z EN UN PAÍS EMERGENTE

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose –** This study aimed to identify the factors that make physical stores relevant to Generation Z, contributing to the reframing of this operational model, which plays a strategic role in job and income generation in Brazil.

**Design / Methodology / Approach –** An exploratory qualitative approach was adopted, grounded in the EKB model. In-depth interviews were conducted with Generation Z representatives, and the data were analyzed using content analysis.

**Relevance – T**echnological advancement has transformed the way consumers interact with brands, challenging physical retail channels to adapt. Generation Z, as digital natives, relates to brick-and-mortar stores in new ways that require deeper understanding, especially in emerging markets and in the post-Covid-19 context. Although existing literature highlights social interaction and sensory experience as key drivers of physical store attractiveness, studies focusing specifically on Generation Z in this scenario remain scarce.

**Findings –** The results highlight the relevance of physical stores at three stages of the purchase process: (1) alternative evaluation, driven by the need to physically experience the product; (2) purchase, influenced by a spillover effect from the previous stage; and (3) post-purchase, where the store was partially relevant, associated with perceived service efficiency.

**Implications –** As practical and strategic recommendations, this study proposes repositioning the physical store as a space for sensory and emotional experiences, expanding access to product and service information inside the store, leveraging personalization as a key value driver, applying channel-based pricing intelligence, ensuring seamless post-purchase integration across channels, and bringing digital influencers closer to the physical retail environment.

**Limitations –** The study reflects individual perceptions of participants within a specific Brazilian context; therefore, it neither represents Generation Z as a whole nor can it be generalized to other market segments or regions.

**Originality –** The study is original in investigating the strategic role of physical stores for Generation Z despite the prominence of digital channels, within an emerging and post-pandemic market context—an area largely unexplored in previous research.

**Keywords:** Consumer behavior; Purchase journey; Generation Z; Future of retail.

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## RESUMO

**Objetivo –** Este estudo teve como objetivo identificar os fatores que tornam as lojas físicas relevantes para a geração Z, contribuindo para ressignificar esse modelo de operação estratégico na geração de emprego e renda no Brasil.

**Design / Metodologia / Abordagem –** Utilizou-se uma abordagem qualitativa exploratória, fundamentada no modelo EKB. Foram realizadas entrevistas em profundidade com representantes da geração Z, e os dados foram analisados por meio de análise de conteúdo.

**Relevância –** O avanço tecnológico tem transformado a interação entre consumidores e marcas, desafiando os canais físicos a se adaptarem. A geração Z, nativa digital, apresenta uma nova relação com o varejo físico, que exige maior compreensão, especialmente em países emergentes e no cenário pós-covid-19. Embora a literatura aponte a interação social e a experiência sensorial como principais atrativos das lojas físicas, há escassez de estudos focados nessa geração e nesse contexto.

**Resultados –** Os achados indicam a relevância das lojas físicas em três etapas do processo de compra: (1) avaliação de alternativas, motivada pela necessidade de sentir o produto; (2) compra, influenciada pelo efeito de transbordamento da etapa anterior; e (3) pós-compra, em que a loja física demonstrou ser parcialmente relevante, relacionada à eficiência no atendimento.

**Implicações –** Como recomendações práticas e estratégicas, este estudo propõe reposicionar a loja como espaço de experiência sensorial e emocional, ampliar o acesso à informação sobre os produtos e serviços dentro da loja física, trabalhar a personalização como alavanca de valor, atuar sobre o preço com inteligência de canal, integrar a etapa de pós-compra de forma fluida entre canais e aproximar influenciadores digitais do ambiente físico.

**Limitações –** O estudo reflete percepções individuais dos participantes em um contexto brasileiro específico, portanto não representa toda a geração Z, nem pode ser generalizado para outros segmentos ou mercados.

**Originalidade –** O estudo é original ao investigar o papel das lojas físicas para a geração Z, mesmo diante da proeminência do digital, em um contexto de mercado emergente e pós-pandemia, lacuna pouco abordada em pesquisas anteriores.


**Palavras-chave:** Comportamento do consumidor; Jornada de compra; Geração Z; Futuro do varejo.


## RESUMEN

**Objetivo –** Este estudio tuvo como objetivo identificar los factores que hacen que las tiendas físicas sean relevantes para la Generación Z, contribuyendo a resignificar este modelo operativo, que desempeña un papel estratégico en la generación de empleo e ingresos en Brasil.

**Diseño / Metodología / Enfoque –** Se adoptó un enfoque cualitativo exploratorio, basado en el modelo EKB. Se realizaron entrevistas en profundidad con representantes de la Generación Z y los datos fueron analizados mediante análisis de contenido.

**Relevancia –** El avance tecnológico ha transformado la forma en que los consumidores interactúan con las marcas, desafiando a los canales físicos a adaptarse. La Generación Z, nativa digital, se relaciona con las tiendas físicas de maneras que requieren una mayor comprensión, especialmente en los mercados emergentes y en el contexto post-Covid-19. Aunque la literatura señala la interacción social y la experiencia sensorial como los principales atractivos de las tiendas físicas, existen pocos estudios centrados en esta generación y en este contexto específico.

**Resultados –** Los hallazgos indican la relevancia de las tiendas físicas en tres etapas del proceso de compra: (1) evaluación de alternativas, motivada por la necesidad de experimentar físicamente el producto; (2) compra, influenciada por un efecto de desbordamiento de la etapa anterior; y (3) post-compra, en la que la tienda física resultó ser parcialmente relevante, asociada a la percepción de eficiencia en el servicio.

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**Implicaciones –** Como recomendaciones prácticas y estratégicas, este estudio propone reposicionar la tienda física como un espacio de experiencia sensorial y emocional, ampliar el acceso a la información sobre productos y servicios dentro de la tienda, aprovechar la personalización como palanca de valor, aplicar inteligencia de precios por canal, integrar de manera fluida la etapa de poscompra entre canales y acercar a los influenciadores digitales al entorno físico.

**Limitaciones –** El estudio refleja percepciones individuales de los participantes en un contexto brasileño específico; por lo tanto, no representa a toda la Generación Z ni puede generalizarse a otros segmentos o mercados.

**Originalidad –** El estudio es original al investigar el papel estratégico de las tiendas físicas para la Generación Z, a pesar de la prominencia del entorno digital, en un contexto de mercado emergente y post-pandémico, un tema poco abordado en investigaciones anteriores.

**Palabras clave:** comportamiento del consumidor; jornada de compra; Generación Z; futuro del comercio minorista.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, the retail sector has undergone profound transformations, driven both by technological advancements and by changes in consumer behavior patterns. In the past, retail was characterized predominantly by small family-owned stores, where consumers requested products directly from the shopkeeper and often negotiated prices (Gauri et al., 2021). Beginning in 1995, with the emergence of the World Wide Web, a new era unfolded with the advent of electronic commerce, paving the way for the first digital businesses (Grewal et al., 2025). Since then, the sector has experienced rapid digitalization, with increasingly connected sales and service channels.

In addition to e-commerce, the advancement of mobile technologies prompted a new disruption in the retail environment, transforming consumers' expectations and behaviors (Rigby, 2011). The emergence of mobile phones enabled mobile commerce (m-commerce), while the growth of social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram fostered social commerce (s-commerce) and supported the rise of digital influencers (Grewal et al., 2025). In this context, the consumer journey has become increasingly fluid and personalized, resulting from the transition from a traditional single-channel model to an omnichannel structure that integrates physical stores, digital platforms, social networks, and apps into a unified shopping experience.

As these various channels evolved, competition emerged among them, particularly between offline and online channels. This occurs because offline operations remain strongly centered on transactional aspects of consumption, which are also performed by online channels—enhanced by greater convenience. A similar scenario can be observed in the apparel retail sector, which presents intense competition in terms of commercial formats and brand variety. This broad assortment grants consumers a degree of bargaining power, thereby intensifying commercial rivalry. In Brazil, the sector demonstrates significant economic impact and projected growth in both volume and revenue for 2025. Based on the aspects previously discussed, the apparel retail environment was selected as the field of investigation, though without the intention of examining the sector in depth.

Beyond a more diverse and competitive market landscape, a new type of consumer has emerged, marked by characteristics that distinguish them from previous cohorts: Generation Z. Born between the mid-1990s and 2010, this generation was the first to be born already connected. They do not know a world that exists solely offline, as their lives began at a time when the internet was already embedded in society (MindMiners, 2018). Their relationship with money and work challenges prevailing models of success. Their consumption awareness also shows signs of shifting when compared with earlier generations.

Although generational aspects and the need to redefine retail are global phenomena, the reality of an emerging country amplifies the relevance of this redefinition and demands a more specific analysis. In an emerging economy such as

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Brazil, the importance of physical retail makes this redefinition a matter of social and economic sustainability. Moreover, cultural, social, economic, and structural differences create a particular context that requires more tailored actions. In light of this, the problem faced by retail organizations concerns the challenge of redefining physical channels amid growing competition from online channels, which offer greater convenience to consumers. Thus, the research question addressed in this article is to uncover which factors—and in what ways—shape the incorporation of physical stores into the purchasing journey of Generation Z in an emerging country. To sustain the attractiveness of offline channels, it becomes essential to understand which attributes are valued by this generation, whose digital experience shapes new expectations and demands strategic adaptation from traditional retail.

It is widely acknowledged that consumers' perceptions of channel attributes, as well as their responses to those attributes, are crucial for channel attractiveness (Gensler, Verhoef, & Böhm, 2012). Understanding these perceptions from a generational standpoint provides a tool for analyzing changes over time. In addition, it offers ways to comprehend how different experiences relate to and influence the life cycle and aging process, shaping individuals' worldviews (Dimock, 2019). Although various other factors—such as social, cultural, and economic variables—may guide consumers' choice of point of sale, the generational factor was selected due to Generation Z's distinctive technological context.

Several studies have already been conducted in an attempt to identify the reasons behind consumers' preference for physical stores as their preferred channel option. Current knowledge indicates that the following elements make this channel highly relevant for consumers in general: sensory aspects, social aspects, security in the purchasing process, and additional services. The sensory aspect reflects the possibility of testing and feeling the product (Kunc et al., 2024). The social aspect comprises three distinct dimensions. One refers to the sense of entertainment associated with the physical shopping process (Zielke & Komor, 2025). Another dimension concerns the interaction with other people during the purchasing process. Lastly, it relates to the personalized attention consumers find in this channel, manifested through the support provided by the salesforce (Haridasan & Fernando, 2018). The security aspect also proves relevant and is represented in two ways: security in data sharing and security in the decision-making process (Flavián, Gurrea, & Orús, 2020). Finally, services manifest in several forms, such as physical stores functioning as pick-up points for online purchases or as locations for product returns (Miquel-Romero, Frasquet, & Molla-Descals, 2020).

After reviewing the existing body of knowledge, an opportunity for further research on the topic was identified. The first reason relates to the fact that most findings date from a period before or during the Covid-19 pandemic. This health crisis generated significant changes in the retail environment, leading many consumers to alter their purchasing routines (Eger et al., 2021). Another reason is the need for deeper exploration of the stages of the purchasing process beyond pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase. An additional relevant reason is that the studies identified portray realities of countries other than Brazil. Investigating the Brazilian context also provides insight into the broader landscape of emerging markets. Finally, the consumption preferences of Generation Z remain underexplored in the literature.

Based on the context discussed and the results identified thus far, this study aimed to uncover the factors that influence the incorporation of physical stores in the purchasing journey of Generation Z in an emerging country. The response to this research question was structured across six sections. The first, Introduction, provides an overview of the topic. Next, the principal theoretical concepts are examined through a literature review. Subsequently, the methodology is presented, grounded in an exploratory qualitative approach, with semi-structured interviews conducted with Generation Z individuals residing in the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The data collected were analyzed through content analysis, grouping identified codes to enable subsequent understanding of behavior. The two following sections present the collected data and the corresponding discussions. The final section offers the study's conclusions, along with its limitations and suggestions for future research.

The insights generated herein contribute to theory by providing new knowledge about the consumption behavior of this generation within the context of emerging markets. Furthermore, they offer practical guidance for physical store managers, indicating opportunities for adjustments, improvements, and operational development with the aim of enhancing the relevance and attractiveness of these points of sale for Generation Z. Additionally, the study presents social contributions by aligning with the following United Nations Sustainable Development Goals:

Goal 8.2: Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading, and innovation.

Goal 8.3: Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation.

Goal 9.1: Develop quality, reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on equitable and affordable access for all.

## Retail, Its Development and Relevance

Starting from the concept that retail encompasses all activities related to the commercialization of goods and services directly to the final consumer (Kotler, 2024), this environment can be represented in multiple forms. Retail can facilitate access to information, offer product variety, and provide pleasant shopping formats (Betancourt et al., 2016).

Over time, retail evolved from small family-owned stores to departmental structures. In the 1990s, physical stores, catalogs, and telemarketing predominated (Grewal et al., 2025). Although the fundamentals of retail have remained, the mode of operation shifted with the emergence of the internet, which opened space for electronic businesses (Grewal, Motyka, & Levy, 2018; Grewal et al., 2025). This gave rise to the concept of multichannel retailing, associated with the integrated management of multiple channels (Neslin et al., 2006).

Technological advancements brought new disruptions, especially mobile channels (Rigby, 2011; Verhoef, Kannan, & Inman, 2015) and the omnichannel model, which promotes integration across channels and reflects a logic centered on consumer behavior (Ailawadi & Farris, 2017; Alexander & Blazquez Cano, 2020; Verhoef et al., 2015). The boundaries between channels have become increasingly blurred (Verhoef et al., 2015b). Despite digitalization, physical stores still play a central role. In 2024, online retail accounted for only 9.03% of sales in Brazil (Associação Brasileira de Comércio Eletrônico, 2025). Even so, online channels have been driving the reconfiguration of physical retail (Alexander & Blazquez Cano, 2020; Cao & Li, 2015). Practices such as showrooming—researching in physical stores and purchasing online—(Flavián, Gurrea, & Orús, 2020; Neslin et al., 2014) and webrooming—the opposite pattern (Kleinlercher et al., 2020; Verhoef et al., 2015)—illustrate the fluidity of channels throughout the purchase journey.

## Fashion Retail

The multiplicity of channels found in retail in general is also evident in fashion retail. Competition for the portion of the consumer budget allocated to apparel is intense and occurs across a wide range of retail formats, including specialty stores, department stores, mass retailers, among others, operating both physical and online stores (Berman, 2011). These diverse formats arise from the pursuit of better addressing customer needs (Kotler, 2024).

Competition among brands is also significant. According to data from Econodatas (2025), there are nearly one million business registrations (CNPJs) in Brazil associated with apparel retailing. This volume highlights the sector's strong economic significance in the country. Estimates for 2025 indicate that apparel retail sales (both physical retail and e-commerce) are expected to grow by 4.9% in the number of items sold and by 9.0% in nominal value (BRL), compared with 2024.

The multiple possibilities for purchasing apparel—both in terms of brands and channels—grant consumers substantial bargaining power (McCormick et al., 2014). In response, a hybrid purchasing posture has emerged, blending online and offline environments. This trend is evidenced by a study with Portuguese youth aged 16 to 25, which showed no predominant preference for either online or offline channels in apparel retail. On the contrary, more than 70% reported purchasing through both physical and digital channels.

**Generation Z**

The notion of generation, initially conceived as a grouping delineated by historical events that produce behavioral and value-based cleavages among cohorts, provides the foundation for understanding intergenerational differences (Parry & Urwin, 2011; Turner, 2015). This framework evolves by emphasizing birth year as a marker of exposure to historical and technological disruptions that shape personal and professional values—though it does not necessarily resolve the tension between age, period, and cohort effects, an issue still insufficiently tested empirically and one that justifies further investigation (Klopotan, Aleksić, & Vinković, 2020).

Within this continuum, Generation Z emerges as a digitally native cohort, typically born between 1995 and 2010, whose primary socialization occurred within connected ecosystems, conditioning their preferences and competencies (Vojvodić, 2019; White, 2017). The literature describes a permanently online profile for whom technology is a habitat rather than a tool, with relative difficulties in non-mediated interactions and faster—but at times superficial—information-processing patterns (Andrea, Gabriella, & Tímea, 2016). Simultaneously, technology can operate as a pathway for escapism and belonging, although the causal relationship between intensive use, identity seeking, and the development of in-person competencies remains insufficiently clarified, often more inferred than demonstrated (Toronto, 2009; Turner, 2015). Indeed, growing up immersed in tablets, smartphones, and social networks reinforces the hypothesis of a cohort shaped by pervasive connectivity (Ng et al., 2019), but little is known about the boundary conditions—such as socioeconomic status, digital infrastructure, or cultural norms—that may moderate these effects.

In the domain of consumption, the shift from single-channel strategies to integrated architectures has consolidated with this cohort, leading some scholars to argue that the very term "omnichannel" may be insufficient given their expectation of total, continuous, and frictionless integration across touchpoints—an aspirational proposition that still demands rigorous measurement and behavioral validation rather than descriptive assumptions (Baykal, 2020). Generation Z is commonly portrayed as diverse, multicultural, and demanding, endowed with greater decision autonomy due to the ubiquity of information and the ability to compare options in real time; however, gaps remain regarding when and how this autonomy translates into decision quality, satisfaction, and loyalty (Cheung et al., 2018). Declared emphases on innovation, convenience, security, and escapism delineate a value map that must be connected to actual practices, not merely to self-reported attitudes (Wood, 2013).

Furthermore, the online search for information shapes expectations regarding service and product delivery, but the link between algorithmic expectation (what platforms "promise") and perceived experience (what consumers effectively receive) remains understudied, exposing a gap between technological promise and value delivery (Cerna et al., 2024). In sum, although the conceptual framework has advanced by recognizing Generation Z as digitally native (Vojvodić, 2019; White, 2017) and connecting their socialization to consumption patterns in integrated networks (Ng et al., 2019; Baykal, 2020), crucial theoretical gaps persist:

i) the rigorous distinction between cohort effects and age/period variations (Parry & Urwin, 2011; Turner, 2015; Klopotan, Aleksić, & Vinković, 2020);

ii) the causal validation of relationships between technological use, escapism, belonging, and social competencies (Toronto, 2009; Turner, 2015; Andrea, Gabriella, & Tímea, 2016);

iii) the behavioral—and not merely declarative—measurement of expectations and decisions in truly integrated ecosystems (Cheung et al., 2018; Wood, 2013; Cerna et al., 2024). It is precisely within this set of unresolved tensions that the need for this study is anchored.

### Point-of-Sale Choice

Understanding how consumers choose their point of sale is essential for brand success (Montaguti & Valentini, 2011; Neslin et al., 2006). In a scenario in which consumers construct hybrid journeys (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), it becomes even more important to understand the role played by each channel in this process. The decision between online and offline channels involves a series of variables. Factors such as age, education, and income influence this decision (Singh & Swait, 2017), but consumer behavior extends beyond these elements. There is a combination of channels within the same journey, in which consumers weigh advantages and disadvantages dynamically (Harris et al., 2017; Singh & Jang, 2022; Wolf & Steul-Fischer, 2023). Three studies were central to grounding this research, as they synthesize the main factors that influence channel choice (Neslin et al., 2006; Gensler, Verhoef & Böhm, 2012; Wolf & Steul-Fischer, 2023). Based on these works, it was possible to identify relevant conceptual convergences and distinctions. The selected factors, as well as their relationship with the respective authors, were organized in Table 1 to facilitate visualization and support comparative analysis, contributing to the understanding of the strategic role of physical stores in Generation Z's experience and its impact on employment and income generation in Brazil.

**Table 1**

*Channel Choice Factors*

| Factors | Authors | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Neslin et al. (2006) | Gensler, Verhoef e Böhm, (2012) | Wolf e Steul-Fischer (2023) |
| Marketing efforts | x | | |
| Channel attributes/characteristics | x | x | x |
| Channel integration | x | | |
| Social influence | x | | |
| Situational/contextual variables | x | | x |
| Individual differences/traits | x | | x |
| Experience effects | | x | |
| Spillover effect | | x | |
| Consumer needs | | | x |
| Product/service characteristics | | | x |

Source: Prepared by the authors

### Stages of the Purchase Process

The analytical framework adopted to understand the factors that lead Generation Z to choose physical stores as their preferred channel was the EKB consumer decision-making model (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 1986a). Developed in the late 1960s, this model describes the stages through which consumers progress during the purchase decision process. Its name derives from its authors—Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell—and it proposes a logical and rational sequence influenced by internal and external factors. The model consists of five stages: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase evaluation (Fern Yeo et al., 2022). This structure provides a roadmap that can guide marketing professionals in defining product mix, communication, and sales strategies (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 1986b). The choice of this model is justified by its theoretical and practical relevance. It is widely recognized as a seminal model in the literature on consumer decision-making and is among the most frequently cited frameworks in studies of purchase behavior (Ashman, Solomon & Wolny, 2015; Oke et al., 2016).

Each stage of the model contributes to understanding the motivations that lead young members of Generation Z to opt for physical stores. The first phase is problem recognition, when

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the consumer identifies an unmet need. This perception emerges through internal or external stimuli, establishing a gap between the current and desired state, which initiates the purchase process (Silveira, Chawla & Xara-Brasil, 2024). The second stage is information search, during which the consumer seeks relevant data to satisfy the identified need. This search may occur internally, based on memory, or externally, through the active collection of available information (Altaf et al., 2019). The third stage is the evaluation of alternatives, when the available options are compared based on the information gathered and on personal preferences. If an alternative satisfies the identified need, the consumer moves to the next phase (Silveira et al., 2024). The fourth stage is the purchase, the moment when the decision is enacted and the consumer selects the alternative considered most suitable to solve the original problem (Shen, 2022). Finally, the post-purchase evaluation stage involves assessing the experience with the product or service acquired, which may influence future decisions (Ashman et al., 2015).

## Emerging Markets

An emerging economy is defined as a low-income country undergoing rapid economic growth (Hoskisson et al., 2000). It is characterized by limited resources, information asymmetry, and fragmentation, requiring firms to adopt marketing strategies adapted to local conditions (Chan & Cui, 2004). When firms from emerging markets internalize their operations in developed markets and apply the same marketing strategies without any adaptation, outcomes tend to be weaker. This difference can be explained by the substantial environmental gap between regions at different stages of economic development (Samiee & Chirapanda, 2019). Thus, local adaptation of strategies becomes essential.

Consumers in emerging markets display relevant differences from those in developed markets, spanning aspects such as buying behavior, motivations, preferences, and attitudes (Cavusgil, 2021). In developed markets, consumers have higher expectations regarding product quality and performance, prioritize value and sustainability, and are less influenced by foreign brands (Sheth, 2011). In emerging markets, by contrast, consumers desire a greater variety of products, engage in conspicuous consumption, adopt online purchases and credit more readily, value quality, and are willing to pay for it (Cavusgil, 2021). Consumption motivations in emerging markets are linked to the aspiration for a better lifestyle and social mobility, whereas consumers in developed markets may focus more on practical needs, convenience, and individual satisfaction (Sheth, 2011).

Given these differences, the greater the alignment between marketing strategies and actions and consumer profiles, the higher the likelihood of success. Therefore, to adapt knowledge generated in developed countries to emerging markets, it is essential to conduct new studies capable of providing more relevant and effective guidelines.

## Method

Although the central theme of this research has been investigated by other authors, several elements are specific to this study, which confers an exploratory character to it. The first element refers to the highly altered historical context following the Covid-19 pandemic, when compared with the period in which previous studies were conducted. The second concerns a more detailed view of behavior based on the EKB model, encompassing the five stages of the purchase process. Another distinguishing element relates to locality, given that the studies identified portray realities other than that of Brazil, an emerging country. Finally, the focus of the study is a generation born into the digital world and therefore far more closely connected to the online environment than previous generations, which experienced an exclusively offline world. Table 2 presents the methodological pathway of the study.

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**Table 2**

*The methodological path of the study*

| Nature of the Research | Qualitative |
|---|---|
| Research Method | Phenomenological |
| Data Collection Technique | In-depth interview |
| Data Collection Instrument | Semi-structured questionnaire |
| Research Context | Clothing purchase |
| Data Analysis Technique | Content analysis |

Source: Prepared by the authors

To achieve the objectives of this research, a qualitative approach was adopted, as this method enables the understanding of subjective objects that encompass social phenomena in specific contexts (Vieira & Tibola, 2005). The phenomenological method was employed because the main objective is to identify the essence of individuals' lived experiences, incorporating both "what" and "how" they have experienced them (Creswell, 2014). The topic presents an exploratory character, given that the results obtained thus far do not reflect reality when considering all factors jointly.

The technique used to conduct this research was the in-depth interview, supported by a semi-structured questionnaire composed of predetermined questions designed to guide data collection while allowing detailed responses. This technique was selected because it offers flexibility to explore topics that may emerge during the interview. To obtain a deeper understanding of how respondents relate to physical stores, the interviews were contextualized around purchases made in the apparel retail sector. This context was chosen based on the study by Matos, Durão, and Magano (2022), which indicates a hybrid purchasing posture in this segment, considering both physical and online points of sale.

The focus of the study was centered on the concrete details of the participants' lived experiences, through a reconstruction of the elements that shape them. The data collection instrument was developed based on previous studies addressing three aspects: understanding Generation Z's purchase journey, identifying the purchase channel used at each stage of this journey, and identifying the motivations involved in channel choice. Table 3 presents the data collection instrument in detail.

**Table 3**

*Alignment Matrix of the Data Collection Instrument*

| Research Objective | Category | Detailing | Questionnaire Question | Theoretical Framework |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Understand the purchase journey of Generation Z | 5 stages of the purchase process according to EKB – problem recognition | It is when a need that must be satisfied is perceived. | Describe how you recognized the need to purchase a clothing item. | Engel (1986) |
| | 5 stages of the purchase process according to EKB – information search | The consumer seeks information about products or services that may meet the perceived need. | What information did you look for about the item you needed to buy? | |
| | 5 stages of the purchase process according to EKB – alternative evaluation | The comparison between different options is carried out by analyzing relevant aspects for the purchase decision. | How did you evaluate the available options? | |
| | 5 stages of the purchase process according to EKB – purchase | O consumidor decide qual alternativa atende melhor sua necessidade e efetiva a compra. | Through which channel did you purchase the item? | |
| | 5 stages of the purchase process according to EKB – post-purchase | The consumer decides which alternative best meets their need and completes the purchase. | Did you have any need for assistance after the purchase? | |
| Identify the channel used in each stage | Means through which each stage of the purchase process was completed | It is when the consumer evaluates their satisfaction with the product or service. | Did any physical or online environment contribute to the recognition of your purchase need? If so, which one? | Montaguti e Valentini (2011), Lemon e Verhoef (2016) e Li et al. (2017) |
| | | | In which sources of information did you search for the desired item? | |
| | | | How did you decide on those sources? | |
| | | | Through which channel did you purchase the item? | |
| | | | If you had any post-purchase need, where did you seek assistance? | |
| Identify the motivations involved in channel choice | Channel attributes/characteristics, individual differences, product or service characteristics, consumer needs, channel integration, purchase journey, social influence, situational variables, marketing efforts, experience effects, and spillover effect | The number of sales channels through which customers can construct their purchase journey is increasing, making the journey more complex. Physical stores, websites, customer service centers, social media, and resellers are examples of channels. | What made this situation/place trigger your purchase need? | Neslin et al. (2006), Gensler, Verhoef e Böhm (2012) e Wolf e Steul-Fischer (2023) |
| | | | What led you to consult these sources? | |
| | | | How did you evaluate the purchase options in terms of channel? | |
| | | | What led you to choose this channel to complete the purchase? | |
| | | | What made you seek assistance in this channel? | |

Source: Prepared by the authors

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The corpus of this research was composed through convenience sampling and included Brazilian consumers of both genders, aged between 18 and 29 years, belonging to social classes A, B, and C, according to the economic classification criteria based on purchasing power established by ABEP (Associação Brasileira de Empresas de Pesquisa). Participants were residents of the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Table 4 presents detailed information about the participants and the duration of each interview, which was conducted via videoconference using the Microsoft Teams application over the course of one month. As the study considered participants' personal purchasing experiences, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were based on the demographic characteristics previously described.

**Table 4**

*Demographic data of interviewees and interview duration*

| Interviewee | Age (years) | Gender | Location | Social Class | Occupation | Interview Duration |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Interviewee 1 | 20 | Female | Rio de Janeiro | C | Student | 00:14:31 |
| Interviewee 2 | 21 | Female | São Paulo | A | Advertising professional | 00:24:19 |
| Interviewee 3 | 18 | Female | São Paulo | A | Student | 00:33:16 |
| Interviewee 4 | 26 | Female | Rio de Janeiro | C | Student | 00:14:28 |
| Interviewee 5 | 26 | Male | Rio de Janeiro | A | Administrative assistant | 00:23:51 |
| Interviewee 6 | 29 | Female | São Paulo | B | Product manager | 00:39:23 |
| Interviewee 7 | 27 | Female | Rio de Janeiro | B | Advertising professional | 01:15:07 |
| Interviewee 8 | 24 | Female | Rio de Janeiro | B | Advertising professional | 00:34:30 |
| Interviewee 9 | 28 | Male | Rio de Janeiro | B | Architect | 00:25:59 |
| Interviewee 10 | 25 | Female | São Paulo | B | Sociologist | 00:33:18 |
| Interviewee 11 | 28 | Female | São Paulo | B | Physical therapist | 00:30:57 |
| Interviewee 12 | 25 | Female | Rio de Janeiro | C | Student | 00:28:21 |
| Interviewee 13 | 23 | Male | Rio de Janeiro | B | Student | 00:33:21 |
| Interviewee 14 | 25 | Male | São Paulo | B | Legal assistant | 00:23:37 |
| Interviewee 15 | 25 | Female | Rio de Janeiro | C | Student | 00:17:16 |

Source: Prepared by the authors

Based on the step-by-step description of the experience selected by each interviewee—ranging from the recognition of the need to purchase to potential post-sale demands—it was possible to map the purchase journey of this group. Participants were also invited to indicate the sales channels used in each of the five stages of the purchase process, according to the EKB model, as well as the reasons that led them to choose each channel.

The data analysis technique employed in this research was content analysis. This technique is valuable for examining qualitative data, particularly when it involves messages and information (Moraes, 1999). It is used to describe, interpret, and understand meanings in a detailed manner, emphasizing depth and richness of detail. The analysis was conducted immediately after each interview, until a pattern and repetition of behaviors were observed, which occurred beginning with the fifteenth interview. Data collection was therefore interrupted upon determining that data saturation had been reached. Conceptual saturation, or "theoretical saturation," is described as the point at which no additional data can be found that would further develop the properties of a category (Sebele-Mpofu, 2020).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research showed that the purchase process for this group began as an internal and personal process, in an offline environment—that is, an internally identified need triggered the understanding that a clothing item was missing or needed to be replaced. This finding can be illustrated by the following statement from an interviewee: "I wasn't liking the clothes I had in my wardrobe, and I wasn't feeling comfortable anymore. I was wearing a lot of jeans, sweatshirts, more practical day-to-day things, and I felt like I didn't really have a personality anymore." It is as if this young person felt a discomfort that led them to recognize the need to purchase an item. A second trigger for recognizing the need to purchase is the social context—still an offline environment, though rooted in external stimuli—as illustrated by another interviewee: "I think that for college you need something more mature, right? I can't be showing up in shorts and a tank top." This reflects the understanding that the external environment in which one will be interacting suggests—or requires—a different physical presentation. Although this factor appeared less frequently across interviews, it reinforces the relevance of the offline environment in the stage of need recognition.

The most frequently cited motivating factor for choosing the environment and channel in the need recognition stage was the desire for change or dissatisfaction with one's self-image. In general, interviewees expressed some level of discomfort with their current image—whether due to the need for a style change, discomfort caused by existing clothes, or their wear and tear. Regardless of the trigger, the recognition of the need to purchase emerged from a concern with, or an intention to elevate, one's self-image.

The second most representative factor initiating the purchase journey was trust and/or identification with a brand—including digital influencers. Many interviewees reported that content shared by these influencers acted as a catalyst for perceiving value or need for a particular item.

The third factor mentioned as a trigger was the social context: the need to adapt to certain environments or specific occasions. This type of external motivation also relates to the search for social approval and belonging.

Even though interviewees cited different origins for need recognition, they all converged on concerns related to self-image—whether driven by internal motivations or external stimuli. This reinforces the symbolic role of clothing and the value of the physical store environment as a space of identity validation.

In the second stage of the EKB model—information search—the first shift in environment was observed: interviewees moved from offline to online. This generation naturally turns to tools such as Google, Instagram, TikTok, and e-commerce platforms to investigate trends, prices, and product specifications, as illustrated by one interviewee: "First I started online, right? I thought about buying something online. Then I started seeing some pieces that interested me, that I thought were cool on these new sites—Shein, Shopee... I think it's a place that brings a lot of information, right?"

Despite the dominance of the digital environment, offline search remained relevant in the form of word-of-mouth recommendations, as mentioned by another interviewee: "The first thing I did was ask people close to me, but not about price yet. So I decided to ask people who evaluate things every day, since they're high-performance athletes and have more experience. I would get a more accurate and objective answer."

In the third stage—evaluation of alternatives—there was yet another shift in environment: consumers returned to the offline setting, going to physical stores to complete the most sensory part of the process. Touching the product and being able to try it on were decisive factors, as stated by an interviewee: "I went to the physical store to see the model in person and to check if there were any promotions. Sometimes in person they offer some discount. And I also wanted to be sure about the shoe itself. Sometimes the image online is different."

Other triggers for visiting the store included marketing campaigns and convenience, as highlighted by another participant: "Since they had a major promotion that day—they were going to have exclusive pieces at lower prices—and I was on vacation, it was really easy for me to stop by..."

In the fourth stage—purchase—the preference continued to be the physical environment. However, the main reason cited was prior in-store experience, particularly the ability to try the product. This demonstrates a positive spillover effect (Gensler et al., 2012; Verhoef et al., 2007).

Price may generate a negative effect on in-store purchases when consumers perceive a significant difference. In such cases, showrooming occurs—when the consumer visits the physical store but makes the purchase online. One interviewee illustrated this behavior: "For sneakers, sometimes the internet is cheaper. Sometimes I go to the store, try on the sneakers, and buy

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them online."

In the final stage—post-purchase evaluation—no dominant channel emerged; physical stores and online channels were cited in equal proportion. The quality of in-person service and the ease of digital channels stood out as determinants of choice. The statements from the two interviewees below illustrate identical motivations leading to different channel preferences:

Interviewee one: "If I need to solve something after the purchase, I prefer human contact because it's easier."

Interviewee two: "I think it's more practical to solve things online."

Taken together, these results can be consolidated in the framework proposed in Figure 1, which presents in an integrated manner the factors that influence channel choice at each stage of the purchase decision process according to the EKB model, considering the purchase of apparel items. It also proposes the degree of relevance of the physical store at each stage and describes how it can perform more effectively based on the factors identified.

**Figure 1**

*Framework for Understanding the Integration of Physical Stores into Generation Z's Purchase Journey*

| | NEED RECOGNITION | INFORMATION SEARCH | ALTERNATIVE EVALUATION | PURCHASE | POST-PURCHASE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FACTOR | 1. SELF IMAGE<br>2. SOCIAL CONTEXT | 1. NEED FOR INFORMATION<br>2. EASE OF USE | 1. NEED FOR TOUCH | 1. SPILLOVER EFFECTS<br>2.PRICE | 1.SERVICE QUALITY<br>2. EASE TO USE |
| RELEVANCE OF THE PHYSICAL STORE | NO RELEVANCE | LOW RELEVANCE | HIGH RELEVANCE | HIGH RELEVANCE | MEDIUM RELEVANCE |
| PERFORMANCE OF THE PHYSICAL STORE | 1. Low influence of channels in general on young people's self-image.<br>2. The social context is shaped by personal relationships and the environments in which they occur. Therefore, channels do not participate. | 1. The physical store has low influence at this stage due to its limitations in providing information.<br>2. The physical store is perceived as having less ease of use when compared to online channels. | 1. The physical store has significant influence due to the fulfillment of sensory needs that precede the acquisition of an item. | 1. The physical store has significant influence due to the strong impact of the previous stage.<br>2. A price-advantage strategy for physical stores can attract this generation to the channel. | 1. The physical store has moderate influence. The perception of efficiency in providing post-purchase services is positive and encourages young people to choose this channel.<br>2. Lower ease of use, represented by the need for physical displacement, weakens the physical store in this stage. |

Source: Prepared by the authors

### *Insights* on the Role of the Physical Store versus Consumer Perception

ABy organizing and separately analyzing each stage of the purchase decision process, it becomes possible to achieve a clearer understanding of the role of the physical store in Generation Z's purchase journey amid the advancement of digital channels, the behavioral specificities of this generation, and the context of an emerging country. The following section details each stage:

- Need recognition: The most salient factors identified as influencers in this stage were self-image and social context. The predominant perception is that channels—including the physical store—do not influence the formation of consumption needs among young consumers, given the highly internal and personal nature of this stage.

• Information search: This stage is marked by a strong need for information. In this regard, the physical store has low relevance due to its lower ease of use and efficiency when compared with digital channels. Generation Z values speed and ease of access to information. Thus, given the limitations of the physical store concerning the volume and practicality of accessing desired data, its relevance for this generation is low.

• Evaluation of alternatives: The sensory dimension—particularly the need for touch—emerges as a determining factor in this phase. This is when the physical store gains prominence by addressing a demand that cannot be fully met in the online environment. For this reason, the relevance of the physical store intensifies, making the visit to the point of sale an important and meaningful experience.

• Purchase: In this stage, the spillover effect from the previous experience highlights once again the role of the physical store. It maintains high relevance, benefiting from the continuity of the sensory experience initiated in the earlier stage. Competitive pricing strategies can further enhance its attractiveness to young consumers, adding another layer of relevance to the physical point of sale.

• Post-purchase: Service quality and ease of use emerge as relevant factors in this stage. Here, the physical store exerts a moderate influence, as performance evaluations vary. For some young consumers, the store performs very well in post-purchase matters: it is considered easy to use and provides quality service. For others, the need to travel and the effort required to address dissatisfaction in person make online channels the preferred option.

This framework, therefore, not only articulates the factors across the stages of the purchase process but also guides retailers by proposing the degree of relevance of the physical store, which varies according to the type of need and the value perception attributed by Generation Z. By understanding these nuances, this research contributes to the development of commercial and service strategies that align the proposition of physical stores with the expectations of a young, connected, and selective audience.

The study confirmed the relevance of several factors already described in the literature regarding channel choice but also revealed important shifts. Of the ten factors analyzed, only channel integration was not mentioned, indicating that for Generation Z, perfect integration between online and offline has ceased to be a differentiator and has instead become an implicit expectation—contrary to the finding of Neslin et al. (2006).

The factor "characteristics of the product or service" had low relevance, almost contradicting Wolf & Steul-Fischer (2023). On the other hand, channel attributes and consumer needs were the most cited: the former confirming the findings of Gensler, Verhoef & Böhm (2012) and the latter exceeding the emphasis of prior studies, reflecting a more individualized pursuit of fulfillment typical of Generation Z. Other factors—such as individual differences, experience effects, social influence, and spillover effects—appeared in convergence with the reference studies, albeit with variations in intensity. No new factors emerged, but an interconnection was observed between social influence and marketing efforts, suggesting that the action of influencers may blend social and commercial motivations.

## Proposed Actions for Retailers Based on the Problem Situation

Starting from Stage 1 of the purchase process and the finding that the process begins with an internal discomfort related to self-image, physical store retailers have the opportunity to work with store layout, product display, and overall ambiance as positive stimuli for personal transformation and self-enhancement. Storefronts that explore concepts of style and identity, fitting rooms with favorable lighting, and visual communications that reinforce self-esteem can act as triggers for need recognition directly within the offline environment. In a context in which digital influencers appear as catalysts for the perception of value or need for a particular item, physical stores can integrate influencers into their local strategies by promoting in-person events with content creators, highlighting products recommended by them on racks, or replicating displays and visual arrangements inspired by social media.

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This connection between the digital and physical worlds strengthens identification and creates an emotional bond with the consumer. The strong influence that the social context exerts on consumers—especially regarding need recognition—can also be leveraged through the use of in-store style consultants who help consumers assemble looks for specific contexts (events, work, parties), as well as through campaigns focused on usage occasions and clear signage presenting trends or capsule collections tailored to these social moments.

In the second stage of the EKB model—information search—the recommended approach for physical retailers in response to consumers' migration to the digital environment is to ensure a solid, integrated, and responsive digital presence. Beyond maintaining an effective website and updated social media channels, it is essential to allow consumers to easily find information on in-store availability, prices, and local promotions. Tools such as "click and collect," digital try-before-you-buy options, or virtual store tours can help bridge the gap between online and offline environments and encourage store visits. Although it has been identified that the online environment remains far more advantageous for information search, physical retailers can still capitalize on the enduring strength of personal recommendations by encouraging spontaneous advocacy. The creation of loyalty programs, memorable service experiences, and "refer a friend" campaigns are practical examples of this.

In the third stage—evaluation of alternatives—when consumers return to the offline environment, retailers are encouraged to maximize this return by leveraging the sensory differential that the physical store offers. The creation of experimentation zones, spacious fitting rooms, sensory experiences, and immersive atmospheres can help consumers make decisions, increasing the relevance of the physical point of sale. This may represent a significant advantage over online competitors. To take advantage of marketing-driven triggers, retailers should develop visual and media campaigns that communicate ease of access, speed, immediate availability, and an appealing store environment as ways to stimulate visits. Regarding convenience, it is advisable for retailers to simplify in-store navigation, offer intelligent self-service or quick pick-up options, and ensure integration with online inventory systems. As a way to mitigate the potential negative impact of price differences at this stage, recommendations include:

- Matching online prices in-store;
- Offering exclusive coupons for in-store visitors;
- Providing additional benefits such as free alterations or instant gifts;
- Highlighting the absence of shipping costs and delivery wait times.

As in the fourth stage—purchase—the preference for the physical environment stems from a spillover effect from the previous stage, retailers must ensure consistency across the stages of the journey, making sure that positive sensory or service experiences translate into purchases within the same channel. The negative impact of higher in-store prices can be countered with channel-specific advantages such as exclusive promotions, easier payment options, or unique items available only in-store. Immediacy also favors physical retail, provided that stores operate with efficient inventory management and immediate product availability.

In the final stage—post-purchase evaluation—where no predominant channel emerged, physical retailers should invest in staff training and humanized post-sale service protocols. This will help prepare teams to handle exchanges and complaints empathetically, efficiently, and with clear solutions. Additionally, integration with the digital environment should be maintained through channels such as WhatsApp support, digital customer service platforms, or scheduled in-store exchanges.

## CONCLUSION

This research aimed to understand the factors that influence the inclusion of the physical store in the purchase journey of Generation Z in an emerging country, from the perspective of the stages of the decision-making process according to the EKB model, with the goal of proposing a framework for the problem situation faced by physical store retailers as they confront the grow-

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th of online channels in the sector.

Through a qualitative approach grounded in the phenomenological method and applied to the apparel purchase context, in-depth interviews were conducted, allowing the identification of behavioral patterns, preferred environments and channels, and influencing factors across each of the five stages of the purchase process. Based on the reconstruction of the purchase journey reported by each interviewee, it was possible to develop a framework summarized in Table 5. This table presents the main findings of the research, organized according to the stages of the purchase decision-making process, highlighting preferred environments, channels, and factors, as well as the relevance attributed to the physical store in each phase.

**Table 5**
*Summary of Research Findings*

| EKB Stages/ Identified Elements | Need Recognition | Information Search | Alternative Evaluation | Purchase | Post-Purchase |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Preferred Environments | *Offline* | *Online* | *Offline* | *Offline* | *Offline* e *online* |
| Preferred Channels | No channel participation | Various channels | Physical store | Physical store | Physical store |
| | | Google | | | Digital channels |
| | | *Online store* | | | |
| | | Social media | | | |
| Factors | Autoimagem | Necessidade de informação | Need for touch | Spillover effect | Service quality |
| | Contexto social | Facilidade de uso | | Price | Ease of use |
| Physical Store Relevance | Sem | Baixa | High relevance | High relevance | Medium relevance |

Source: Prepared by the authors

The results revealed that, despite Generation Z's affinity with the digital environment, the offline environment still holds strong relevance in their purchase journey. Crucial stages such as need recognition, evaluation of options, and the purchase itself were predominantly experienced in the physical point of sale. Sensory experimentation emerged as the most valued differential, demonstrating that direct contact with the product exerts a decisive influence on decision-making.

On the other hand, the information search stage occurs primarily in the online environment, with particular emphasis on tools such as Google, virtual stores, and social networks. This preference is due to the speed, variety, and ease of comparison offered by digital channels. The post-purchase stage, however, did not reveal a preferred channel: respondents were divided between those who value in-person service and those who prefer fast digital resolutions. This dynamic reflects a hybrid and omnichannel behavior characteristic of Generation Z, which naturally transitions between channels depending on the demands of each stage.

Among the determining factors for channel choice, the following stood out: self-image, social context, information needs, ease of use, price, and service quality. The relevance of the physical store varied throughout the journey: it was low in the initial stages—dominated by internal motivations and online searches—but increased significantly in the experimentation and purchase phases, reinforced by the spillover effect. The only threat to offline preference in this stage was the price factor, especially in showrooming situations. In the post-purchase stage, the division between online and offline channels highlights the need for an integrated and responsive approach. These findings bring important practical and strategic implications for physical retail, especially in the apparel sector:

- Reposition the store as a space for sensory and emotional experience: managers should transform the evaluation stage into an immersive experience, with ambiance, lighting, and sound designed to stimulate the senses. Smart fitting rooms, augmented reality mirrors, and interactive textures can strengthen this connection.

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- Expand access to information inside the physical store: the informational limitation of the point of sale can be mitigated through self-service technologies such as digital kiosks, QR codes on tags, interactive displays, or integrated apps showing stock, product variations, composition, payment options, and promotions. This supports the next stage (experimentation and purchase) with greater confidence.

- Use personalization as a value lever: free style consulting, garment customization, lifestyle-based suggestions, or algorithms connecting consumer profiles with curated offerings can generate perceived value beyond price, helping combat showrooming.

- Adopt smart channel-based pricing strategies: since online channels tend to offer lower prices, physical stores can emphasize non-monetary benefits such as exclusive gifts, special conditions for immediate pickup, loyalty programs with cashback, or extended warranties—elements that reinforce perceived "added value" and reduce online migration at the moment of purchase.

- Integrate the post-purchase stage fluidly across channels: strengthening bridges between physical and digital channels is essential. Offering hybrid support—for example, allowing online purchases to be exchanged in-store, or enabling WhatsApp service with in-store pickup—provides flexibility and enhances perceived efficiency. The quality of service provided in-store, even after the sale, can be decisive for retention.

- Bring digital influencers into the physical environment: in-store events with content creators, "influencer favorite" product signage, and "Instagrammable" spaces encourage visits and create emotional connections with followers, supporting both experimentation and conversion.

- Promote positive self-image within the store: since the journey often begins with dissatisfaction with self-image, the physical environment can become a space for reframing and self-esteem building. Investing in flattering mirrors, campaigns showcasing diverse bodies and aesthetics, or fitting rooms with motivational messages can strengthen emotional bonds with the brand.

- Facilitate flow and reduce friction: convenience is a central criterion for this generation. Physical stores should offer simplified processes such as mobile payment, express pickup, app integration, and clear layout mapping to improve navigation—ensuring efficiency and autonomy, which are core values for Generation Z.

From a managerial perspective, the findings indicate an urgent need for physical stores to undergo strategic redefinition—not as substitutes for the online environment but as sensory, relational, and personalized complements to the digital experience. The proposed practices can be applied as innovation prototypes in physical retail, particularly in emerging markets, where points of sale still play a central social and economic role but face growing challenges as consumption digitalizes.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to deepening the understanding of Generation Z's behavior in an emerging country such as Brazil, offering a detailed mapping of the purchase journey and the factors that shape channel choice. These findings can support future research and omnichannel segmentation strategies.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. As it is based on the individual and contextual perceptions of fifteen participants, its results do not represent the entirety of Generation Z and cannot be generalized to other segments beyond apparel. Furthermore, the findings reflect the specific socioeconomic context of Brazil, which may not be fully applicable to other emerging markets with different characteristics. Based on these limitations, future research should include quantitative studies with larger samples to statistically validate the factors identified qualitatively. Additionally, applying this same analytical model to other consumer categories—such as cosmetics, electronics, or footwear—may enrich the understanding of Generation Z's omnichannel behavior and expectations regarding physical retail.

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