Shopping with Strangers: Grocery Shopping Behaviors of Generation Z

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Shopping with Strangers: Grocery Shopping Behaviors of Generation Z

Prepared for the Lee Honors College

By: Madelyn Olsen

April 21, 2017
Introduction

Marketers frequently segment different populations by generation to target their products more efficiently. Each generation has its own characteristics and behaviors. Marketers use these characteristics and behaviors to improve ways to get consumers’ attention, increase interactions with brands, and increase purchase of products and services.

In a rapidly changing world, these generations are becoming increasingly visible and identifiable due to the integration of technology and social media into daily life. The generation that this study focuses on is called Generation Z. Generation Z has not been fully identified yet because their group is still emerging. Researchers have found it difficult to put an age range on the generation. Research has alternatively indicated the oldest as being between the ages of 20-23 and youngest not being born yet to 9 years old (Mintel, 2016). There are two clear subdivision of Generation Z. There are the older members, who will soon be in college or soon to be entering the workforce, and younger Generation Z, who would be considered teens or tweens that are in their years of primary and secondary education.

This study will focus on the older subdivision of Generation Z. With the options to purchase such a large variety of products, this study has focused on the shopping behaviors of this generation while grocery shopping. Grocery shopping is an excellent lens through which to view shopping behaviors since food is a necessity of life. There will always be a need to buy food or products to sustain whatever lifestyle someone chooses to live. While other studies have provided the foundation for developing general knowledge regarding consumer behaviors, this research is dedicated to behaviors related to grocery shopping of Generation Z.
Research Objectives

The purpose of this research is to develop a general profile of the grocery shopping behavior of Generation Z and determine if Generation Z has a universal shopping path within the stores that they grocery shop. The population of Generation Z was chosen because this group is still in the development stage, and they have not been aggressively targeted by marketers yet. This group is also the next in line to become the target 18-34-year-old age segment of consumers. Generation Z also poses interesting challenges, particularly their ability to selectively expose themselves to advertisements (Washkuch, 2016, p. 20), which stems from their exposure to the Internet that has been present since their birth.

Specifically, in purchasing food, developing a blanket profile for Generation Z will help marketers begin to effectively target this generation using their preferences about the grocery shopping experience and what they purchase. By determining the areas of the store that this group visits or avoids, retailers will be able to place advertisements and promotional tools in the locations that best draw this targeted segment.

Literature Review

Generation Z is the first generation to be considered true digital natives, requiring the business world to treat them differently in terms of how they purchase products and interact with brands. Alex Williams (2015) discusses the differences between Millennials and Generation Z in an article featured in the New York Times titled ‘Move Over, Millennials, Here Comes Generation Z’. This comparison can be summarized by noting that Generation Z “takes in information quickly and loses interest just as fast” (p. 1). Deena Ghazarian (2016) suggests that the best way to interact with Generation Z would be to break down the digital world from reality, despite being plugged in during all times of the day, (p. 15). This would also give marketers the
opportunity to give Generation Z the experiences they crave (“Interactions Marketing Explores,” 2016) by getting them to shop at a physical store and not online.

The traditional method of getting customers to come into store is through marketing. The challenge that is being faced is how to get the people who are consumed by the “anything, anywhere, anytime” mentality (Ampel, 2005, p. 58) to take the time to get into a store. A study on the effects of embarrassment claims that Generation Z responds best to reciprocating engagement, trust, sincerity, and mutual respect. This is also paired with this generation’s unique ability to view everyone being an individual while recognizing and embracing the diversity throughout the world (O’Leary, 2014). This challenge is addressed in a study which took place in India about Generation Z’s purchase behavior towards luxury apparel. The results of the study concluded that Generation Z could be broken up into four segments because they all behaved differently (Jain, Vatsa, & Jagani, 2014).

This sense of embracing the diversity in the world around them varies in distinct ways with the prior generations. Mintel studies point out that Generation Z is more accepting of a variety of social issues, in a report on gay marriage. Most of Generation Z has come to accept the “to each their own” mentality regarding most social issues (“Adult iGens and Attitudes”, 2016). Despite that extremely large difference between Generation Z and the Silent Generation, there are experts out there who believe the two could be more relatable than what can be seen on the surface.

It is possible that Generation Z has certain economic behaviors that mirror those of the Silent Generation. Neil Howe stated in the article written by Alex Williams (2016) that Generation Z’s tendencies to be “private individuals, use caution, and focus on sensible careers” mirrors behavior of their grandparents or in some cases their great-grandparents. Examples of Generation Z being more private stems from their public image being displayed over social
media. They want to have full control over how they are perceived by others. Generation Z also grew up during the aftermath of 9/11, which was a time where many people became more cautious of their surroundings. The significant benefit of being compared to the Silent Generation is that they were one of the wealthiest generations (Williams, 2015). If their social patterns of living are comparable to Generation Z, their economical patterns may also be mirrored.

In a survey taken by Mintel in February of 2016 of 3,001 internet users aged 18 and up were asked “Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I am sick of hearing about Millennials”. The focal point of this survey was to suggest that people are getting annoyed with seeing advertising targeting specifically at Millennials. Taking this time to take a step back from pursuing the Millennial generation gives marketers the chance to start to capture a generation that has not fully been defined yet. Generation Z, is “beginning to push Millennials out of the key 18-34 age range” (“What you Need to Know”, 2016). I believe it is time to give this generation the attention they deserve. The rewards could be huge.

**Methods**

The purpose of this study is to determine the best overall approach to market to Generation Z, without disturbing their individuality, by finding a general consumer profile that highlights their preferences and where they shop within the store. The sample for this research was comprised of ten research subjects between the ages of 18 and 20 years old. The research subjects were males or females that attended Western Michigan University. Through the help of the Lee Honors College Research subjects were recruited on a volunteer basis, via email from the Honors College’s email system. The email prompted those that were interested to contact me if they would be willing to participate in a session with me that included a pre-interview, a grocery
shopping trip, and a post-interview. The subjects were given a link to a Google Form where they participated in a prescreening process that verified their age, gave general demographic information, and provided contact information. Once notified that they qualified for the study, subjects scheduled an appointment to participate in the three-step process. Of those ten subjects that participated eight were female and two were male with the average age of the subjects was 19.2 years of age (see Table 1 or Figure 3). Only one of the participants was double majoring (see Table 1), but the group overall belonged to five different colleges (see Figure 1). Seven of the students stated that they lived off campus, but nine of the students live in housing situations that were not the dorms (see Figure 2). These dwellings gave the subjects access to a full kitchen that could encourage them to not participate in a meal plan. The following is a table is describing to each of the participants, along with the pseudonym that was given to each of them to protect their identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Liam</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>College of Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>College of Arts and Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Olivia</td>
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<td>College of Arts and Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ava</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>College of Arts and Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Isabella</td>
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<td>College of Arts and Sciences</td>
</tr>
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<td>6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>College of Fine Arts</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>College of Arts and Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>College of Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>College of Health and Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>College of Education and Human Development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Participants pseudonym, gender, age, and college

The interview questions consisted of general questions about Generation Z that derived from preliminary research. The questions were then divided into the pre-interview questions that
would be asked before going grocery shopping and the post-interview questions that would be asked immediately after grocery shopping. The questions were approved by my honors thesis chair. Resources related to best practices for interviews were given to me prior to fieldwork.

The questions that were asked during the pre-interview process involved questions about general grocery shopping experiences. Examples of these questions included what services and amenities that respondents preferred in a grocery store, what they liked and disliked about grocery shopping, how much participation from advertising, store staff, and store signage they preferred, how they prefer to see advertising, how they integrate technology into their grocery trips, and their preferred method of payment.

Once the pre-interview was completed, we went grocery shopping! The respondents were all voluntarily recorded during their entire shopping trip from the moment they walked in the door to the moment they exited the store. Once the shopping trip was over each subject participated in a post-interview that asked questions about what they had purchased, their shopping trip in general, how they felt about certain food products and services offered within the store, what departments they felt should be included into a grocery store, the importance of store sustainability, their opinions of purchasing groceries online, and how they would like to see technology implemented into grocery stores.
**Figure 1: Colleges That Each Subject Belongs to Based on Pre-Screening**

**Figure 2: Living Situations of Students Based on Pre-Screening, Interviews, and Observations**
Figure 3: Age of Research Participants Based on Subject Pre-Screening

Pre-Interview Questions
The pre-interview questions asked involved subject’s preference about the grocery store, brands/ items purchased, the use of technology while shopping, sustainability regarding the store, and advertising in-store and online. Some of the questions also asked about how the subjects perceives themselves and the grocery shopping experience in general.

Post-Interview Questions
The post-interview questions asked questions about the subjects’ preference on checking out, products, product sustainability, the use of technology in grocery stores, and convenience. Some interview questions were also asked to see if the subject was self-aware of their shopping experience, influences of their grocery shopping, basket size, and ordering groceries online.

Basket Analysis and Shopping Path Analysis
Each grocery shopping trip that was taken was recorded using my cell-phone, so I could map the subject’s path after we left the grocery store. I also collected each subject’s receipt to perform a basket analysis.

Figure 4: Description of Methodology for Each Phase of Fieldwork
Results

The following are the results of the study broken into subsections that best answer the questions that participants were asked during their interviews and the analysis of their shopping paths.

Store Size

When asked if store size played a factor in where the participants decided to grocery shop, seven of the ten answered no.

If the store has everything I need, I am content (Emma, 18).

This quote illustrates that Generation Z prefer the convenience of only having to make one trip to the grocery store. Other participants that indicated that size did not matter related the store size to the amount of money they would spend. Either they felt comfortable shopping in the store of their choice because they liked the price point, or they would be willing to go to a larger store when they had more disposable income. The other three participants that felt store size did matter were more concerned with the number of options available at larger stores, resulting in sourcing the food products from origins that were too far away and the feeling of being overwhelmed. Another participant had a more positive attitude toward going to a larger retailer for the larger selection of products.

The bigger the store, the more likely I would want to go to that store (Noah, 19).

Employee Involvement

I think employees should be pretty hands off. Maybe ask once if I am finding everything okay. They do not need to ask again, buy they should be open enough that I would not feel intimidated to ask them where something is (Amelia, 19).
The quote above describes the feeling that most of Generation Z has while grocery shopping. They only wish to talk to an employee while shopping if they need something. Three participants of the sample explained that they would prefer if the employees were easy to find when they have a question. On the other hand, there were a few respondents that would prefer if the employees made themselves available to them, so they would not have to go look for help. A few characteristics that were mentioned when describing the store employees that they would like to see were friendly, approachable, and interactive.

**Amenities and Services Offered**

![Bar chart showing responses to what amenities are important in a grocery store.](chart)

*Figure 5: Responses of What Amenities are Important to you in a Grocery Store*

Most this sample found that bottle returns, deli counters, and sampling were all important amenities in a grocery store. The responses shown above with two or less responses were those amenities that were identifiable, but not a necessity within store to attract this population.
The general feeling toward the less popular amenities can be described as useful to have, but not frequently used. One participant stated:

All I need in a grocery store is for them to have my food and have it be easy to find… I don’t pay attention to the amenities in a grocery store (Amelia, 19).

The most important service that could be provided in a grocery store is employee availability. The participants liked it when employees are around to answer a question, provide a quick checkout process, and are friendly while doing so. One respondent’s favored service is even located outside of the store.

I appreciate the cart corrals, so I do not have to take the cart back to the front door (Isabella, 18).

Signage

Participants of the interview indicated that the two pieces of signage they are most interested in are aisle markers and sale signs.

I like good signage because I do not have to work as hard to find the things that I am looking for (Ava, 19).

They are content with the price tag flags indicating what items are on sale. The main characteristics that this sample wants in store signage can be described with the following quote:

The signage should be visible, easy to read, and accessible for all customers (Emma, 18).

There was more than one participant who indicated that accessibility is important. One participant wishes that stores were doing more to continue to follow the Americans with
Disabilities Act (ADA). This is an example of a way that Generation Z likes to identify with a variety of social issues and causes.

Self-Checkout

Most of the participants were divided when asked if they preferred self-checkout. The general opinion on the topic was that if they had a large basket they would prefer to be checked out by an employee. If they only had an item or two, they would prefer to go to self-checkout. Those that like self-checkout prefer having less interaction with people and having more control over the process of checking out. Those that prefer being cashed out by a store employee find that experience to be faster and more convenient. The only downside about being checked out by an employee is the line to do so.

Method of Payment

This sample’s preferred method of payment would be using either a physical debit or credit card. Only one participant prefers to use cash when grocery shopping. Of those that prefer to use their credit or debit card, none of them have mobile credit card payment services such as Apple Pay or Android Pay. No participant of this sample owns a grocery retailer’s credit card. Of those that responded they mentioned that their parents have a grocery retailer credit card that they use on occasion or they are not interested in opening one.

Couponing

Most participants feel excitement when they receive money off their bill when they use a coupon. Among that group, a few of them stated that the coupon had to be of a significant value or it had to be a coupon for a product they were going to purchase anyways for them to feel excited. Not all of them feel excitement at this type of promotion. Most (eight) of the participants
do not coupon hunt at all. Six of those eight who do not coupon hunt explained they prefer to go to stores that have generally lower prices.

I told myself I would, but I found it to be so time consuming that I did not feel that I was saving very much money doing it. Instead I just try and limit myself to buying only what I need to buy. I prefer Everyday Low Pricing (EDLP) (Isabella, 18).

Those that do coupon hunt do not participate in the traditional hunt of clipping from the newspaper. One of the participant’s parents sends her coupons directly to her home, while the other participants clip coupons using the Meijer mPerks mobile application.

**All-Inclusive or Specialty Store**

When asked if participants would rather shop at an all-inclusive grocery store or by grocery department, they all wanted to shop at an all-inclusive grocery store. The reasoning that they gave behind this decision was that an all-inclusive store would be more convenient by saving them time and making their shopping experience easier.

I would want to shop all inclusive. I feel that shopping by department would involve more trips. I feel like the whole point of a supermarket is to bring a bunch of stuff all together to make it convenient. I like that (Noah, 19).

There was only one participant who stated if she had more time (when school is out in the summer), she would shop by department.

**Usage of Grocery Store Applications**

The majority of the sample does not use a grocery store application. Of those that do not use an application, two participants were unaware that grocery stores had mobile applications and
another two participants have the mPerks application, but they do not use it regularly. Those individuals that responded that they have and use a grocery store application, use mPerks. The interesting part of this is whether or not they are using their own mPerk accounts. Half of the respondants explained that they use their parents’ mPerks account, while the other half own and use their own account.

Those participants that have the grocery store application were asked what functions of mPerks they use. Their responses included earning ‘points’ for shopping to be redeemed for valuable coupons, receiving alerts when they qualify for a valuable coupon, and clipping coupons within the application. The only discrepancy mentioned about using the application came from those that used their parent’s mPerks account. They stated that they only receive coupons for some of the items that they purchase because over half of the coupons are tailored for their parents.

Nine participants did not use technology while they grocery shopped. The only time any of those nine participants pulled out their phone, was when they were waiting in line to checkout or to shoot a quick text while shopping. The single participant that did use technology while shopping, was using her cell phone as a grocery list. Another participant did mention that she does not use her mPerks app while shopping. She uses it at home as part of the planning stage of the grocery shopping experience.
Figure 6: Responses Regarding if Participants Use an App While Grocery Shopping

Figure 6 displays the responses of those participants who answered a question involving their preference of using a mobile app while they grocery shop. The majority of respondents answered no, explaining that they felt adding an app to the process of grocery shopping would be inconvenient and a distraction that would complicate their shopping experience. Those that responded with “maybe” responded with conditional statements. They would consider using an app while shopping if there was a function they felt would be useful or if there were upgrades made to what is available to them. This topic will be discussed in the following technology subsection.

Ordering Online with Full Delivery Service

The participants indicated that most of them would not be open to trying an online grocery delivery service, like Amazon Grocery. They prefer going to the store and having more control
over what items are being chosen for their basket. Another factor that made them hesitant to try this kind of service is the additional cost compared to a regular grocery shopping trip.

I would possibly try it, but I am leaning towards no. I would rather grab the items myself. I would prefer to take my time looking at apples in person. I prefer to grab my own products (Noah, 19).

Other participants would consider trying this kind of service because they have previously participated in it or they feel it could be more convenient than going grocery shopping.

**Ordering Online with In Store Pickup**

The sample overall would not participate in ordering groceries online to be picked up at their grocery store. Their reasoning is that it would cost more money, they want to be in control of their shopping experience, they would not feel satisfaction of completing the task of grocery shopping, and they feel it would not be convenient.

If I had to go pick it up, why wouldn’t I just go shopping at the store myself (Ava, 19).

**Items to be Ordered Online**

Half of the participants stated that most of them would order nonperishable foods online, such as nut butters, protein powders, paper products, crackers, pasta sauce, and other shelf stable products. Four of the participants would not feel comfortable ordering their groceries online at all. Five of the participants stated that they would not want any perishable (such as produce, dairy products, and frozen options) items ordered online.
Technology to be Implemented

There were two major types of technology integration described by the respondents in this sample: in-store integration and pre-shopping integration. When asked about implementing technology, those that responded with technology to be placed into the store described four different concepts, each with unique twists. The first technology implementation for in stores would be to add tablets to certain areas of the store, either on the shelves or in the carts, that gave a more in depth look at the products nutritional information or compared items to one another in terms of price and general product facts. The most popular implementation in stores would help customers locate products within the store. These participants would like either a kiosk (comparable to a price check station) or an app, where they can look up items in the store to see where they are located or plug in an entire grocery list to get an optimal path of where to shop for items. The third recommendation would involve electronic price tags on the shelves. One participant would like to see the electronic price tag adjust itself daily to have consumers pay for the damage caused by the carbon footprint of each product being purchased. Another participant would like a ticker next to each item’s price on the shelf to display how many more of a product is in stock. The fourth idea from participants involves completely changing the way customers grocery shop. She recommends that you go up a kiosk and type in everything you would like to purchase from the store, and robots in a warehouse located behind the kiosk grab everything that you want from the store. It is comparable to how Amazon warehouses are run. The last idea was meant for customers to use before they step foot in the grocery store. This participant wanted an app that would make recommendations to them of what to purchase based on items that they already purchase. The main purpose of the app is to help the consumer of those products cook at home. If someone already is purchasing noodles, the app would recommend sauce and spices to
help the customer create a meal. The app would eventually start to recognize what the user enjoys eating to make better recommendations of what to prepare and eat.

Store Sustainability

![Chart showing the importance of grocery store sustainability](chart.png)

**Figure 7: The Importance of a Grocery Store’s Sustainability**

In regards to how important their grocery store sustainability is to this sample, many answered that it was important to them (see Figure 7). An equal number of people are neutral on the topic, meaning they do not particularly notice the store’s sustainability. Only two of the respondents mentioned that their grocery store’s sustainability is not important to them. Half of that group did mention that they probably should care about the topic of sustainability more. In total six of the respondents do not take their store’s sustainability into consideration when deciding where to go grocery shopping. Two participants said that it does affect where they grocery shop, and it is the main reason that they do not shop at certain stores.
Figure 8: Responses to How Participants Would Like to see Sustainability Practiced in their Grocery Store

When asked how they would like to see their grocery store practicing sustainability, many of the respondents liked that their grocery store encouraged them to use reusable bags or bring their own bags and containers (see Figure 8). The next popular choices were to have the store recycle their cardboard and plastic bags, encourage customers to recycle using the bottle returns, and use more environmentally friendly shipping methods. The less popular responses included composting their waste or going waste free and using more locally sourced products. Only one participant was unable to give an example of how they would like their grocery store to practice sustainability.

The Effects of Advertisements
Eight of the participants in this sample stated that advertisements do not affect where they grocery shop (see Figure 9). Those that elaborated (three participants) explained that they either do not see advertisements that they only leave their preferred store if another store has product exclusivity, or that they believe that the best places to shop do not need to advertise. The participants that indicated that advertisements sometimes affect where they grocery shop are enticed by huge sales. One of the participants specifically mentioned that they would only go to that store for the sale item, and they would return to their preferred store for the rest of their grocery shopping.

Advertising on Social Media

Six participants of the sample stated that they do not want to see advertisements on social media. Two members of the sample could be described in the following quote:
They can go for it, but I am probably not going to pay attention to it (Noah, 19).

There were only two participants that were able to see advertisements on social media. One participant wanted to see them on the platforms she uses because she does not watch television or listen to the radio. The other participant specifically stated that she only wanted advertisements on social media from locally owned stores not big box retailers.

![Frequency Chart of Participant’s Preference of Where They Would Like to see Advertisements on Social Media](image)

*Figure 10: Frequency Chart of Participant’s Preference of Where They Would Like to see Advertisements on Social Media*

I am okay with the occasional ad here or there like on Pandora or if it pops up on Instagram every now and then. I would not want it to be overwhelmingly obnoxious because I feel social media is not the place for advertisements (Isabella, 18).

The above quote mentions that advertisements are expected to a certain extent online, but this sample indicates they would prefer not to see advertising at all on social media. Figure 10 lists
the major platforms one which this sample would be comfortable seeing advertisements. One participant mentioned that they did not want to see blatant advertisements, but it was okay to have sponsorships embedded into the videos that are being shared around online. An example of this would be Tasty videos presented by Buzzfeed. Many participants would rather not see advertisements unless they are searching for them or they are known to already exist, such as the side bar advertisements on Google or the pre-advertisement before watching a video on YouTube. Once the advertisements start to invade their personal space online, they are not comfortable seeing the advertisements anymore.

In Store Advertisements

Most respondents would like to see advertisements in store only for items that are on sale or that would be saving them money. The remaining respondents would like to see very little advertising or do not care about advertising at all.

[In store advertising] doesn’t matter to me because I have blinders (Noah, 19).

This quote directly relates back to the challenges that marketer’s face when targeting this generation.
Most respondents stated that premade foods/meals are not important to them (see Figure 11). They feel that premade foods/meals are unhealthy and unnecessary. They find them unnecessary because they have excess time to make their own food or they feel that the packaging on those items are damaging to the environment. There were some participants that did find premade foods/meals to be important, mainly because they do not have time to cook. Another participant argued that the premade foods/meals are the only way for them to eat an actual meal. Otherwise they end up eating snacks for dinner.

Another contributor to both premade and on the go packaged foods is that this sample group enjoys making their own foods/meals to be taken on the go with them (six participants). They find their on the go snacks to be important because they do not have the time to eat a full meal. Two thirds of those state on the go foods/meals are important attempt to make their own on the
go snacks. The people who feel that premade foods/meals are unimportant feel the same way towards on the go foods/meals. These food/meal options vary in importance based on the amount of time that each person has to cook, as well as how important they consider their own health.

Product Packaging

Most participants do consider the recyclability of product packaging when purchasing items, and they feel that the recyclability of packaging is relatively important. Most of them make a regular effort to recycle in their daily life, but six of the respondents do not let packaging recyclability affect what they purchase. There were three participants that stated that the product’s packaging affects what they purchase. They actively make the choice to purchase something that allows them to recycle post-use compared to something that cannot be recycled.

[Packaging recyclability is] important. I am big on recycling, but I am not the greatest at picking out things that are recyclable. Whatever I do purchase I try my best to recycle its packaging (Charlotte, 20).

Health Consciousness

The two most common answers when asked if the participants felt that they were health conscious were “yes” and “sometimes”. The people who indicated “yes” were those that stated that they make healthier food choices and were regularly active. The individuals who answered “sometimes” found themselves influenced by others, not always making the best food choices, but they ultimately found a balance between healthy and non-healthy food options. There was only one participant that stated they were not health conscious at all. The following quotes depict the health-conscious group and the somewhat health-conscious groups
I try to stay away from super processed things as well as the sweets and snacks aisles. I try to get a lot of fresh foods that are quick, which can be difficult (Mia, 19).

I try to be [healthy]. I will get all the unhealthy food first and then I will look at it. After looking at the unhealthy products, I go put some healthier choices in my basket to make me feel better (Noah, 19).

**Shopping Preferences**

The participants were asked prior to their grocery shopping trip what they liked about going grocery shopping. The predominant opinions of things they enjoy is that they feel independent and productive, and enjoy getting recommendations from friends for new products to try. Other responses included that they find it relaxing to not have to think when they shop, they enjoy getting more food because it makes them happy, and they also enjoy their familiarity with certain stores.

**Shopping Aversions**

Participants were asked in a pre-interview what they disliked about grocery shopping. The three main themes that resulted from this question is that they do not like how much time they spend shopping, how much money they spend on food, and waiting in line to check out. There were other comments mentioning that they do not like how many people are normally at the grocery store, the store restocking in the middle of the day, and there is too much of an assortment for some products.

**Shopping Preferences About Our Trip**
After we had completed our shopping trip together, participants were asked what they enjoyed about the shopping trip. The major themes present are that they saved money, they could purchase the things they needed, it was a fast experience, and they did not have to wait in line.

**Shopping Aversions About Our Trip**

After we had completed our shopping trip together, participants were asked what they disliked about the shopping trip. Their responses are described in the next few sentences. They were unable to find an item they wanted without asking for help. One individual could not find someone to help them, which they were irritated with. One individual was annoyed that there were stocking carts in the aisle with no one stocking the shelf. Others found that the background noise was distracting and that the store was crowded on the day we went shopping.

**Influences**

When asked, what influences them to buy items at the grocery store, respondents were mainly motivated to purchase items because they were replenishing what they were out of at home. Secondary factors included whether the item was on sale or if they wanted to try a new item. Another comment about choices of the products was the participant being conscious of their health.

**Consciously Aware of Cart Size**

Respondents recognized how many items they had in their basket only when the basket became heavy or full. Some of participants that were aware of how many items they had in their basket keep a running tally count in their head to make sure they do not overspend. Three participants of this sample said they do not stay consciously aware of how many items they have in their basket.
I pile items on top of one another in my cart, so you cannot truly see everything. I am aware of what I have, not how many things (Charlotte, 20).

They were then asked if the number of items in their basket ever made them self-conscious. Eight participants of the sample said that they do not feel self-conscious about what is in their basket, or, if they do, it is not a lingering thought. The other two participants felt self-conscious because what they purchase could easily be stereotyped as a “college kid’s” shopping cart or they felt that they had too many items in their cart.

**Stock Outs**

The sample indicated that they are not all that bothered by stock outs. Most of the participants mentioned that they may take a week’s break from that retailer when looking for that item. Some of them did mention that it was a bit irritating, but they would try again. One of them mentioned that if it was a specific item that is not purchased regularly, they would not return to that retailer for that infrequent item.

I don’t think I would care if they were out of something. I would come back because I know they did not stop carrying the item. There was just none on the shelf when I went to purchase the item (Ava, 19).

It is not the store’s fault that they do not have what I am looking for. It is probably a logistics problem of the parent company of a product. I would find a substitute for that day, and I would hope that it would be there next time I went shopping (Noah, 19).
Over Purchase/ Under Consumption

Most of the participants stated that they eat everything that they purchase at the grocery store. The instances where they would purchase but not consume was when they forgot about items they purchased, some of the items they bought went bad quickly, or they ended up not being home enough to eat everything they purchased. Some of the participants admitted that they waste food almost every time they go grocery shopping. Others found it difficult to tell because the people that live with them eat their food as well.

Average Basket Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
<th>Total Cost of Basket</th>
<th>Average Cost Per Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>$58.70</td>
<td>$2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>$27.43</td>
<td>$1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>$40.00</td>
<td>$3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>$97.58</td>
<td>$3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>$55.67</td>
<td>$2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>$47.58</td>
<td>$1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>$73.39</td>
<td>$1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>$71.42</td>
<td>$2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>$70.15</td>
<td>$2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>$45.97</td>
<td>$2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>25.7 Items (26 Items Rounded)</td>
<td>$58.79</td>
<td>$2.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Each Participant’s number of items purchased and amount spent

The table above indicates how many items were bought per participant as well as how much each of them spent on their shopping trip. The average cost per item column was calculated by taking each participant’s total cost of their basket divided by the number of items each of them purchased. The averages row was calculated by taking all of the preceding rows in their respective columns and dividing by the number of participants. On average each participant
purchased 26 items, had a total basket cost of $58.79, and spent $2.26 per item in their shopping cart.

**Frequency of Shopping Trips**

When I interviewed the participants, I asked them how frequently they went grocery shopping. Some of the participants responded with a time range, so I felt it would be most helpful to see the average minimum and maximum time the participants went in between shopping trips.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Unassigned with Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Minimum Number of Days</th>
<th>Maximum Number of Days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>12.6 Days (13 Days Rounded)</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.4 Days (16 Days Rounded)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3: Participants with Their Minimum and Maximum Number of Days in Between Shopping Trips*

From the table above, it can be concluded that the participants in this sample go grocery shopping every 13 to 16 days.
Shopping Times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Length of Shopping Trip (Time in Seconds)</th>
<th>Length of Checkout (Time in Seconds)</th>
<th>Store</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>25 minutes (1,500 seconds)</td>
<td>8.45 minutes (525 seconds)</td>
<td>Meijer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.42 minutes (805 seconds)</td>
<td>1.77 minutes (106 seconds)</td>
<td>Aldi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.57 minutes (1,114 seconds)</td>
<td>2.52 minutes (151 seconds)</td>
<td>Kalamazoo Food Co-Op</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>27.85 minutes (1,671 seconds)</td>
<td>5.93 minutes (356 seconds)</td>
<td>Meijer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21.13 minutes (1,268 seconds)</td>
<td>2.87 minutes (172 seconds)</td>
<td>Meijer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>14.77 minutes (886 seconds)</td>
<td>3.62 minutes (217 seconds)</td>
<td>Aldi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>23.48 minutes (1,409 seconds)</td>
<td>3.13 minutes (188 seconds)</td>
<td>Aldi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>31.52 minutes (1,891 seconds)</td>
<td>5.18 minutes (311 seconds)</td>
<td>Meijer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>30.88 minutes (1,853 seconds)</td>
<td>2.77 minutes (166 seconds)</td>
<td>Meijer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.65 minutes (639 seconds)</td>
<td>2.57 minutes (154 seconds)</td>
<td>Aldi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>21.727 minutes (1,304 seconds)</td>
<td>3.881 minutes (234.6 seconds)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Participants’ Shopping Time, Checkout Time, and Calculated Averages

The table above shows each participant’s total time of their shopping trip, their time spent cashing out (including their time waiting in line, and what stores they went grocery shopping.

From the table this sample’s average shopping trip time was approximately 22 minutes, and their average time checking out is approximately 4 minutes.

Choice of Stores
Figure 12 shows the responses to the question “where do you normally grocery shop?” Most of the sample mentioned Meijer as their number one response, with eight of the ten participants indicating that they regularly grocery shop there. The second most popular store is Aldi with four of the ten participants regularly shopping there. The remaining locations were only mentioned once by participants, and those options include Sawall’s Health Foods, Earth Fare, the Farmer’s Market, Kalamazoo Food Co-Op, Target, and Costco.

When the participants were asked why they select the stores at which they regularly shop, the most popular response related to price. Participants felt they got the best price at the stores at which they regularly shop, or they felt that the prices were reasonable. The second characteristic that was commonly mentioned among respondents is that their regular store was located close by to them. The other characteristics were familiarity with the layout, the fresh produce selection offered at their regular stores, and the convenience of being able to purchase everything they need in one place.
Aldi Path Analysis

Image 1: Aldi’s Floor Layout Including Participants’ Shopping Path and Item Locations

Image 1 represents the floor layout for the Aldi grocery store located on West Main Street in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Each participant’s shopping path was tracked and traced with a highlighted line to show the most common paths for Aldi. The black dots placed on the store layout represents the shelf locations where the participants picked up an item and placed it into their shopping cart. The most popular areas for Aldi is the first red aisle where most of the snacks, breakfast foods, and peanut butter and jelly are located. Other popular areas of this store include their frigerated reach in coolers that are light blue and the fresh produce island.
Image 2: Meijer’s Floor Layout Including Participants’ Shopping Path and Item Locations

Image 2 represents the floor layout for the Meijer grocery store located on West Main Street in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Each participant’s shopping path was tracked and traced with a highlighted line in order to show the most popular areas for Meijer. The black dots placed on the store layout represents the shelf locations where the participants picked up an item and placed it into their shopping cart. The most popular areas of Meijer are the apple island in the produce department, the middle four aisles of the store, and the dairy aisle. Those middle four aisles contain bread, beverages, salty snacks, soups, canned meats, cookies, and breakfast foods.
Limitations

This study had a number of limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the findings, including the following:

- The study was limited to participants between the ages of 18-20. The minimum age was set at 18 years old because that is the age where the participants are able to give reasoned consent to participate in the study. The age maximum was set to 20 years of age because I am not yet 21 years old. If a participant was at least 21 years old and wanted to purchase alcohol, they would not have been able to purchase that item while I was shopping with them.
- The sample that was chosen was not an equal balance of males and females. The total number of participants was 10, with 8 of those participants being female and 2 of them being male. This sample does not clearly represent the population in regards to gender.
- The only method that was used to recruit was through Western Michigan University’s Lee Honors college, meaning that all the participants were honors students.
- The group that was studied was only college students.
- The subjects knew that they were being followed in the grocery store, which might have altered their shopping behavior.
- The questions asked before the shopping trip might have affected choice of items.
- Not all participants are not be shopping with their own money. All the students that were participating are in college, and some are getting some financial support from their parents. This can skew what students are purchasing, by affecting sensitivity to price because it is not their own money. Also the majority of participants do receive help from their parents still when purchasing groceries. Many of their parents purchase meat from a Warehouse Club Store such as Costco or Sam’s Club.
Recommendations

Based on this study there are three recommendations major recommendations for store targeting Generation Z. First, retailers should strategically place advertisements and products within their stores. Next, retailers should implement some technology recommendations given by the participants. Finally, retailers should integrate smart social media campaigns. These recommendations will be described in detail below.

Strategically Placing Advertisements and Products

The recommendations given for strategically placing advertisements and products in the store are shown in this section specifically for Aldi and Meijer. Using the path analysis that I completed, it is easy to see where the heaviest traffic flow is in the store, what areas of the store are exposed to shoppers of Generation Z, and where they are actually picking up items in the store to purchase.

Image 3: Floor Layout of Aldi with Markers Indicating Where Participants Picked Up Items to Purchase

For Aldi, using the floor layout shown in Image 3, it is easy to see what parts of the store are popular and what areas of the store Generation Z are not visiting. The areas of the store that are not getting attention in Aldi are places that sell miscellaneous household goods, miscellaneous
household goods and foods, and the paper products, foils and wraps, and trash bags aisle. In order to get members of Generation Z to visit these sections of the store, it may be in Aldi’s best interest to move popular items from the red aisle into the miscellaneous household goods and foods sections of the store. This would encourage members of Generation Z to shop the entire store, instead of sticking to their popular aisles.

![Image 4: Floor Layout of Meijer with Paths Highlighted to Show Where Participants Traveled Within the Store](image)

The objective at looking at paths that have been mapped in Meijer is to locate the best areas to increase traffic flow and place advertisements. Key areas to notice in Meijer are the apple island in the produce section, the end caps located on the breakfast foods, soups, and bread aisles, and the dairy products aisle. I would recommend that the apple island in Meijer’s produce section be placed farther in the back in order to get members of Generation Z to shop the entirety of the produce section. As the picture above indicates, there is no traffic in the upper right portion of
the store. By moving the apples farther back in the produce section, it may increase the traffic for that dead zone of the store. The end caps located on the main walkway of the store for the breakfast foods, soup, and bread aisles increase a unique kind of traffic. This traffic flow would increase young shoppers to walk past the end caps in both direction to move to the next aisle in either direction or to move to different sections of the store. This traffic flow creates the most exposure for those specific ends caps. On these end caps I would recommend that Meijer place their new items for Generation Z to try or their items that have been placed on sale. The utilization of these end caps can increase basket size and increase the total cost of Generation Z’s basket. Another important section in Meijer is their Dairy aisle. This is the only aisle in the entire store where every participant of my study visited. This aisle is a great opportunity for cross merchandising and for placing advertisements for sale items near the end of the aisle where there is normally bread.

**Implementing Technology Recommendations**

During my time interviewing my participants, I did find it a bit shocking that most did not use an app for grocery shopping. Those who did use an app were not using their own accounts, which results more often than not in frustration for the participant. I have come up with three recommendations that can be added to a grocery store application to encourage members of Generation Z to use the app. My first recommendation would be to have a feature built into the app where you can type in your grocery list. Using a word recognition software, the app would use the keys words that you use to make your list to automatically pull coupons for you. This makes clipping coupons a faster experience, and it would allow for stores to gather more data about this generation. My second recommendation is to allow customers to look up where products are within each store by looking up store layouts through the app. This feature would
use location tracking to pull up which store they were shopping at, and it would use their location in the store in order to give them directions on how to get to that item. Ideally over time the grocery list and the item locator feature would be able to show participants the most efficient way to travel through the grocery store. The third recommendation would be to allow for customers to be able to compare two items on three different features: nutritional facts, ingredients, and price. This would give the customer all of the information that they need in order to choose the best item for them without spending time in the store physically comparing the items. Generation Z would enjoy all of these recommendations because retailers would help them save money while eliminating the effort that goes into couponing, provide assistance at the tips of their fingers on demand to find anything they are looking for, and allow them to perform research at home. The benefits for the retailer would be being able to collect all the data from the app through these new features and cross analyze it with the information that is collected through the cashing out process.

**Integrate Smart Social Media Campaigns**

One of the clearest results from this study has been that Generation Z is very sensitive about how they are advertised to on social media. I believe the key advertising on social media is to choose the correct platform to advertise, and to make it more than just an advertisement. The important aspect to be aware of is to make sure it is something that they can discuss with their friends. I have three recommendations for social media campaigns that I believe would be successful among Generation Z. The first recommendation would be to hire brand ambassadors at colleges. These ambassadors would be hired to post things to their social media accounts that would sponsor the retailer that hired them. The important thing to note is that these posts would be intermingled with their personal posts as well. This way, all of their friends and people who
follow them online would be more likely to see the posts regularly instead of only seeing advertisements coming from that account. Examples of advertisements for these ambassadors to post would be to photograph all the fresh produce that they got shopping at their retailer that day or taking a selfie inside the retailer wearing a shirt with the retailer’s logo and post the photo to Instagram.

The second campaign idea is to give members of Generation Z contests with real prizes. A form of advertising many of my participants mentioned they see online, but they do not mind watching, are Tasty videos. These are videos that are 30 seconds to 1 minute in length and show a recipe from start to finish with all the ingredients. The sponsoring portion of these videos is in the beginning of the video when the person shows all the ingredients being pulled out of a grocery bag with a retailer’s logo on it. Retailers could sponsor a competition where their customers are challenged to create their own Tasty video. The participants of the contest would enter their recipes, and the retailer would choose a winner. That winner would be able to create a Tasty video with a friend sponsored by the retailer. This would also open up an opportunity for the video to be spread naturally through the winner, their friend, and the retailer’s social media pages.

My third campaign idea would be to create a game similar to Starbucks’ BINGO game. My Starbucks Rewards is known for giving points to customers for every dollar they spend at Starbucks. Starbucks created a version of BINGO that allows their customers to earn additional points to earn free rewards through their application. Customers could earn these additional points by completing tasks. The way that grocery retailers might alter this game is by having customers engage with the retailer on social media. An example of a BINGO square could be take a selfie in front of the retailer’s sign out front and posting it to Instagram. Another example
is posting a photo of the food the customers made from the items purchased from the retailer or checking in to three different locations of the retailer on Facebook. The key with these challenges is that each post must have a hashtag identifying which challenge it is and the participant should tag the retailer in each post. Once the task has been completed the participant earns points towards coupons to be redeemed at the retailer.

**Additional Research**

After doing extensive research on this topic, I have additional thoughts of how to increase knowledge of the grocery shopping behaviors of Generation Z. I think it would be fascinating to do some comparison research with these participants. It would have been interesting to go grocery shopping with them more than once to determine if that one shopping trip was consistent behavior. Also by looking at the participants week to week, there is an opportunity to do a comparative basket analysis. I think it would also be fascinating to do a 10-year comparison of how this sample group grocery shops once they are on their own income and become truly independent adults. When following the participants around the grocery store, I followed them from behind using only a camera to show their shopping path and what items they picked up. It would be more beneficial to get a camera that would be able to concentrate on each participant’s eye movements because I was unable to tell what they were looking at or for how long. It would allow for a better analysis of what members of Generation Z are exposed to and what they react to in the grocery store.

In future studies, all of the pre-interview and post-interview questions could be broken down into their own individual studies. This method may be more effective to ensure that participants behaving differently due to being observed. Designing a study this way would give ample time for researchers to find out specifically why participants are behaving in regard to specific topics.
I feel the most interesting topic that should be researched next is to determine why members of Generation Z are not integrating technology into their grocery shopping experience. Knowing that this generation is inseparable from their phones outside of the grocery store, it would be interesting to see why they unplug while they grocery shop. For marketers, it is extremely important to learn how Generation Z would like to use their smartphones while shopping.

Another topic that would be worth considering would be the price sensitivity of college students. This study focused on college students, with the number one characteristic being that they are price sensitive shoppers. Taking into account the price sensitivity of college students would be helpful to marketers because most Generation Z will be entering college over the next couple of decades. Being able to approach this generation during a time in their life where they will be the most frugal gives retailers an opportunity to gain their loyalty for a large time period. Being able to so a basket analysis on this generation by category could also be beneficial and interesting. It would allow retailers and marketers to see what products are succeeding with Generation Z, and it would allow brands to develop products that better fit the wants and needs of this generation.
References


