Omnichannel Shopping Experience:
An Exploratory Study on a Generation Z Sample

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Info	Abstract
Keywords: Omnichannel Multichannel Generation Z Marketing strategies	The increasing adoption of new technologies, such as mobile and smart equipment and social networks, and the increasing deployment of technological solutions in stores create new opportunities and challenges for retailers. As the separation between online and physical channels faints, the omni-channel approach is gaining ground, seeking to deliver a seamless customer experience regardless of the channel. Considering the integration of channels, the impact of mobile technologies, the importance of social media, the changing role of physical stores and the need to respond to new consumer requirements, this article explores the omnichannel phenomenon with a focus in the new generation of digital natives, Generation Z, suggesting questions for further research and opportunities for formulating marketing strategies suited to ongoing developments.

Introduction

Currently, brands face fierce competition in retail, where the buying process evolves as consumers look for brands that can anticipate their needs and attend to their wants where and when it best suits them. Not long ago, brands reached their customers when they visited a store or by mail or phone. The Internet changed the scenery, as now brands can choose from an array of channels. Some brands focus on specific channels, while others develop strategies for every possible channel. In any case, what seems to matter for customers today is that brands can add value and provide better service by creating synergies among different channels. If a brand manages to wipe out barriers between digital and physical channels and interconnect them, it goes from a multichannel to an omnichannel approach, offering customers a better and personalized shopping experience.

The younger generations, especially the upcoming Generation Z, or *GenZers*, are particularly familiarized with the use of digital technologies; that is why they are called *Digital Natives*. Their members are well informed, quite demanding in terms of experiences and service, and they use both online and offline retail channels readily, which underlines the importance (and opportunity) of going omnichannel. To thrive in this new environment, traditional and non-traditional retailers should rethink their strategies for innovative information delivery and product fulfillment (Bell, Gallino & Moreno, 2014).

Despite that many studies focused on multichannel and even cross-channel shopping (e.g., Chatterjee, 2010; Heitz-Spahn, 2013), only in recent years the omnichannel phenomenon has attracted attention. Omnichannel involves all channels and touchpoints, physical and digital, through which consumers interact with brands before,

during, and after a purchase, and a seamless transition between those channels across the customer shopping journey (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). As the lines between online and physical channels are fainting, the omnichannel approach gains ground, seeking to provide a seamless customer experience regardless of the channel.

This article explores the literature on Generation Z, omnichannel shopping, and multichannel topics. Then, it describes the outcomes of a quantitative survey study based on a sample of Portuguese GenZers. The aim is to better identify trends and opportunities for omnichannel strategies and formulate omnichannel-related questions for future research.

I. Literature Review
1. The new consumers: Generation Z

There is no consensus about when Generation Z appeared. For several researchers (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Seemiller & Grace, 2019), Generation Z corresponds to individuals born between 1995 and 2010. Interestingly, those authors state that individuals who correspond to the oldest group of Generation Z may present Millennials' behaviors and characteristics. The youngest may pass on some of their characteristics to the elders of the next generation (the Alpha Generation). Generation Z members born between 1995 and 2002 are known as the "Big Z", whereas the youngest, born between 2003 and 2010, are named "Little Z". "Big Zs" were born when smartphones did not exist yet, and the "Little Zs" have grown amid mobile devices and smartphones. However, there are still not many detailed studies about their evolution, perspectives, and behaviors for this second group within Generation Z. Francis and Hoefel (2018) also claim that Generation Z is a digital natives' generation

because they have been in contact with the newest technologies (e.g., smartphones) and social networks since very young. They also affirm that this generation seeks and likes to express itself, uses its own identity, seeks authentic, different products, and is willing to spend more money on an object or product they believe in.

Generation Z traits

From a social point of view, this generation has been growing in an era that has to deal with issues of terrorism and social alarmism. GenZers are concerned about everyone's security (Carter, 2018). They are more independent, creative, entrepreneurial, and they can create their own business without depending directly on anyone; they often create digital content, especially on YouTube (Carter, 2018). They are also more self-confident yet cautious and concerned about the image they will pass, especially when publishing content on social networks (Carter, 2018). However, they know and manage the social networks tools very well and do not create fake profiles (Seemiller & Grace, 2019).

The Internet and mobile devices have been part of Gen Zers' lives from a very young age. However, their ability to pay attention to something is low; they prefer more direct information without much effort (Sriprom, Rungswang, Sukwitthayakul & Chansri, 2019). They like things to happen at high speed, their attention span is short, and they are interested in more than one issue simultaneously (Berkup, 2014). They can do several things at once because of how they live life and are always connected and discover and evaluate the information they receive (Sriprom et al., 2019).

GenZers as consumers

The diffusion of smartphones and the subsequent evolution of related technologies have changed the behavior of consumers, who now have several touch-points at a distance. Furthermore, digital and social networks have enabled this diversity of touchpoints, reflecting on the consumers' decision-making process (Rooderkerk & Kök, 2019).

Not only technological advances but also the evolution of the new generations is transforming consumer behavior. If businesses want to remain competitive, they must clarify what they consider consumer value, what consumers want, and how to treat them. They must also consider moving from mass production to more personalized and differentiated production because Generation Z is continually looking for anything different (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Leisure consumption activities such as music, movies, games, dinners, and extreme sports are what Generation Z likes best and spend most of its money on. GenZers prefer activities that allow them to get out of the routine; the Internet is a great way to look for these activities, where the virtual reality of games, for example, becomes more attractive. The escape for this generation is often the constant contact with digital media, social networks, and video sharing platforms.

When GenZers want to buy any product offline (physical store), it is common to ask friends for their opinions. The same happens with online shopping. However, GenZers no longer depend on friends only, as they have access to other online information sources that can tell them

whether a particular product is worth it. For example, they view a product on Facebook and quickly get the link to directly access the product's website (Hidvégi & Kelemen-Erdős, 2016).

The purchasing habits of Generation Z also depend on the socio-economic factor. For Generation Z members that still live with the family, it plays a vital role in the final decision of purchase. However, the so-called reference groups, such as digital influencers, YouTubers, and social networks, play a more considerable influence on this generation (Hidvégi & Kelemen-Erdős, 2016). Generation Z tends to follow one of two approaches: BOPS (buy-online-pickup-in-store) and ROPO (research online purchase offline) (Hidvégi & Kelemen-Erdős, 2016). GenZers value service and experience and, as they have access to different channels and purchasing modes, brands should develop multichannel strategies to provide quick and meaningful interactions with them.

2. Multichannel and omnichannel approaches

The multichannel strategy is already over 100 years old (Stojković, Lovreta & Bogetić, 2016) but has expanded in 2000 (Simone & Sabbadin, 2017). In the past, retail stores operated in physical stores, warehouses, and combinations of physical channels and catalogs. However, the Internet has revolutionized multichannel marketing, and the online channel has become a significant driver of consumer demand.

Multichannel approach

We can define multichannel as a set of marketing strategies that serve consumers who use more than one channel when interacting with a given organization (Weinberg, Parise & Guinan, 2007). In multichannel management, multiple channels are thus offered, treated individually, and managed by different teams. Channels do not interact with each other, data between channels are not cross-checked, and teams are stimulated in different ways (Tyrväinen & Karjaluoto, 2019).

The analysis of products and services by consumers in one channel, the purchase of the product or service in another channel, and the collection or return in another channel describe the multichannel approach in retailing (Stojković et al., 2016). The success of many companies using the multichannel approach is due to the employees or representatives of the group (known as liaisons or brokers), who establish connections between the channels (e.g., telephone, web, and physical store) (Weinberg et al., 2007). However, the coordination of these representatives is frequently not smooth and could create problems, as some channels are not well structured and are built in an organizational structure in silos where there is no communication and cooperation between the elements of an organization (Weinberg et al., 2007).

Today, profitability in retail has increased due to the introduction of the electronic channel (Stojković et al., 2016), which has also generated new consumer behaviors, namely, showrooming and webrooming. Showrooming means that the consumer first sees a product in a physical store but later decides to buy it online; webrooming means that the consumer looks for the product online but later purchases it in-store (Rooderkerk & Kök, 2019; Wolny & Charoensuksai, 2014). Webrooming is more popular than

showrooming because there is no charge for shipping as consumers buy the products in-store, do not want to wait for delivery, find it easier to return, and feel and see the product up close (Rooderkerk & Kök, 2019).

Technology plays an essential role in multichannel approaches. Often information and technology (IT) systems are an issue for some companies because IT systems are not designed for multichannel marketing. That leads to having a different set of channels and data; in that situation, human action is fundamental to ensure coordination and valuable data analysis (Weinberg et al., 2007). The use of the mobile channel has also increased, driving a shift in retail marketing strategies. For example, the so-called multichannel loyalty programs no longer meet the needs of customers who prefer cross-channel combinations (Klede-Schnabel & Bug, 2016). That is because loyalty aims to concentrate all available data, which becomes the retailer's touchpoints per point-of-sale (POS) system or online store. If data is stored individually or in a silo system, it may harm, rather than improve the relationship between the customer and the retailer (Klede-Schnabel & Bug, 2016).

Stojković et al. (2016) analyzed the multichannel strategy and highlighted some advantages, such as using more than one channel to help retailers reach consumers in national and local-global markets. However, although retailers can benefit from using multiple channels, they can still choose the channel where they want to spend more resources. Stojković et al. (2016) also mention that multichannel consumers spend more and are more profitable than single-channel consumers.

One of the disadvantages of multichannel is that having multiple channels is not free: there are substantial additional costs associated with information technologies (IT) and coordination (Weinberg et al., 2007). In addition, multichannel systems are complex in terms of processes and decisions, mainly concerning the customer and distribution, communication, and sales channels. Also, the more data companies record, the more security and privacy issues become more relevant to the customer, questioning what companies do with the data they collect (Weinberg et al., 2007). Finally, traditional multichannel loyalty programs no longer meet customers' demands seeking synergies across all channels; multichannel has been evolving to omnichannel, which seems to be the best suited to meet the needs of customers and businesses (Klede-Schnabel & Bug, 2016).

Omnichannel approach

The dispersal of boundaries between online and traditional commerce allows retailers to interact with customers through multiple channels, which exposes them to a set of sensory information, thanks to advances in mobile computing technology and virtual reality (Brynjolfsson, Hu & Rahman, 2013).

As a result, omnichannel, a term first introduced in 2009, emerged as a new interaction strategy, linking online and offline, beyond multichannel and cross-channel approaches; however, even today, the true meaning of omnichannel is not clear to everyone, especially in the retail world (Savisaari, 2016). *Ominchannel* is a compound word that brings together the Omni, which means "all", and channel. Omnichannel, in a strict sense, means *All-Channels*. Beyond the literal meaning, omnichannel is an approach where more value is placed on interactions, messages, and customer data collection to cross-check the data collected and provide the best experience to the consumer (Savisaari, 2016).

The strategy should be considered for all channels (offline and online) since the consumer may have contact with a product in one channel and decide to buy in another. In these situations, companies should acknowledge that from one channel to the other, the customer cannot lose interest in the product (Santos, 2018). Each interaction becomes a continuous extension of its previous interactions, allowing the companies to provide the customer with all the information, regardless of the channel she chooses for the search, purchase, and payment. That provides an opportunity to understand customers' transactions and their interactions, such as store visits, Facebook likes, or website searches (Mosquera, Pascual & Ayensa, 2017). Many retailers point out the advantages of the omnichannel strategy. Those who use this approach do it because they consider greater access to markets and more returns (Rosenmayer, McQuilken, Robertson & Ogden, 2018). Omnichannel is a more comprehensive approach, where priority is given to the consumer experience. Product inventories, including all the goods offered in all channels, make omnichannel management more efficient, reducing time and costs (Fairchild, 2016). Omnichannel customers can move quickly between the physical store and online sites; they can be in the store and still view the products on their mobile phones simultaneously (Simone & Sabbadin, 2017).

Choosing between multichannel and omnichannel

On the one hand, multichannel retailers prefer discretionary retail channels because it means more access to markets and higher revenues. In addition, they can adapt the reach to consumers in local, national, and even global markets. That is one of the main reasons why retailers may still prefer a different channel strategy. On the other hand, some companies gain a competitive advantage by choosing several different channels. They can then choose which channel to bet on, which can become more sustainable for them (Stojković et al., 2016). Retailers using an omnichannel strategy, on the other hand, control customer data to offer their customers a better experience, namely guiding purchases through all channels (Abrudan, Dabija & Grant, 2020), which allows constant, uninterrupted experience with a broader choice of products. The grocery retail companies using the omnichannel strategy allow customers to run a shopping list for several days, order the items, give feedback on the purchase and items, receive promotions, and even save the shopping list for later reorders and for sharing it among friends and family (Savisaari, 2016). There are also retailers, even classic manufacturers, that use distribution in physical stores and on the Internet (online channel), and others that work exclusively online but distribute to physical stores (Fairchild, 2016).

If customers see certain product information on their computers, they expect the same information to be available in the same visual format on the smartphone. That is important so that the customer does not lose interest in the purchase (Galipoglu, Kotzab, Teller,

Hüseyinoglu & Pöppelbuß, 2018).   One can see omnichannel as a set of trips that customers engage in to reach a product. Along with these trips, several touchpoints are established, involving channels not belonging to the company or brand. Consumers can switch between channels without interrupting the transaction process; they can search for product information using a mobile application, buy the product on the site, and pick it up or return it to a physical store (Mosquera et al., 2017).

Understanding customer channel selection behavior can help companies increase channel convenience, reduce return costs, and meet customer needs and expectations (Xu & Jackson, 2019). For example, location-based applications allow local retailers to send promotional messages to local consumers or even search for their competitors' products and prices. In addition, some online retailers try to gain a competitive advantage by offering lower prices than their competitors (Brynjolfsson et al., 2013).

People are more and more informed, and they search long before buying. Therefore, companies should prepare for this context and invest in software products that manage customer and stock data, market research, and recruit and train channel managers and employees (Berman & Thelen, 2018).

Additional tools to improve omnichannel are essential. Such tools include loyalty cards that allow customer identification and service personalization, electronic bulletin boards, price tags that bring energy to physical stores, and sales personnel equipped with devices with various levels of stock information and delivery options. These tools contribute to creating more significant customer interaction (Brynjolfsson et al., 2013).

For most companies, customer or brand loyalty issue is nothing more than a repetition of purchase (Pitta, Franzak & Fowler, 2006). The increase in customer loyalty results in behaviors such as customer buy-back, positive word-of-mouth, or cross-selling (Hur, Ahn & Kim, 2011). Brand loyalty goes further than the simple notion of a recurrent customer that frequently buys a product or service based on price, discounts, and other promotional techniques. Instead, brand Loyalty means that a customer will buy a product regardless of any promotional techniques and is an indicator that the customer has an emotional attachment to the brand. Brand loyalty is one of the elements that constitute "brand equity", described as the commitment to repeat the purchase of a product or service in the future, regardless of the marketing efforts of competitors (Sriram, Prabhu & Bhat, 2019). The omnichannel approach may increase consumer satisfaction and thus contribute to building brand loyalty.

Omnichannel trends and technologies

In the future, omnichannel management must pay constant attention to technology trends and invest in empowering physical stores with updated technologies. The emphasis should be on enhancing customer experience by creating and improving the sites with virtual aisles, digital signage, personalized promotion, vending machines, intelligent self-service kiosks and displays, and QR (quick response) codes. In addition, the physical layout of the store should be rethought as new technologies evolve. Change can help retailers, both online and offline, to reach new consumers, retain their customers, and expand their markets.

Customers are increasingly connected and demanding, looking for multiple possibilities to interact with the company throughout the shopping journey, always expecting to get a superior shopping experience (Liu, Xu & Zhang, 2021). Free Internet access can allow the customer to search for articles in the store through the company or brand application, access discounts and promotion opportunities, and loyalty information (Bennett & El Azhari, 2015).

The implementation of self-service technologies (SST) allows customers to make purchases without depending on the employee. This technology can be implemented through a tactile display computer and payment executed through an ATM service (Curran, Meuter & Surprenant, 2003). We know that this system is mainly operated in supermarkets and some restaurants; however, its implementation in other sectors would bring more flexibility to the retailer and a more streamlined purchase. Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) is a system that provides the consumer with a unique and integrated experience because through the barcode of the articles, this system collects information and then matches the articles to the customer profiles in the store (Lee, 2018). This system works through an antenna, so whenever the customer approaches an item, an antenna signal is triggered. This system can also work through a physical display, like those used in clothing stores, where through a magic mirror guide or a platform of dressing rooms, the customer can have a general look of how an outfit looks and even share the look in social networks (Bennett & El Azhari, 2015). A recent evolution of the RFID system, the "Just Walk Out" technology patented by Amazon, is used in its Amazon Go and Amazon Fresh physical stores. It uses a combination of cameras, sensors, computer vision techniques, and machine learning to allow customers to shop and leave the store without waiting in queues or checkouts. The billing is ensured by the Amazon Go App, activated by the customers when walking in the store.

As the Internet enters our lives, the devices we use to access are becoming more personal. Smartphones are already replacing credit cards, while some providers allow consumers to associate their smart cards with their mobile phones via SIM cards. These developments make it easier to pay and make everyday life lighter. Shahriari and Shahriari (2017) suggest that mobile-commerce (m-commerce) has the advantages of offering dominant customer orientation, customer loyalty, determination, ubiquity, competence, productivity, agility, and distribution. They also claim that Internet marketing offers are more comfortable and more convenient to access. M-commerce has grown substantially in recent years, offering users the ability to receive information and perform transactions from virtually any location in real-time (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). The diffusion of powerful smartphones has changed consumers' behavior, who now have fast and easy access from several touchpoints at a distance (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Digital and social networks have enabled this diversity of touchpoints, reflected in the consumers' decision-making process.

The omnichannel approach and the use of the mentioned technologies may generate better shopping experiences, increase consumer satisfaction, and contribute to building brand loyalty. Omnichannel marketing can grow with the younger generations, as they are digital natives and more likely interested in relating to technological-based channels that deliver better shopping experiences. In particular, the newest Generation Z is already consuming and interacting with omnichannel. So, targeting this generation is a bet in the future today.

II.   Methodology

This research explores omnichannel shopping behavior trends, namely the customers' use of multiple touchpoints and switching between channels. Considering the trends portrayed in the literature, the buying behaviors that shape the omnichannel approach are analyzed through an empirical study based on an online survey.

1.   Procedures

A questionnaire was built with items from Schulz (2016) that address the four phases mentioned above, which were translated into Portuguese. The questionnaire, including those items and demographic questions (gender and age), was distributed over the Internet, using Google Forms, following a convenience and snowball sampling. The self-administered web-based questionnaire was used to obtain a total of 343 valid responses were collected between May 15th and June 30th, 2020. All procedures were carried out following the terms of the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and subsequent addenda. Each participant in the study was informed in advance about its objectives and the guarantee of anonymity and data confidentiality, only accessing the questionnaire after expressing his/her consent to the terms of participation.

2.   Instrument

The implemented questionnaire is exploratory as it was used to collect data about possible variables of interest and was not aiming at testing or quantifying hypotheses. It included: a section with sociodemographic questions about gender (male and female) and age (numerical); a section with questions about the consumer behavior concerning the usage of devices; a section with questions on the choice of channels; a section with questions about the consumer behavior across the customer journey (discover, research, purchase, and evaluation phases); and a section with questions about the factors that positively impact the customer experience, consisting of a nine items' scale developed by Schulz, to which the respondents were asked to express the degree of importance for all items using a Likert scale from 1 ("Very low") to 5 ("Very high").

3.   Data analysis

The collected data were processed with SPSS, version 27. The respondents' sociodemographic characteristics and the answers to the questions associated with the conceptual model constructs were carried out with descriptive statistics. Student t-test was applied to test differences concerning gender. The reliability of the positive customer experience scale was assessed with Cronbach's alpha coefficient. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered significant.

4.   The sample

The sample has 343 cases, of which 149 males (36.3%) and 194 females (63.7%). All respondents belong to Generation Z, as their ages range from 16 to 25 years old (21.8±2.33). Table 1 shows the sample distribution according to gender and age.

Table 1. *Sample: cross-tabulation gender and age*

Age	Gender					
	Male		Female		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
16	0	0.0%	2	0.6%	2	0.6%
17	2	0.6%	3	0.9%	5	1.5%
18	7	2.0%	20	5.8%	27	7.9%
19	9	2.6%	30	8.7%	39	11.4%
20	6	1.7%	29	8.5%	35	10.2%
21	11	3.2%	31	9.0%	42	12.2%
22	25	7.3%	26	7.6%	51	14.9%
23	20	5.8%	17	5.0%	37	10.8%
24	39	11.4%	16	4.7%	55	16.0%
25	30	8.7%	20	5.8%	50	14.6%
Total	**149**	**43.4%**	**194**	**56.6%**	**343**	**100.0%**

III.   Results

1.   Usage of mobile devices

Every respondent owns at least a laptop (295 participants or 86% of the sample), a mobile device (334 or 97%), a desktop computer (43 or 13%), or a tablet (115 or 34%). Almost half the sample (48.7%) owns laptops and mobile devices, while 25.7% also own tablets (Table A1, Appendix A).

Table 2. *Use of mobile devices for shopping activities (N=343)*

For which of the following purchase-related activities do you use your mobile devices?	Males		Females		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
buying online	132	88.6%	147	75.8%	279	81.3%
paying online	98	65.8%	112	57.7%	210	61.2%
comparing offers and products	40	26.8%	39	20.1%	79	23.0%
commenting on my shopping experience and checking offers or promotions	63	42.3%	139	71.6%	202	58.9%
exploring products and novelties	63	42.3%	138	71.1%	201	58.6%
finding stores nearby	54	36.2%	123	63.4%	177	51.6%
checking product details	46	30.9%	138	71.1%	184	53.6%
comparing prices online	71	47.7%	130	67.0%	201	58.6%
checking availability of products	47	31.5%	115	59.3%	162	47.2%
reading product evaluations or ratings	44	29.5%	103	53.1%	147	42.9%
reserving products	40	26.8%	36	18.6%	76	22.2%
receiving local offers via location-based services (GPS)	31	20.8%	22	11.3%	53	15.5%
paying contactless in-store (mobile wallet)	78	52.3%	49	25.3%	127	37.0%
liking or following brands on social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)	122	81.9%	128	66.0%	250	72.9%
visiting seller's online shop or website	130	87.2%	162	83.5%	292	85.1%
consulting friends or other consumers on social networks	115	77.2%	133	68.6%	248	72.3%
I haven't used my mobile device for purchase-related activities.	0	0.0%	4	2.1%	4	1.2%

The participants were asked to identify the purchase-related activities where they used mobile devices. Table 2 shows that the activity in which most people (85.1%) used their mobile devices was visiting seller's online shops or websites, followed by: buying online (81.3%), liking or

following brands on social networks (72.9%), and consulting friends or other consumers on social networks (72.3%). In contrast, only a few respondents used mobile devices to receive local offers via location-based services (GPS) (15.5%), reserving products (22.2%), and comparing offers and products (23.0%). However, it was found that specifically women often use their mobile devices to comment on their shopping experience and check offers or promotions (71.6%), explore products and novelties (71.6%), and check product details (71.1%).

Table 3. *Use of mobile devices for shopping in-store (N=343)*

While in-store, for which of the following activities have you already used your mobile device(s)?	Males		Females		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
check product details/information	110	73.8%	102	52.6%	212	61.8%
compare prices online	111	74.5%	99	51.0%	210	61.2%
buy the product online	82	55.0%	36	18.6%	118	34.4%
take photos of the product information	92	61.7%	95	49.0%	187	54.5%
scan coupons, barcodes or QR codes to access more information about a product	40	26.8%	41	21.1%	81	23.6%
look for discounts and offers	96	64.4%	59	30.4%	155	45.2%
check availability of a product in other stores	90	60.4%	88	45.4%	178	51.9%
read online product evaluations or ratings by other consumers	59	39.6%	77	39.7%	136	39.7%
reserve a product	37	24.8%	20	10.3%	57	16.6%
I haven't used my mobile device for purchase-related activities in-store.	12	8.1%	25	12.9%	37	10.8%

2. Choice of channels for shopping

Most respondents declared (84.6%) using two (44.0%) or three (42.5%) channels across their buying path (Table 4).

Regarding the participants who declared to have purchased different product categories, it was found

(Table 5) that part claimed to buy only in offline channels, namely: groceries and alcoholic drinks, cosmetics and personal care, medicine, flowers, car and motorcycle accessories, sporting goods, and baby supplies, toys, and dolls.

Table 4. *Use of multiple channels along the path to purchase (N=343)*

When you want to buy a product, how many different channels do you typically use during your purchase		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	1	32	9.3%	9.6%	9.6%
	2	147	42.9%	44.0%	53.6%
	3	142	41.4%	42.5%	96.1%
	4 or more	13	3.8%	3.9%	100.0%
	Total	334	97.4%	100.0%	
Missing		9	2.6%		
Total		343	100.0%		

In contrast, part declares to buy clothing, shoes and accessories, event tickets, books, e-books, DVDs and CDs, electronic equipment, and furniture and decoration in both offline and online channels. The only product category that the respondents purchase more using only online channels is transport, hotels, and tour tickets.

The participants were also asked to identify the cross-channel shopping behaviors listed in Table 6. All respondents declared to have switched channels along the purchasing path, being that almost all (94.5%) bought it in-store or through a catalog after researching a product online.

Table 5. *Use of online and offline channels for different product categories (N=343)*

Which of the following product categories do you buy exclusively online or offline and which do you buy both online and offline?	offline and online channels		only online channels		only offline channels		I haven't bought a product of this category	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Groceries, alcoholic drinks	72	21.0%	10	2.9%	219	63.8%	42	12.2%
Clothing, shoes, and accessories	257	74.9%	24	7.0%	55	16.0%	7	2.0%
Event tickets (concerts, cinema, etc.)	200	58.3%	68	19.8%	50	14.6%	25	7.3%
Electronic equipment, mobile phone, tablet, etc.	161	46.9%	21	6.1%	124	36.2%	37	10.8%
Computer software and hardware	112	32.7%	33	9.6%	111	32.4%	87	25.4%
Hardcopy books, e-books, DVDs, CDs	181	52.8%	27	7.9%	101	29.4%	34	9.9%
Sporting goods	132	38.5%	20	5.8%	146	42.6%	45	13.1%
Cosmetics and personal care	93	27.1%	16	4.7%	213	62.1%	21	6.1%
Car, motorcycle and accesories	65	19.0%	15	4.4%	165	48.1%	98	28.6%
Baby supplies, toys and dolls	65	19.0%	8	2.3%	106	30.9%	164	47.8%
Flowers	24	7.0%	14	4.1%	169	49.3%	136	39.7%
Medicine	42	12.2%	19	5.5%	213	62.1%	69	20.1%
Furniture and decoration	155	45.2%	20	5.8%	112	32.7%	56	16.3%
Airline/bus/train tickets, hotel and tour reservations	130	37.9%	160	46.6%	33	9.6%	20	5.8%

In addition, 64.7% of the sample bought a product with a mobile device while away from home. Again, that was a behavior more popular among men. Most participants (77.6%) declared to have purchased a product online and picked it up later in-store. About 42% researched a product online, then tried it in-store, and finally purchased it over the Internet.

3. Behavior across the purchase process

This study considers a four-stage purchase process: discovery, information research, purchase, and evaluation. The participants were asked to think about the last purchase they have made and then identify which channels they used in each of the four stages of the consumer journey (Table 7).

Table 6. *Shopping behavioral patterns across channels (N=343)*

Have you already followed one of these shopping behavioral patterns?	Males		Females		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
After researching a product online, I bought it offline (e.g. in-store, catalog).	143	96.0%	181	93.3%	324	94.5%
After testing and looking at a product in-store, I bought it over the Internet.	119	79.9%	94	48.5%	213	62.1%
First, I researched a product online, afterwards I tried it in-store, but bought it over the Internet finally.	68	45.6%	76	39.2%	144	42.0%
I purchased a product via my mobile device when I was not at home.	123	82.6%	99	51.0%	222	64.7%
I purchased a product online and picked it up in a local store.	130	87.2%	136	70.1%	266	77.6%

Table 7. *General channel usage along the four phases of the customer journey (N=343)*

When you think of your last purchase, through which channel did you...	... discovered products?		... searched for more information about products?		... purchased products?		... evaluated or commented on your shopping experience?	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Brick-and-mortar store	84	24.5%	101	29.4%	119	34.7%	44	12.8%
Printed catalog	3	0.9%	7	2.0%	0	0.0%	3	0.9%
Television/radio	1	0.3%	4	1.2%	1	0.3%	4	1.2%
Printed newspaper/magazine	1	0.3%	7	2.0%	2	0.6%	3	0.9%
Online magazine	3	0.9%	9	2.6%	2	0.6%	6	1.7%
Online video	5	1.5%	21	6.1%	3	0.9%	9	2.6%
Search engine (e.g. Google)	23	6.7%	123	35.9%	7	2.0%	12	3.5%
Company website	21	6.1%	85	24.8%	13	3.8%	23	6.7%
Recommendations by family/friends	5	1.5%	35	10.2%	0	0.0%	38	11.1%
Online product reviews & rating sites (comments by other consumers/experts)	10	2.9%	77	22.4%	4	1.2%	66	19.2%
Social networks, blogs, user forums	37	10.8%	65	19.0%	5	1.5%	40	11.7%
Online shop	106	30.9%	194	56.6%	151	44.0%	60	17.5%
Online marketplace (e.g. Amazon, eBay)	28	8.2%	54	15.7%	27	7.9%	49	14.3%
E-mail	1	0.3%	3	0.9%	1	0.3%	7	2.0%
Mobile app	12	3.5%	17	5.0%	7	2.0%	11	3.2%
Telephone	3	0.9%	8	2.3%	1	0.3%	0	0.0%

For discovering a product, 30.9% of the respondents used an online shop, while for 24.5%, the brick-and-mortar store was still the preferred channel to find a product. Browsing social networks, blogs, and forums (10.8%), big online marketplaces (8.2%), searching engines (6.7%), and company websites (6.1%) play a relevant role in the product discovery stage. As shown in Table 7, traditional channels, such as catalogs, television, online and offline newspapers, and magazines are increasingly irrelevant for GenZers. E-mails, telephone, and mobile apps are not very important either.

The Internet is also heavily used to search for more information about the products, being that all the channels mentioned above are even more used by all respondents, namely: online shops (56.6%), search engines (35.9%), company websites (24.8%), product reviews and rating sites (22.4%), and social media (19.0%). However, brick-and-mortar stores are also more important for more participants (29.4%). In addition, recommendations by family and friends now play a relevant role for 10.2% of the respondents.

Nevertheless, whereas 44% of the sample has purchased products online, still 34.7% purchased in the physical store. Only 7.9% bought products through online marketplaces like Amazon and 1.5% through social media, while 3.8% purchased on company websites. The most relevant channels for evaluating the own shopping experience were online product reviews and rating sites (19.2%), online brand shops (17.5%), and online marketplaces (14.3%).

4. Shopping experience

The importance of some aspects for having a positive customer experience was evaluated using Shulz's (2016) nine items. The internal consistency of this Positive customer experience scale was evaluated through Cronbach's alpha, whose value, 0.826, suggests good reliability. Table 8 displays the mean and standard deviation for each variable.

The items that scored the highest were 'Option to return online purchase and get money back in-store' (4.5), and 'Consistency of product information and price across channels' (4.5). The authors considered items rated with 4 and 5 to be important. Figure 1 depicts the percentage of respondents that considered important/very important each of the nine elements that impact positive customer experience.

Table 8. *Positive customer experience items measurements (N=343)*

| Item	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Ability to interact with the company over multiple channels (e.g. in-person, e-mail, social media)	2	5	4.1	0.94
Access to more in-depth product information in stores through technology	2	5	4.1	0.91
Consistency of product information and price across channels	2	5	4.5	0.70
A more personalized experience with relevant offers and recommendations based on my interests	2	5	4.1	0.89
Ongoing engagement with the company after the purchase has concluded	2	5	3.9	1.06
Company representatives have my client information across all channels	2	5	3.5	1.04
Option to pick up delivery in closest store	2	5	4.3	0.85
Option to return online purchase and get money back in-store	2	5	4.5	0.78
Contactless payment methods (e.g. via NFC technology)	2	5	4.0	0.98

Min - Minimu; Max - Maximum; SD - Standard deviation.
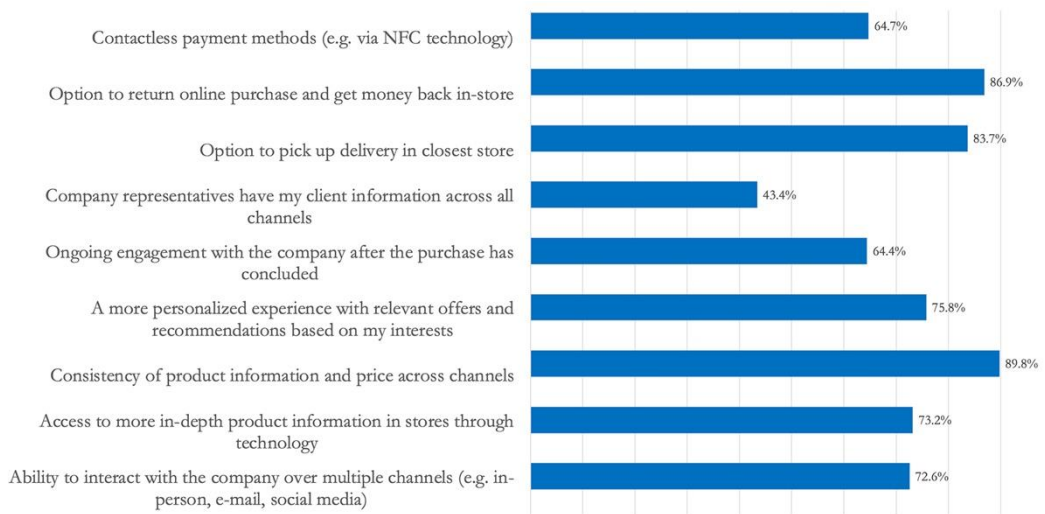
Figure 1. *Accumulated percentage of respondents who rated the element important/very important*

Again, the most important elements for having a positive customer experience were 'Consistency of product information and price across channels', 'Option to return online purchase and get money back in-store', and 'Option to pick up the delivery in closest store'. It was found differences in Positive customer experience items concerning gender (Table B1, Appendix B), and then applied a *t*-test (Table 9 and Table 10). The results show significant statistical differences exist in a few items by respondents' gender: the difference in the 'Consistency of product information and price across channels' item between males (4.54±0.693) and females (4.19±0.922) was significant [t (341) = 3.83; p <.001; d = 0.417]; in 'A more personalized experience with relevant offers and recommendations based on my interests' between males (3.77±1.047) and females (3.22±0.975) [t (341) = 5.02; p <.001; d = 0.546]; and in 'Ongoing engagement with the company after the purchase has concluded' between males (4.28±0.992) and females (3.66±1.041) [t (341) = 5.49; p <.001; d = 0.598].

Table 9. *Positive customer experience – Independent samples t-test*

	Student's *t*	*df*	*p*	Mean difference	SE difference		Effect Size
Ability to interact with the company over multiple channels (e.g. in-person, e-mail, social media)	-1.0047	341	0.316	-0.10738	0.1069	Cohen's d	-0.10944
Access to more in-depth product information in stores through technology	1.8204	341	0.07	0.15402	0.0846	Cohen's d	0.19829
Consistency of product information and price across channels	3.8284	341	< .001	0.34619	0.0904	Cohen's d	0.41703
A more personalized experience with relevant offers and recommendations based on my	5.016	341	< .001	0.55016	0.1097	Cohen's d	0.5464
Ongoing engagement with the company after the purchase has concluded	5.4908	341	< .001	0.61022	0.1111	Cohen's d	0.59812
Company representatives have my client information across all channels	-1.4284	341	0.154	-0.1381	0.0967	Cohen's d	-0.1556
Option to pick up delivery in closest store	0.3679	341	0.713	0.02806	0.0763	Cohen's d	0.04007
Option to return online purchase and get money back in-store	0.0323	341	0.974	0.00322	0.0996	Cohen's d	0.00352
Contactless payment methods (e.g. via NFC technology)	1.3197	341	0.188	0.13423	0.1017	Cohen's d	0.14375

Table 10. Positive customer experience - Gender descriptives

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Ability to interact with the company over multiple channels (e.g. in-person, e-mail, social media)	Males	149	3.89	4	0.960	0.0786
	Females	194	4.00	4	0.997	0.0716
Access to more in-depth product information in stores through technology	Males	149	4.60	5	0.677	0.0555
	Females	194	4.44	5	0.845	0.0607
Consistency of product information and price across channels	Males	149	4.54	5	0.693	0.0568
	Females	194	4.19	4	0.922	0.0662
A more personalized experience with relevant offers and recommendations based on my interests	Males	149	3.77	4	1.047	0.0858
	Females	194	3.22	3	0.975	0.0700
Ongoing engagement with the company after the purchase has concluded	Males	149	4.28	5	0.992	0.0813
	Females	194	3.66	4	1.041	0.0748
Company representatives have my client information across all channels	Males	149	4.03	4	0.846	0.0693
	Females	194	4.16	4	0.918	0.0659
Option to pick up delivery in closest store	Males	149	4.48	5	0.664	0.0544
	Females	194	4.45	5	0.727	0.0522
Option to return online purchase and get money back in-store	Males	149	4.08	4	0.850	0.0697
	Females	194	4.08	4	0.960	0.0689
Contactless payment methods (e.g. via NFC technology)	Males	149	4.13	4	0.883	0.0723
	Females	194	4.00	4	0.971	0.0697

IV. Discussion

The results of the study clearly show that the use of mobile devices is well spread among GenZers. Almost all participants of the survey own a smartphone (97.4%). The use of these devices deserved investigation, as the purchase journey in the omnichannel context implies the spread of mobile devices. The results show that mobile devices have become the most important means for shopping-related activities. That is true for both genders, but they reveal differences regarding their use of the devices. For example, men use mobile devices more than women to purchase and pay online and contactless, compare offers and products, reserve products, receive local offers via location-based services, and follow brands on social media. In contrast, women use more mobile devices than men to comment on their shopping experience and check offers or promotions, explore products and novelties, find stores nearby, check product details, compare prices online, check product's availability, and read product evaluations ratings. In-store, men use more mobile devices than women concerning all activities. Despite gender differences, the findings show a parallel use of different platforms and channels during the same shopping path, enhancing the omnichannel shopping trend. Moreover, several participants bought a product online with their mobile device while shopping inside a physical store or visited competitors' websites and chose different providers irrespective of location, which is another characteristic of omnichannel shopping. Also, most participants tried webrooming and showrooming, being that webrooming is more widespread than the latter. In addition, a considerable number of participants (84.3%) declared to use two or three channels during the purchase path (another indicator of an omnichannel shopping pattern). In the minds of GenZers, it looks like using online channels has become the dominant approach. Nevertheless, in specific product categories, offline channels remain dominant (e.g., groceries, alcoholic drinks, cosmetics, or medicine). Considering the results of mobile devices usage by GenZers, possible questions for future research could include: What drives different mobile device usage behavior between men and women during the purchasing process? What explains that specific product categories drive GenZers to prefer online or offline channels? Why is showrooming less appealing than webrooming in the shopping behavior of GenZers?

The analysis of the shopping behavioral patterns of the sample indicates that shopping is less constrained to place and time, as omnichannel GenZer consumers obtain information or buy a product whenever and wherever they want. Do GenZers expect this flexibility because of their natural openness to digital technology? Consequently, are they more open to omnichannel shopping than older generations? How important is mobility to those consumers across the purchasing journey?

Brick-and-mortar stores remained important for nearly a third of the sample, especially during the discovery, information search, and buying stages of the consumer purchasing journey. However, e-commerce and e-commerce are increasingly relevant. A significant number of participants reported having purchased goods through online shops, company websites, and online marketplaces. In addition, the Internet is heavily used by participants to convey their impressions and share their opinions with other consumers.

In general, the participants of the study did not use solely one channel for each shopping stage. Instead, they adopted a multichannel behavior, especially within the research phase. Using multiple channels for the same purchase and switching among the channels and touchpoints along the shopping journey is an indicator of omnichannel shopping behavior. For marketers, it would be interesting to understand what leads consumers to change between channels across that journey and thus design better cross-channel strategies.

It is consensual that convenience and a seamless shopping experience across all channels play an important role for modern consumers. According to most respondents, the omnichannel approach also implies consistency across all channels to provide a seamless shopping experience, essential for a positive customer experience. The results show that all elements that impact the customer experience scored high and were considered important/very important for a positive experience (a little less concerning 'Company representatives have my client

information across all channels'). Moreover, it was found statistically significant differences in several of those elements concerning gender, being that men score higher in 'Consistency of product information and price across channels', 'A more personalized experience with relevant offers and recommendations based on my interests', and 'Ongoing engagement with the company after the purchase has concluded'. How important is a seamless shopping experience along all channels and omnichannel elements in a marketing strategy? How could those strategies explore the difference between gender concerning the elements that determine a positive shopping customer experience?
The questions mentioned above could benefit from further investigation in the future.

Conclusion

This study intended to explore omnichannel buying patterns among young consumers (GenZers), notably concerning mobile devices, the use of multiple channels, the behavior during the different stages of the shopping journey, and the elements that impact a positive customer experience. Moreover, it was intended to formulate research questions that would deserve further investigation in the future for a better understanding of omnichannel shopping behavior and the opportunities that arise for marketing. The study revealed a somewhat expected openness of GenZers, the so-called digital natives, to easily switch between digital and physical channels and follow omnichannel trends. However, it also showed differences in behavior between men and women, which deserve further investigation.
As a limitation of the study, one should point out the small sample size, given the exploratory nature of the research. Also, the convenience sampling and data collection method resulted in a biased sample. That is, the

participants are not equally balanced or objectively represented in the sample. Therefore, the findings cannot be extrapolated to the Portuguese population. Future research could be designed to address the questions formulated in the Discussion section and ensure a larger and representative sample to generalize results. It should also consider in-depth channel analysis and possibly new devices and technologies to facilitate channel switching among young consumers.

Appendixes

Appendix A

Table A.1

	Frequency	% of cases
Devices owned		
Laptop	295	86.0%
Mobile	334	97.4%
Desktop Computer	43	12.5%
Tablet	115	33.5%
Devices owned by each participant		
Laptop	5	1.5%
Mobile	26	7.6%
Desktop Computer	1	0.3%
Tablet	0	0.0%
Laptop + Mobile	167	48.7%
Laptop + Computer	0	0.0%
Laptop + Tablet	3	0.9%
Mobile + Computer	7	2.0%
Mobile + Tablet	11	3.2%
Computer + Tablet	0	0.0%
Laptop + Mobile + Computer	22	6.4%
Laptop + Mobile+ Tablet	88	25.7%
Laptop + Computer + Tablet	0	0.0%
Mobile + Computer + Tablet	3	0.9%
Laptop + Mobile + Computer + Tablet	10	2.9%
Total	343	100.0%

Appendix B

Table B.1

How important are the following elements to you for a positive customer experience?		Male		Female		Total	
		Frequency	Percent of cases	Frequency	Percent of cases	Frequency	Percent of cases
Ability to interact with the company over multiple channels (e.g. in-person, e-mail, social media)	1 - Very low	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	2 - Low	4	2.7%	15	9.3%	23	6.7%
	3 - Medium	36	24.2%	37	23.0%	71	20.7%
	4 - High	53	35.6%	53	32.9%	112	32.7%
	5 - Very high	56	37.6%	56	34.8%	137	39.9%
	Total	149	100.0%	161	100.0%	343	100.0%
Access to more in-depth product information in stores through technology	1 - Very low	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	2 - Low	1	0.7%	2	1.0%	19	5.5%
	3 - Medium	11	7.4%	21	10.8%	73	21.3%
	4 - High	53	35.6%	59	30.4%	113	32.9%
	5 - Very high	84	56.4%	112	57.7%	138	40.2%
	Total	149	100.0%	194	100.0%	343	100.0%
Consistency of product information and price across channels	1 - Very low	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	2 - Low	6	4.0%	12	6.2%	3	0.9%
	3 - Medium	33	22.1%	32	16.5%	32	9.3%
	4 - High	61	40.9%	62	32.0%	112	32.7%
	5 - Very high	49	32.9%	88	45.4%	196	57.1%
	Total	149	100.0%	194	100.0%	343	100.0%

Statement	Scale	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
A more personalized experience with relevant offers and recommendations based on my interests	1 - Very low	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	2 - Low	14	9.4%	28	14.4%	18	5.2%
	3 - Medium	16	10.7%	64	33.0%	65	19.0%
	4 - High	34	22.8%	47	24.2%	123	35.9%
	5 - Very high	85	57.0%	55	28.4%	137	39.9%
	Total	149	100.0%	194	100.0%	343	100.0%
Ongoing engagement with the company after the purchase has concluded	1 - Very low	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	2 - Low	18	12.1%	49	25.3%	42	12.2%
	3 - Medium	48	32.2%	79	40.7%	80	23.3%
	4 - High	33	22.1%	40	20.6%	81	23.6%
	5 - Very high	50	33.6%	26	13.4%	140	40.8%
	Total	149	100.0%	194	100.0%	343	100.0%
Company representatives have my client information across all channels	1 - Very low	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	2 - Low	1	0.7%	13	6.7%	67	19.5%
	3 - Medium	14	9.4%	28	14.4%	127	37.0%
	4 - High	38	25.5%	62	32.0%	73	21.3%
	5 - Very high	96	64.4%	91	46.9%	76	22.2%
	Total	149	100.0%	194	100.0%	343	100.0%
Option to pick up delivery in closest store	1 - Very low	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	2 - Low	2	1.3%	1	0.7%	14	4.1%
	3 - Medium	10	6.7%	14	9.4%	42	12.2%
	4 - High	34	22.8%	38	25.5%	100	29.2%
	5 - Very high	103	69.1%	96	64.4%	187	54.5%
	Total	149	100.0%	149	100.0%	343	100.0%
Option to return online purchase and get money back in-store	1 - Very low	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	2 - Low	2	1.3%	6	3.1%	8	2.3%
	3 - Medium	10	6.7%	27	13.9%	37	10.8%
	4 - High	34	22.8%	36	18.6%	70	20.4%
	5 - Very high	103	69.1%	125	64.4%	228	66.5%
	Total	149	100.0%	194	100.0%	343	100.0%
Contactless payment methods (e.g. via NFC technology)	1 - Very low	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	2 - Low	9	6.0%	17	8.8%	26	7.6%
	3 - Medium	50	33.6%	45	23.2%	95	27.7%
	4 - High	38	25.5%	53	27.3%	91	26.5%
	5 - Very high	52	34.9%	79	40.7%	131	38.2%
	Total	149	100.0%	194	100.0%	343	100.0%

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