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GEN Z AND THE DIGITAL SHOPPING EXPERIENCE: AN ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER
BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS SUMMER JACKETS ONLINE

Perceptual Map

MARIA TERESA DE SOUSA DE

MACEDO RAPOSO

Work project carried out under the supervision of:

Daniela Schmitt

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Abstract

This study investigates the online shopping behavior and expectations of Generation Z (Gen Z), a significant and economically influential cohort of the global population. Focusing specifically on the online purchase of summer jackets, the research encompasses a thorough review of literature and research methodology that includes conjoint analysis and perceptual mapping. The study derives valuable findings: Online shopping has become routine, and Gen Z's online shopping patterns exhibit a strong inclination towards price sensitivity, with decision-making heavily influenced by diverse information and inspiration channels. This

reflects Gen Z's core values, which prioritize aspects such as convenience, sustainability, and a keen awareness of pricing considerations. These findings serve as a basis for providing recommendations to brands and retailers on effectively adapting their strategies to meet the unique needs of Gen Z consumers.

Keywords: Gen Z, Fashion, Summer Jackets, E-Commerce, Omnichannel, Social Commerce, Consumer Interviews, Conjoint Analysis, Perceptual Maps

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Table of Contents

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	5
1 INTRODUCTION	6
2 DATA AND METHODOLOGY	9
2.1 PERCEPTUAL MAP	9
2.1.1 Methodology	9

2.1.2	<i>Survey Construction</i>	12
3	RESULTS	15
3.1	PERCEPTUAL MAPS	15
3.1.1	<i>Sample Characteristics</i>	15
3.1.2	<i>Perceptual Map's Analysis</i>	19
4	ADDITIONAL EXPERIMENTS	24
4.1	SCENARIOS ON GEN Z CONSUMERS PREFERENCES	24
4.1.1	<i>Methodology</i>	24
4.1.2	<i>Survey Construction</i>	25
4.1.3	<i>Sample Analysis</i>	29
4.1.4	<i>Scenario Analysis</i>	31
4.2	CONJOINT ANALYSIS VIA CHATGPT	34
5	CONCLUSION	37
5.1	DISCUSSION	37
5.2	MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS	52
5.3	FUTURE RESEARCH	58
	REFERENCES	64
	APPENDICES	69

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
AI	Artificial Intelligence
Gen Z	Generation Z (Born 1997-2012)
MWTP	Marginal Willingness To Pay
QR codes	Quick Response Codes
S.M.A.R.T	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.
UGC	User-Generated Content

1 Introduction

Generation Z (Gen Z) is the world's largest generation, accounting for nearly a third (32%) of the world's global population in 2019 (Miller and Lu 2018), making it one of the most crucial, if not the most essential group for companies to address with their products moving forward to ensure financial success. Should be noted that individuals belonging to Gen Z are still financially far from their peak. In 2022 more than half of Gen Z is still set to enter their working life, with only 48% being full/part-time or self-employed and 42% advancing their education further (GWI 2023). These figures indicate that Gen Z's impact on the overall economy will rapidly increase over the next few years following an increase in the employment ratio. Aside from the rising employment ratio, the economic footprint will also further increase through individuals advancing their careers and thus improving their financial means. These assumptions are also clearly underpinned by data showing that Gen Z individuals are more ambitious, adventurous, career-focused, and money-driven than their ancestors who belong to other generations (GWI 2023).

Growing up with digital technologies like no other generation has led Gen Z to be frequent online shoppers, with 32% of the age group saying to shop online daily or even multiple times a day (Jungle Scout 2023).

While the financial impact already outlined the importance of Gen Z for the future of all industries, it should also be noted that Gen Z also considers themselves more conscious regarding fashion than past cohorts, displayed by an over-index of 1.13 against previous generations (GWI 2023). These findings indicate the urgent need for fashion manufacturers and online retailers to target the needs of this emerging generation specifically.

The jackets and coats segment is among the most significant fashion segments, with global sales expected to amount to approximately 126.66bn US\$ by 2027 (male 56.47bn

US\$, female 54.96, children 15.23bn) and 2.58 bn pieces to be sold by 2027 (Statista 2022b, Statista 2022c, Statista 2022d). While the jacket sales volume “only” reflects 1.33% of the overall fashion apparel sales volume, the value amounts to approximately 7.30% of the entire industry, indicating the paramount importance of the jackets and coats segment for future success (Statista 2022a). Considering various factors, summer jackets are especially appealing to address within this segment. Considering the research project takes place in spring, consumers are likely not actively looking into purchasing winter jackets, which could influence their willingness to participate in the study and their attitude towards the product. Consumers are generally not looking for winter jackets in summer, so the willingness to pay for them could be lower than when they are looking to buy a winter jacket.

The work project aims to understand better how Gen Z behaves when buying summer jackets and what expectations they have throughout the process of buying their product. The key objective of this work is to guide how brands can potentially adapt their strategy to satisfy the needs and expectations of this generation. To be able to provide recommendations, two research questions were formulated (RQ1 and RQ2).

The first research question, RQ1 – *“How does Gen Z behave when purchasing jackets online?”* – was developed to understand how consumers are influenced when deciding between a range of jackets that differ in their attributes and levels.

The second research question, RQ2 – *“What do consumers expect from fashion brands in their shopping experience and the purchased product?”* – was designed to understand how those online retailers are perceived by Gen Z. The analysis of this question allows the researchers to understand better the strengths and weaknesses of each of the chosen online retailers and how they can adapt their customer journey.

Both, research question one and two were analyzed in a perceptual Map, in order to make it easier to visualize consumer perceptions about the questions and draw some conclusions.

In the end, the findings in the perceptual map of both research questions can be mapped together to identify areas of improvement for online retailers to appeal more to consumers belonging to Gen Z. This objective is addressed by the third research question, RQ3 –“*How can Brands adapt their strategy to the shift of needs in this generation?*”.

2 Data and Methodology

2.1 Perceptual Map

2.1.1 Methodology

The best method to comprehend the brand image of a particular brand or product is to collect information about consumers' perceptions of the topic of study, for instance, by conducting a survey. However, the issue of how to organize the collected data and

feedback is recurrent. Therefore, one of the potential solutions to this issue is to use a perceptual map to make it simpler to visualize consumer perceptions (William 2023).

Therefore, a perceptual map can be created to comprehend how consumers perceive and feel about a particular brand or product. Theoretically, a perceptual map is a statistical technique known as multidimensional scaling that creates a multidimensional image of the perceived similarities and differences between brands (Gigauri 2019). They are helpful charts that enable companies to understand the competitive positioning of their brand or product. In addition, they allow companies to compare vital attributes with consumers, and are frequently used in market research to comprehend consumers' reactions to key attributes and benefits of competitive products or brands. (Gigauri 2019) Perceptual mapping is a tool that allows market researchers to visualize consumer perceptions of product attributes, brands, and services, among other things. (Gigauri 2019).

According to William (2023), five straightforward stages are required to create a perceptual map:

Initially, researchers must select the attributes. This selection should be based on the target audience and the attributes consumers use to compare the products or the brand to the competition. Given the diversity of the target market, it may be beneficial to determine which are the most essential from a typical customer's perspective.

Next comes the most crucial component of perceptual map construction, **setting dimensions**. This stage will enable the researchers to clearly interpret the customer's perceptions, which involves **assigning numerical values to each axis and considering** that a more significant number of numerical values indicates a superior mapping. Therefore, it is mandatory to **determine the product attributes and brands to map**. This stage is essential for increasing the map's efficacy. For instance, if the goal is to

create a map for jackets, a variety of brands should be selected, depending on the information the researcher wish to obtain.

The fourth step is to **conduct a survey**. The best way to collect data for the perceptual map is through surveys, where questions should be asked in the Likert Scale format – a five or sometimes seven-point scale that allows respondents to indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with a particular statement by providing five or seven possible responses. Examples include (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Undecided; (4) Agree; and (5) Strongly Agree (McLeod 2023).

After the previous steps have been completed, this final step is likely the simplest, to create the actual map. A typical perceptual map appears as a graph with two dimensions represented as the X and Y axes, where both dimensions should measure attributes or dimensions that consumers actively consider when making an actual purchase (William 2023).

Nonetheless, it is essential to be aware that there are two significant categories of perceptual maps: standard and multi-dimensional.

The multidimensional perception may provide a more comprehensive view of an entire product market, by integrating customer perspectives on at least three attributes. (Indeed Editorial Team 2022). The first employs a two-axis chart structure, so that it can be used to analyze perceptions of two product attributes (William 2023; Indeed Editorial Team 2022). Due to the complexity of this form of perceptual mapping, statistical tools are required (William 2023; Indeed Editorial Team 2022), such as IBM SPSS, which is one of the most popular software programs .

In the case of multidimensional perceptual maps, the creation process will differ slightly, as dimensions will be condensed by a statistical transformation tool in order to fit them on a traditional axis-based perceptual map (Zheng 2011). This implies that the final stage

is to generate a multidimensional scaling (Zheng 2011) to obtain the multidimensional perceptual map, as opposed to manually positioning brands or attributes based on the dimensions chosen. After accumulating information, a researcher must analyze the results in order to draw conclusions that can be used to formulate recommendations and provide insights.

2.1.2 Survey Construction

The researchers decided to conduct a perceptual map in order to analyze and answer the first and second research questions, “ How does Gen Z behave when purchasing jackets online?”

” What do consumers expect from fashion brands in their shopping experience?”. After the consumers interviews, the researchers constructed this quantitative analysis. The online survey was compiled using Google forms and was available for seven days. To control any sampling error, the professor advisor and two others were asked to assess and ensure the clarity of the text.

The survey was launched on different channels, considering the easier access to get a voluntary response sampling from the generation in question. The platforms were the following ones: LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. The questionnaire was launched both on personal social media accounts (Instagram, Facebook, Reddit and LinkedIn) as well as on family and friends’ groups (WhatsApp).

The questionnaire included a total of 16 questions, which were separated into three sections (see Table 1). The first question assessed whether respondents are members of Gen Z. Negative responses to the preceding question determined exclusion from the survey. This section was used to determine whether respondents belonged to Gen Z and whether they were actual jacket consumers with a certain level of brand knowledge. Entries that answered “no” were eliminated because there was insufficient data to analyze

them. Later, all the textual data pertaining to the associations were converted to numeric form.

The second section consisted of fundamental perceptual questions, each of which inquired about the consumer's perception of a specific attribute and characteristic of various brands. These eleven questions were constructed using the attribute rating method known as the Likert scale. Respondents were asked to select a number between one and five, with one representing "Extremely unimportant" and five representing "Extremely important." The objective of the Likert scale was to gauge the consumers' perceptions of each examined brand (Zara, Mango, Shein, ASOS, and H&M). Participants were required to select a number based on the scale at the bottom of each question. The characteristics examined were the following ones: (i) brand reputation, (ii) product price, (iii) discounts, (iv) quality of materials, (v) design, (vi) uniqueness, (vii) sustainability of materials, (viii) gender association, (ix) shipping costs, (x) delivery time, (xi) return policy. In order to access the third part of the survey, consumers were asked to give feedback to all the sections of brands under examination.

Finally, the last part of the questionnaire included demographic questions to collect data on the questionnaire sample characteristics. The descriptors used were (i) frequency of purchases, (ii) channels, (iii) influencers, (iv) inspiration, (v) preferences, (vi) motivations to shop in-store, (vii) gender, (viii) age, (ix) education level, (x) professional status, (xi) income, and (xii) country. All the questions were multiple choice except the third and the fourth that contained a 5-points Likert scale where each influencer or source of inspiration was supposed to be rated.

The questionnaire was organized as depicted in Table 1. After conducting the survey, descriptive statistical outputs were available, allowing the researchers to characterize the sample. To conduct the analysis of the collected data, the average responses of all

respondents were calculated for each attribute to determine how participants viewed each brand. In addition, with the aid of IBM SPSS software, a factor analysis was performed on the questionnaire data to transform a number of variables into smaller categories and then construct the perceptual maps.

The final stages of the process involved the analysis of the data and the subsequent development of the perceptual map. It is essential to note that both will be investigated in the results component of this study.

The questionnaire was anonymous and available online for one week, eliciting 232 responses in an average of five minutes per response.

3 Results

In the following the findings within the conjoint analysis and perceptual map will be provided, addressing the questions on which attributes are important in summer jackets and how brands are perceived.

3.1 Perceptual Maps

3.1.1 Sample Characteristics

For the purpose of collecting samples, the survey was sent out between April 1st and April 8th. It was promoted on Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn, among others. The link was sent one thousand times, of which 768 (76.8%) did not begin the survey, one did not finish it and 231 (23.1%) completed it (see Table 2).

The launched survey yielded a total of 231 responses, of which 231 were from Gen Z. Furthermore, 99.57% (230) of the 231 knew at least one of the brands, while 0.43% (1) did not. 93.48% (215) of the 230 have purchased at least one of these brands, while 6.52% have not. Considering that the purpose of this investigation was to examine the online purchasing of certain brands, only 215 of the collected answers were considered, representing 92.67% of the total responses (see Figure 1 to Figure 3).

To better characterize the sample, demographic information was requested: age, country, gender, educational levels, occupation, and monthly liquid income. Due to the survey's emphasis on online shopping, it is essential to investigate the additional characteristics of

the respondents' profiles. Thus, the researchers examined the participants' online shopping frequency, channels, influencers, inspiration, preferences, and in-store purchasing motivations.

Hence, the evaluation of these responses was essential to this research, as it had the potential to influence the report's conclusions. Based on the respondents' demographic responses, the compiled sample can be characterized.

Regarding demographics, the researchers found that 44% of respondents were born in the 20th century, while only 17.8 % were born after 2004 (see Figure 4). The researchers anticipated this left-sided distribution because younger members of Gen Z frequently lack the means to purchase for themselves. The observers can see that the number of answers to our survey varies proportionally to the age of the individuals; the younger the individual, the fewer responses researchers have, and vice versa.

The majority of respondents are German (61.04%), followed by Portuguese (29.54%) and Brazilians (2.60%) (see Table 3).

According to the questionnaire results and the statistical analysis of all variables that characterize demographics, it was possible to conclude that the number of females and males in this study is identical. Among the 215 responses considered, 109 (50.7%) are female, and 94 (43.72%) are male. The remaining six individuals (2.79%) responded with "others," and six individuals (2.79%) chose not to disclose their gender association (see Table 4).

Following the analysis, the educational background of the population considered for the research reveals that out of 215 cases, only one individual (0.47%) did an MBA/Ph.D. Given that researchers are studying Gen Z, this result was already anticipated. In the following scale of the hierarchy, it was also possible to identify that 13.49% of the respondents have obtained their master's degree, 40% have received their bachelor's

degree, 35.5% have a high school diploma, and 10.70% have not yet completed high school (see Table 5).

Concerning the employment status of the survey's sample, researchers can see that there is a marked inclination toward students, with a total of 170 individuals (79.07%) out of the total 215. Next, and descending, as seen in Table 6, it is possible to identify the group representing full-time employees with a total of 30 individuals (13.95%). This group constitutes the most significant proportion of all respondents, which is natural given the focus on Gen Z. Lastly, the group of part-time workers consists of 9 individuals (4.19%). Only 2.79 % of the participants do not belong to any of the categories mentioned above.

In terms of monthly liquid income (salary minus deductions), more than half of the participants have received less than 1000€ (64.65%). On the other hand, only 13.03% have more than 2000€ available per month, which is an effect of the correlation between birth year, monthly income, and professional status (see Figure 5).

In terms of Online Shopping Frequency, the researchers found that more than 50% of respondents shop frequently (once every 1 to 3 months or more often) online, with nearly half (43.72%) indicating that they shop once every one to three months (see Figure 6).

Regarding online shopping channels, retailer websites (e.g., Nordstrom, Zara) account for 73.16 % of all transactions. Followed by Online marketplaces (e.g., Amazon, eBay) and Fashion-specific marketplaces (e.g., ASOS, Farfetch), scoring 44.59% and 42.42%, respectively. The lowest score goes to social media shopping (e.g., Instagram, Facebook) (19.91%) and Outlet store websites (e.g., Saks Off 5th, Nordstrom Rack) scoring 11.69% (see Figure 7).

According to the results of the questionnaire, and after performing the statistical analysis of each of the variables, it was possible to conclude that those who influenced the most

before buying clothes were friends with the highest score, family influencers, and in the last place, celebrities (see Figure 8).

In terms of inspiration, it was possible to determine that the majority of consumers find inspiration on Instagram, followed by TikTok, Pinterest, and radio/television. Additionally, we can conclude that consumers rarely find inspiration on Facebook (see Figure 9).

Continuing the analysis of the questionnaire results, it was possible to determine that 90.23% of the population considered for the study purchases in-store and online. In the following hierarchy, 5.58% of customers only shop online, while 4.19% only shop in-store (see Figure 10).

Concerning why consumers choose to shop in-store, the primary reasons are the predictability of fit/sizes, the ease of determining product quality, and immediate product availability, with scores of 92.56%, 80.47%, and 73.49%, respectively. Next, and descending, it is possible to identify the cause of social experiences such as purchasing with friends, with a total of 34.88%. Lastly, Personal Customer Service represents a lesser proportion of the sample, with 14.42%. 4.65% do not shop in-store (see Figure 11).

When it comes to Brand Awareness, H&M, and Zara have the highest brand awareness across the sample, scoring 98.70% and 96.96%, respectively, followed by Shein (84.22%), Mango (77.83%) and ASOS (68.70%). Only 0.43% of respondents were unfamiliar with any of the brands mentioned (see Figure 12).

Even though both H&M and Zara have widespread brand recognition, there is a significant difference between the proportion of respondents who have purchased from each brand. As opposed to Zara's 68.37%, 93.02% of those familiar with H&M have also purchased H&M. Even though Shein has the third highest brand recognition, only 33.02% of those familiar with the brand have purchased from the store. Mango (46.51%)

performed better than Shein (32.56%), and ASOS (32.56%) performed the worst (see Figure 13).

3.1.2 Perceptual Map's Analysis

To generate a concrete analysis from the qualitative, a perceptual map was constructed using the statistical software SPSS. The dimensions of the attributes were then diminished by linearly combining the original variables and the solutions to each principal component (Arkkelin 2014).

As mentioned previously, this questionnaire uses a Likert-type scale so that respondents can rank eleven attributes on a five-point scale, where one corresponds to "extremely unimportant," three is "neutral," and five is "extremely important." According to Croasmun and Ostrom (2011), likert scales are beneficial in social science and attitude research initiatives.

The analysis's main objective was to build a perceptual map using SPSS factor analysis. A factor analysis aims to group similar variables into dimensions and reduce the number of variables in a regression model to facilitate data interpretation. Nonetheless, it is essential to observe that this technique assumes the input characteristics are linearly related. This suggests that factor analysis may not perform well on sets of features that are not linearly related, and that it cannot generate meaningful results in situations where none of the input features are correlated. If no features contain comparable information, this is not feasible. (Ellis 2022).

It is necessary to construct the perceptual map by reducing all the variables used in the preliminary questionnaire into components that attempt to explain those variables most thoroughly. As evidenced by the Scree Plot with two explanatory components (see Figure 14), two components explain many of the study variables.

The Table 7 was created to illustrate the variance and cumulative variances explained by each dimension. Two dimensions will be considered for this investigation. The rationale behind the selection of the number of dimensions corresponds to the method employed. A dimension is only deemed significant if its associated scalars (eigenvalues) are greater than 1 (Rahn, 2022). As shown in Figure 14, the eigenvalue corresponding to component number 2 is approximately $4.7 > 1$.

Therefore, it is possible to demonstrate that the cumulative variance of this study is justified by the selected two-dimensional model, which accounts for 92.91%. A minor amount (7.09%) remained inexplicable, indicating that the selected factors did not support the model (see Table 8) When the cumulative variance is divided into partial aggregates, the first-dimension accounts for 50.57% while the second dimension accounts for the remaining 42.33%. Consequently, a scatter graph representing the aforementioned dimensions was generated. As shown in Figure 15, Dimension 1 is represented by the X-axis and Dimension 2 by the Y-axis.

To gain a deeper understanding of the scatterplot, specifically the correlations between variables and factors, the factor loadings are analyzed to determine which component has the most significant influence on each variable. Loadings closer to -1 or 1 indicate that the factor significantly influences the variable. In contrast, variables and loadings closer to zero indicate that the factor has minimal impact on the variable (DeCoster, 1998). As an alternative to analyzing the factor loadings table, it is possible to observe the proximity of the vectors to the axis, where it is evident that there are four-dimensional groups, as shown in Figure 15. These will be labeled with the Roman numerals I, II, III, and IV, starting in the upper-right quadrant and proceeding counterclockwise.

Furthermore, by looking carefully at the four groups: shipping cost, delivery time, and return policy are positioned in the I quadrant, sustainability, design, and gender

association, in the II quadrant, brand reputation in the III quadrant, and price and discounts in the IV quadrant. Even though the quality of materials and uniqueness are not as positively correlated as the other variables, the researchers can still include this attribute in the second group since it follows the same direction as the rest of the aggregated variables.

These groups fall into four distinct areas of perception characteristics. The first set prioritizes attainability. In the I quadrant, the attributes address the primary consumer concerns when ordering online; the shipping cost and delivery time attributes are related to product delivery, and the return policy attribute is related to terms and conditions. The second category corresponds to a product's characteristics. The third collects status- and performance-related attributes, based on how well a product or service performs, the fourth category relates to money.

Previously, it was possible to position each attribute on the perceptual map generated by SPSS. The X-axis and Y-axis showed two dimensions, thereby identifying groups of attributes with similar orientations. Given that the primary purpose of this data collection was to understand consumers' perceptions of brands that sell jackets, it is now important to determine how brands are positioned along these attributes.

Moving onto Figure 16, the aspect being analyzed is the position of the five brands in the Cartesian plane, which will serve as a function of dividing the four sections into quadrants. If the studied brands share a similar position in the plot, they are perceived to have similar profiles.

As it is possible to notice through their allocations, the brands can be divided into two groups: Mango and Zara in the I quadrant and H&M, ASOS, and Shein in the IV quadrant. The fact that Zara and Mango are in the same quadrant and are relatively near indicates that they are readily comparable. This aspect suggests that the brands are perceived to

possess comparable qualities, thus indirectly increasing competition between them. On the other hand, as per H&M, ASOS, and Shein, their profiles are close, which means they have similar characteristics. Lastly, when analyzing the perceptual map graphs, it is essential to note the proximity of Shein and ASOS, which suggests that the two brands likely share the same positioning.

In addition, the spaces between the brands represent an opportunity, as no other brand is perceived to offer the same combination of specific benefits and products.

Figure 17 will combine the previous Figure 16, which depicted the positioning of the brands, with the positions corresponding to the eleven predetermined attributes used to evaluate the brands, Figure 15. We can then interpret the graph based on the vectors' lengths and directions.

Regarding brand perception analysis, it is essential to note that the association between a brand and an attribute depends on the quadrant in which the brand is located (see Figure 17). Given the similar directions described by these clusters, it is possible to identify positive correlations between the considered attributes. This means that if one of them is given a high rating, a similar rating can be anticipated for the others in the group. In this case, a high rate in discounts will implicitly cause a high rate in price, and vice versa; the same logic can be applied to the other clusters.

An additional consideration is that if the orientations of the attributes are opposite, then the attributes are negatively correlated. This suggests that a high rate in one attribute is negatively related to the contrary attribute and vice versa. In this instance, such a phenomenon is observable because an opposite vector is depicted. This is evident, for instance, in the uniqueness and discounts. It indicates that a high discount rate is negatively associated with uniqueness and vice versa.

Moreover, if the directions are perpendicular to one another, this indicates that the attributes are uncorrelated. As an illustration, consider the following grouping: Uniqueness - Shipping Time; Material Quality - Shipping Cost. This observation has the practical implication that uniqueness has no effect on delivery time. Similarly, material quality has no effect on the shipping cost.

In addition, the angles of the vectors indicate a concurrence in consumers' perceptions, implying that brands associated with one characteristic will also be associated with another in a similar orientation. In this circumstance, it is conceivable to combine, for instance, price and discounts.

Moreover, the higher the value attributed to this factor, the greater the attribute's ability to differentiate between brands under consideration. In reality, the attributes with the most extended vectors are uniqueness, material quality, price, and discounts. In contrast, the attributes with the shortest vectors are design, sustainability, and gender association, so it is possible to draw the appropriate conclusion.

Following this review, the merged analysis of the attributes and platforms based on their positions on the plane can be conducted. Beginning with Mango and Zara, as indicated previously, they share identical profile characteristics. Their location can be explained by associating them with a high importance for consumers to have a prominent level of consumer protection, quick delivery, and the ability to easily return items. These two brands should offer high consumer protection and an easy return policy, in order to succeed. Interestingly, the other three platforms, H&M, ASOS, and Shein, prices and discounts are the attributes that consumers value the most when purchasing these brands. A further evaluation involved ranking the eleven attributes of each brand so that the locations they encompass on the map can be described in greater detail. The method involves establishing a hypothetical perpendicular line on each attribute line and moving

it from the plane's exterior (i.e., the origin) inwards. The association's intensity will depend on the raking height, so the higher it is, the stronger it will be.

For instance, ASOS ranks high in price and discounts. Shein is the second closest to ASOS, and H&M is the third in all these previously stated attributes.

4 Additional Experiments

4.1 Scenarios on Gen Z Consumers Preferences

4.1.1 Methodology

The conjoint analysis and the perceptual map discussed in Chapters Three and Four aimed and enabled to answer the questions “*How does Gen Z behave when purchasing jackets online?*” and “*What do consumers expect from fashion brands in their shopping experience?*”, respectively. Nevertheless, to analyze and answer the third research question: “*How can brands adapt their strategy to the shift of needs in this generation?*” we conducted additional research.

This extra analysis aims to evaluate consumers’ perception of the shopping experience, their preferences and how they would act when faced with different situations. These different circumstances can help the researchers understand how brands can find attractive solutions to target Gen Z consumers and better meet their needs and expectations.

The chosen research follows a quantitative approach. Most of the analysis was based with primary data: the results from both the conducted conjoint analysis and perceptual map and secondary data: H&M Website and other online fashion resources.

To understand how Gen Z consumers would act when faced with multiple scenarios, researchers conducted a survey with varied situations, in which consumers would select the answer they would find more suitable to their preferences and expectations.

Ultimately an ANOVA was conducted to measure the influence of the demographics of the sample. As a result, to assess the effect of the sample demographics on the final results, specifically the averages for each question, a series of ANOVAs were conducted using the statistical analysis software SPSS.

Given this, researchers decided to choose the sample demographics “Gender” in order to understand if the answers to the question varied with gender.

Also, researchers decided to choose “Professional Status” as a second demographic of the sample in order to understand if the different professional status would impact the answer to the questions.

4.1.2 Survey Construction

As mentioned in Methodology Chapter above, the researchers decided to create a survey to answer the research questions and analyze how Gen Z consumers would react when placed in different scenarios.

Given this, researchers created the survey using Google Forms, and this one was available for six days. Google Forms was chosen for its simplicity, as it allows to create the survey and record the answers instantly, giving access to the results as they come in. Also, similarly to the Google Form used for the creation of the Perceptual Map, two members of the group reviewed and ensured the clarification and the quality of the questionnaire was in place, in order to control any sampling errors.

The survey was launched in platforms that are popular among Gen Z consumers. This way researchers could ensure a greater number of replies and even a better engagement and responsiveness from the audience. Given this, the different channels where the survey was shared included Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and WhatsApp. In addition,

researchers also counted on with the help of friends and family members to answer our questionnaire, having shared the survey through messages and WhatsApp groups.

The questionnaire had a total of 14 questions, and it was composed by three different sections.

The first section was to determine whether the participants corresponded to our study. This had the goal of ensuring our surveyed participants were part of Gen Z and, secondly, that the participants were all online shoppers. This way it was ensured the answers would be filtered and the sample was relevant for our study.

Next, the second section was dedicated to different scenarios. The questions were composed to connect and to correlate different attributes to different scenarios. This enabled researchers to understand how consumers would react when confronted with two possible scenarios and therefore analyze their preferences and expectations on online shopping and brands.

Last, the final section was concentrated on demographics. This was important to evaluate segments such as age, gender, professional status, education level, income, and geographical location. With this, researchers were able to understand the background and the traits behind the sample.

Regarding scenarios sector, this one consisted of six questions. These questions were composed of varied scenarios and participants were asked to imagine themselves in certain situations. Given this, they would have to choose the option they preferred or how they would react in a certain situation.

The first question asked participants to imagine themselves in a scenario where they wanted to buy a summer jacket online but were confronted with shipping costs. As a result, they were asked to choose between a) spending extra money but having the item

delivered at home or b) saving money but picking up the item in-store. This question aimed to understand how consumers perceive convenience and price, especially when confronted with shipping costs. As a result, the goal was to understand how Gen Z consumers value and weigh down their options when choosing between the convenience of doorstep deliveries and having to pay extra for the item shipped. As mentioned in Chapters 2.4.2. and 2.4.3., Gen Z consumers are both price and convenience conscious. Nevertheless, price sensitivity is one of the most critical factors in this cohort. Therefore, with this question, researchers want to determine whether, despite having to pay for shipping costs, the convenience of doorstep delivery outweighs the cost of paying for the packages to be sent home.

Afterward, the second scenario confronted correspondents with a situation where they would accumulate points every time they made purchases with a brand. As a result, they would then be able to redeem these points in exchange for discounts in any possible channel (physical or online stores). Given this offer, the participants were asked if their willingness to make purchases with this brand would increase. Literature and the results obtained from the conjoint analysis and the perceptual map suggest consumers are price sensitive and value monetary incentives. For this reason, the objective of this question is for researchers to understand and confirm if discounts impact and influence consumers' willingness to pay and if these Gen Z customers are more drawn to brands that make efforts to provide customers with financial incentives.

Next, as a third question participants were confronted with a scenario where they want to purchase a summer jacket and they come across a jacket their favorite influencer recommended. However, the price is slightly over their budget. As a result, the respondents were asked if the recommendation of their favorite influencer increased their

willingness to buy. Regarding this question, researchers want to comprehend if influencers, who are so important in providing inspiration for their Gen Z audience, have an actual impact on consumer's perception of online shopping and influence consumer's purchase decisions.

Thereafter, the fourth question presents a situation where consumers are looking for a summer jacket. During their search they come across positive reviews of the product, however, their friends tell them the price-quality ratio of the jacket is not worth it. Given this, participants are asked to select the answer they identify themselves the most a) still buy the jacket – highly regard the positive reviews online, b) buy the jacket anyway because they don't value their friend's opinions or the reviews as much or c) don't buy the jacket because they take into consideration their friend's opinions. With this question, researchers want to understand how Gen Z consumers perceive and value the reviews of the products they search for and to what extent their friends' opinions influence their purchase decision. The reality is that literature suggests both are relevant in Zoomers' shopping experience. Nevertheless, researchers want to understand the importance and the role of influencers and their reviews of products online, the impact of the availability of customer ratings, and the influence of friends and family members in the purchase decision.

Next, the fifth question puts correspondents in a scenario where they can purchase a summer jacket with no extra costs for delivery. Correspondents can choose between two different options a) choosing a “click and go option” to pay for the jacket online and immediately picking it up at the nearest store or b) receiving the package at their doorstep, having to wait for two to three days for the package to arrive at their houses. The purpose of this inquiry is to understand if the presence of omnichannel such as the option of “Click

and Go” is attractive to consumers and facilitates their shopping experience, especially if consumers can have immediate accessibility to the item in the nearest store.

Finally, participants were presented with the H&M campaign: “Close the Loop” encourages consumers to recycle outworn clothes. Therefore, customers receive rewards when dropping off their used clothes at recycling bins in-store. The goal of this question is to understand how Gen Z perceives initiatives taken by brands, especially fast fashion, and if they are more likely to shop with them when presented with sustainable efforts. Also, if Gen Z consumers perceive these brands are making actual efforts to meet their needs and expectations and become more sustainable brands, this can increase brand loyalty among post-millennial consumers.

Lastly, the third section was constructed to collect information regarding demographics. Given this, the descriptors used to collect the data were the following: i) gender, ii) age, iii) education level, iv) professional status, iv) income, and v) country.

All questions in the survey were multiple questions, except the last one, in the third section, where correspondents had an open question to write their country. The questionnaire is depicted and can be consulted in Table 10 of the appendix. The survey was anonymous and was available to be answered for six days, recording 222 responses and the recorded average response time was six minutes per correspondent.

4.1.3 Sample Analysis

The survey was available from April 23rd to April 29th and there was a total of 221 responses, As mentioned above, the first section was used to filter any participants who were not part of Gen Z, or that did not shop online. As a result, only one correspondent was not part of Gen Z (see Figure 19) and another had never shopped online (see Figure 20), leading to 219 accurate answers.

Regarding demographics, the researchers observed that the gender ratio between female and male respondents was relatively balanced. The sample contained 53% female correspondents while 47% were male participants (see Figure 21).

In addition, concerning the age segment, it was observed that most participants were early Gen Z consumers, with 70% born between 1997 and 2004. This group segment was relatively evenly distributed, with 33% of participants aged between 19-22 and 37% between 23-26 years old.

Younger Zoomers represented the other 30 % of the sample. While respondents aged between 15-18 years old corresponded to approximately 22% of the sample, the remaining 8% represented 11-14 years old (see Figure 22).

Additionally, regarding education level, most responders had obtained a higher education level. While 25% had a bachelor's degree, 28% had earned a master's diploma. Approximately 2% of the sample had even completed an MBA or a Ph.D. Furthermore, 27% of the respondents had completed a high school education, while 18% selected "less than high school" to represent their education level (see Figure 23).

In terms of professional status, most of the surveyed participants were students, representing 67% of the sample. Researchers expected this left-sided distribution, since Gen Z members are aged between 11-26, it was expected that a considerable portion would still be pursuing an educational level. Nevertheless, 22% of participants were full-time employees, while 11% answered that they were employed in a part-time regime. Only one person selected "none of the above" as their professional status accounting for 0.5% of the sample (see Figure 24).

Given that approximately two-thirds of the surveyed participants were students, it is unsurprising that more than half (52%) have a monthly liquid income of 500€ or less.

While 13.3% earn between 501€ and 999€ and 19.6% receive between 1000€ and 1999€, only 16% make more than 2000€ (see Figure 25).

Finally, concerning the last demographics segment analyzed, most of the respondents were German (39.7%) and Portuguese (37%), with Italian (8.2%) and Spanish being the two second most popular nationality (10%). Additionally, France accounted for 3.7% of the participants' country of origin, with also two respondents from the United Kingdom and one from Switzerland (see Figure 26).

4.1.4 Scenario Analysis

To assess the effect of sample demographics on the final results, specifically the averages for each question, a series of ANOVAs were conducted. The researcher used the statistical analysis software SPSS, to determine if it was possible to conclude that the average of each question for each demographic group trait was not identical. Then, using SPSS once more, the overall averages for each query were calculated.

It is required to begin with the aggregate average to gain a greater comprehension of the survey questions.

The first query asked respondents to envision a scenario in which they wished to purchase a summer jacket online but was confronted with shipping costs. Therefore, they were required to choose between 0 = saving money by picking up the item in-store and 1 = spending more money by having the item delivered to their residence. Researchers can conclude, based on an average response rate of 0.379, that most participants chose the first option.

The second scenario presented respondents with a situation in which they would accumulate points whenever they made a purchase with a particular brand. Consequently, they would be able to redeem these points for discounts across all channels. Given this offer, survey respondents were asked if their propensity to purchase this brand would

increase (0 = yes, 1 = no). Based on the average response rate of 0.1324, researchers may deduce that most of the participants selected the first option.

Subsequently, as a third query, participants were presented with a scenario where they wished to purchase a summer jacket and came across one that was recommended by their favored influencer but was slightly out of their price range. As a result, respondents were asked if the recommendation of their favored influencer increased their propensity to purchase, with 0 indicating yes and 1 indicating no. Researchers may conclude, based on the average response rate of 0.21, that more than half of the participants selected the first option.

The fourth query then presents a scenario in which consumers are searching for a summer jacket. During their search, they come across positive product evaluations; however, their friends inform them that the price-to-quality ratio of the jacket is unjustifiable. Participants were then instructed to select the response with which they most strongly identify: 0 = still buy the jacket – highly value the positive online reviews, 1 = buy the jacket regardless because they don't value their friends' opinions or the reviews as much, and 2 = do not buy the jacket because they value their friends' opinions. Based on a mean response rate of 0.817, researchers could infer that the majority of the respondents picked the first option and the second highest was the second option.

Therefore, the fifth question places respondents in a situation in which they can purchase a summer jacket with no delivery fees. Correspondents could choose between two options: 0= choosing a "click and go option" to pay for the jacket online and promptly pick it up at the nearest store, or 1= receiving the jacket at their door and having to wait two to three days for the package to arrive at their homes. Based on the average response rate of 0.301, researchers determined that over fifty percent of respondents chose the first option.

Lastly, participants were provided with H&M's "Close the Loop" campaign, which encourages consumers to recycle worn out clothes and offers incentives in exchange for participation. Given this, participants were asked if campaigns such as these influence how they perceive brands, with 0 = affirmative and 1 = negative. Researchers found that a majority of respondents selected the first option based on the average response rate of 0.256 (see Table 11).

Furthermore, the researchers considered gender differences; however, only female, and male participants were compared due to the absence of data for "others" and "prefer not to disclose." An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for the questions to determine whether the differences are significant.

The conducted ANOVAs showed that question 1, question 2, question 3, question 4, and question 5 are not statistically significantly different by gender ($p\text{-value} > 0.05$) within a 95% confidence interval. In between, question 6 adopted values below 0.05, indicating a significant difference (see Table 12).

Therefore, the answer to question 3, "Would the recommendation of your favorite influencer increase your willingness to purchase?" is affirmative. Females are marginally less impacted by influencers (0.216% versus 0.204%), although the differences are not significant.

However, in the remaining queries, males have higher values than females.

The largest disparities can be seen in question 1, question 5 and question 6. In the first question, males are more likely than females to pick up the clothing in-store in order to save money. Males are more probable than females to favor waiting for home delivery of their purchases, according to the results of the following question. Although, the only

difference that is significant is that men are less likely to be influenced by campaigns than women (see Table 13).

To sum up, the majority of the questions are not statistically significant under a 95% confidence interval, the researchers still analyzed them due to their overall significance in answering the third research question.

Besides Gender, the researchers considered potential differences across professional status; however, due to the small sample size for "none of the above," only student, part-time employed, and full-time employed were compared. To determine whether the differences are statistically significant, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on the questions with the ANOVAs performed, researchers concluded that question 2, question 3, question 4, question 5, and question 6 do not differ statistically significantly by professional status ($p\text{-value} > 0.05$) within a 95% confidence interval. In contrast, question one adopted values less than 0.05, indicating a significant difference. (see Table 14 and Table 15).

To sum up, full-time employees are more likely than students or part-time employees to choose the option to pick up the item in-store and save money (shipping cost) when purchasing online.

4.2 Conjoint Analysis via ChatGPT

Additionally, the researchers wanted to test whether AI chatbots that leverage natural language processing can produce results comparable to those generated via traditional means. These findings are interesting since AI can enrich marketers' work already today if the results are accurate. Carrying out the conjoint analysis via a solution such as ChatGPT generates results within minutes instead of waiting several days for hundreds of participants to complete a survey. If faulty, surveys can be easily adapted and rerun without waiting multiple days. This technology is particularly beneficial in environments

where consumer preferences change rapidly and businesses launch products rapidly, such as in the fast-fashion industry. Using this technology could enrich the work of marketers and researchers, as it allows them to save time and financial resources that occur running studies the traditional way.

To test this, the researchers used ChatGPT 3.5, the currently most used platform offering such services for free. ChatGPT was provided with the following data to run the experiment: all seven attributes and the levels they can assume, the focus on Gen Z and the focus on summer jackets.

The first results generated by ChatGPT showed severe shortcomings compared to the survey results. Figure 27 shows that by default, the chatbot only assesses the relative attribute importance of price with 1.1%, which, if true, could be considered an irrelevant factor. However, the researchers noted in the literature review that Gen Z is generally very price-conscious, which also aligns with the findings of the surveys carried out by the researchers. Additionally, the researchers noted that ChatGPT expected the point sustainability to be much more critical (16.2% vs. 5.1%). Leaving these two points aside, the researchers acknowledged that ChatGPT ranked the other attributes in order of their importance in the survey. The researchers, therefore, decided to provide ChatGPT the information that, overall, the importance of sustainability in other segments has been declining for Gen Z over the last few years and that Gen Z is said to be highly thrifty to generate Figure 28.

The second comparison undertaken in Table 16 (based on the extract provided in Figure 28) shows that ChatGPT could now rank the relative attribute importance much more accurately. This finding becomes especially apparent if one was to rank the attributes in order of their importance the five most important attributes (price, online retailer, jacket material, jacket color, minimum lifespan) and the least important attribute (return policy)

are ranked the same in the survey by the researchers and the results generated by ChatGPT. The only difference is that while ChatGPT would rank sustainability sixth and delivery seventh, the ranks are switched in the conducted survey.

The researchers recognized that the attribute ranges provided by ChatGPT had no deviations of more than 3.5% (price being the highest). It is also worth noting that the value found by the researcher is within ChatGPT's range for both the online retailer and the jacket color. While jacket material was not within the range, the difference is only slight with -0.2%. The most considerable deviations aside from the price were observable within sustainability and the minimum lifespan of the jacket. For sustainability, the chatbot assumed that it is much more important to Gen Z, with the researcher's findings being 2.9% below the lower end of the range and 6.9% lower than the upper range. A potential reason for this could be ChatGPT's knowledge cutoff date of September 2021, which could indicate that the importance of sustainability to Gen Z has decreased since then.

The researchers also tested ChatGPT's capability to estimate the highest preferred levels for each attribute, thus providing the product configuration preferred the most. The results (see

Figure 29) reveal that the chatbot's estimation is identical to the researchers' findings for the four most important attributes (price, online retailer, jacket material, and jacket color). While for minimum lifespan and return policy, ChatGPT did not identify the option preferred most by the participants, the chatbot still mentioned the second most preferred option (difference of -0.1% for minimum lifespan and -0.8% for return policy). The only attribute that ChatGPT completely misevaluated is the delivery, where the bot provided CO2 neutral delivery as the level which is preferred 1.5% less by the average consumer and the second to last preferred option, which could again be driven by the fact that ChatGPT systematically over evaluates the importance of sustainability to Gen Z.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

The evaluation of the research is an interpretive evaluation, and it should be noted that subjective priorities were set in the identification process.

Research question 1

The results of the conducted surveys provide exploratory insights to answer:

RQ1 – “How does Gen Z behave when purchasing jackets online?”

A recent study conducted by researchers investigated that Gen Z purchases fashion online as well as in-store, whereas online shopping frequency was found rather frequent, with nearly half of the respondents of the survey indicating that they shop online once every one to three months. This finding suggests that online shopping has become a routine and regular part of many consumers' shopping behaviors.

It was also found that the primary sources of inspiration for Gen Z are predominantly of digital nature, specifically on social networks such as Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest. This observation is consistent with the theoretical framework presented in [Chapter 2.6.1](#), which highlights the popularity of social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube among Gen Z. These platforms have become a primary source of inspiration for this young generation, who expect to be actively engaged and derive inspiration from these channels.

However, as presented in [Chapter 4.1.2](#), family, friends, and influencers still hold significant sway over the purchasing behavior of Gen Z. This assertion is further corroborated by the findings of the study, which demonstrate that respondents identified friends as their primary source of influence, followed by family and influencers. In contrast, celebrities were found to have a limited impact on the purchasing behavior of this demographic, with more than half of the respondents reporting only a slight influence.

Brands targeting Gen Z must carefully consider the role of these sources of inspiration and influence and develop strategies that effectively engage with Gen Z through these channels.

When it comes to channels used for online purchases, research has shown that retailer websites are the most used, followed by online marketplaces and fashion-specific marketplaces. This may be due to the fact that consumers feel more confident purchasing from established retailers they trust, rather than from unfamiliar or lesser-known sources. On the other hand, social media shopping and outlet store websites were found to have the lowest scores in terms of popularity. This may be because social media shopping is still a relatively new concept, and consumers may not feel as comfortable purchasing from social media platforms as they do from established retailers yet.

Trying to understand Gen Z's shopping behavior better, the results of the conjoint analysis indicate that price is the most important factor for Gen Z when making purchasing decisions for summer jackets. The theory of [Chapter 2.4.2](#), as well as the results of the survey, suggests that Gen Z consumers are price-sensitive and are likely to be motivated by cost savings and material gain in their purchasing behavior. This aligns with the trend of showrooming in [Chapter 2.2.1](#), where consumers visit physical stores to examine products before making a purchase online, often in search of a better deal. By engaging in showrooming, Gen Z consumers can compare prices and find the best deal, which aligns with their tendency to prioritize cost savings and economic incentives. Indeed, it is reasonable to infer that a significant proportion of the survey respondents have been students, given that this demographic is known to have limited financial resources. The importance of price as a decision-making factor may also be indicative of the financial constraints that many Gen Z consumers face, particularly as students with limited incomes. As such, the budgetary constraints that come with being a student may have a

substantial impact on the purchasing decisions of Gen Z consumers, with opting for the best price being a priority.

In light of these findings, Brands and retailers must therefore carefully consider the economic incentives and deals that they offer in order to attract and retain Gen Z consumers. Such incentives may include loyalty programs and exclusive deals and discounts for online shoppers who visit physical stores aimed at promoting economic value. Brands that fail to provide these incentives may find it difficult to compete with other brands that offer them, especially as Gen Z consumers are more likely to prioritize cost savings in their purchasing behavior.

Despite the literature suggesting that Gen Z is less loyal to brands, the survey results indicate that brand is still a significant factor in their purchasing decisions for fashion apparel, ranking second after price. This suggests that while Gen Z consumers may be more focused on cost savings and economic incentives, they still value brand identity and the image that a brand projects. As stated in Chapter 2.2.2, by providing a seamless shopping experience across multiple channels, brands can create a cohesive and consistent brand identity that resonates with consumer's values, beliefs, as well as expectations, and preferences. In light of this, it is reasonable to suggest that the preferred choice of Gen Z consumers towards the brands ASOS, Mango, and Zara indicates that these brands have successfully addressed their values, beliefs, and preferences. This is because, as per the survey findings, Gen Z consumers tend to prefer these brands, implying that these brands have succeeded in creating a strong bond with this consumer segment.

A possible explanation for why these three retailers have been successful in creating a bond with Gen Z may be that these brands have been able to maintain a strong social

media presence and offer unique and trendy designs at an affordable price point, which appeals to Gen Z's preference for personalization and affordability (see [Chapter 2.4.](#)). Based on the results of the survey, it appears that respondents Gen Z has a severe dislike for Shein. Although Gen Z consumers are known for being price-sensitive and tend to shop from fast fashion retailers, these results indicate that these factors are not the only important ones.

In fact, Sustainability seems to be an important attribute in the context of fashion consumption of Gen Z, specifically concerning summer jackets. The findings of the study reveal that Gen-Z consumers display a clear preference for summer jackets made from recycled materials, which underscores the significance of sustainability in their shopping behavior. Interestingly, when individual preferences are considered, nearly two-thirds of consumers favored recycled materials in their summer jackets. This indicates that sustainability is not merely a passing trend, but rather a genuine concern among this demographic. It is noteworthy that sustainability has emerged as a significant factor in fashion consumption, driven by the increasing awareness of the detrimental impact of the fashion industry on the environment. Regardless of the significance of sustainability to the younger generation, empirical evidence suggests that when presented with a choice between standard delivery and one with the option of CO2 offsetting which has identical delivery time, the former is preferred over the latter. This finding suggests that although Gen Z places a high value on environmental responsibility, the option of CO2 offsetting may not necessarily align with their preferences for delivery options.

Understanding the complex interplay between the mentioned factors attributed to purchasing behavior is crucial in developing effective strategies for fashion retailers to

cater to the preferences of Gen Z consumers, who are rapidly reshaping the industry. It can be stated that online shopping has become an increasingly popular avenue for Gen Z consumers to purchase fashion apparel due to the convenience it offers. As discussed in Chapter 2.1, online shopping provides a vast selection of products and a wealth of information about those products. This wealth of knowledge empowers Gen Z consumers to make informed purchase decisions, with the ability to search for inspiration and acquire information via their preferred channels. Gen Z discovers inspiration through social networks and the influence of friends, family, and influencers. This underscores the expectation that brands maintain a presence and remain accessible across multiple channels, necessitating an omnichannel approach. To foster engagement across channels, companies must develop the power of social commerce, as Gen Z values mobility and seeks to be addressed through these platforms. However, social media is not the sole channel of importance, as mentioned before the researchers found out that also other channels such as the retailer's website, online marketplaces, and fashion-specific marketplaces are also relevant.

Despite the growing trend towards online shopping, the large majority of respondents of the survey still value shopping in-store. There are several reasons why consumers may prefer this in their shopping behavior for fashion. One reason is the predictability of fit and sizes. When trying on clothing in-store, consumers can ensure that the item fits properly and suits their body type before making a purchase. This can help reduce the likelihood of needing to return items due to sizing issues. Another reason why consumers may prefer shopping in-store is that they can physically inspect the quality of the product. This is particularly important for fashion products, where consumers may want to feel the fabric before making a purchase.

Research Question 2

To answer the RQ2 – “*What do consumers expect from fashion brands in their shopping experience and the purchased product?*” the researchers gathered the results of the two Analyses presented in [Chapter 4.1](#) and [Chapter 4.2](#).

The second research question of this thesis deals with the Customer Journey and the value concepts of Gen Z.

The customer journey starts with the research and prepurchase stages, as delineated in [Chapter 2.2.2](#). The customer journey incorporates a range of touchpoints, with an ever-increasing emphasis on digital touchpoints. In [Chapter 2.2.2](#) the researcher has identified various digital touchpoints, which encompass mobile applications, online advertisements, search results, social media pages/profiles, online influencers, blogs, live chats, price comparison websites, online intermediaries, and virtual assistants. Consequently, it is crucial for brands to establish and leverage these touchpoints to ensure an optimal customer experience.

In the pre-purchase phase, customers' decision-making is heavily influenced by information and inspiration channels. The surveys indicate that respondents use both online and in-store shopping for clothing, preferring in-store due to predictable fit, easy quality assessment, and immediate availability. However, the social aspect and customer service hold little importance for Gen Z. To enhance online shopping, companies should address these unmet needs. For instance, leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) solutions, as discussed in [Chapter 2.6.3](#), could help bridge the gap between online and offline experiences. Social commerce platforms have already begun incorporating AI solutions that allow customers to virtually "try on" products (see [Chapter 2.6.3](#)). Fashion brands

could benefit from expanding the use of AI solutions to recreate the advantages of offline shopping in an online environment. This approach could also be applied to material assessment, with potential AI innovations enabling customers to better understand a product's material without the need for an in-store visit.

Addressing the issue of immediate product availability is a greater challenge. While it is difficult to replicate the instantaneous nature of in-store purchases, companies should nevertheless strive to improve this aspect. Delivery time is crucial for Gen Z, as excessive waiting periods may generate negative associations with a brand (see [Chapter 2.5.2](#)). This finding from the literature is substantiated by the survey results, which indicate that participants place significant importance on the delivery time. The researcher discovered through the conjoint analysis that delivery accounted for 6.7% of the relative attribute. Furthermore, in the perceptual analysis, the delivery time was ranked as "neutral" in terms of importance for each brand (see [Chapter 4.1.2](#)). The conjoint survey found that while Gen Z does expect fast delivery, they actually prefer next-day delivery over same-day delivery. This may seem counterintuitive at first, as same-day delivery would seem to be the faster and more convenient option. However, the study suggests that Gen Z values predictability and reliability more than immediacy. This would also go along with the success of Amazon's prime strategy.

With Amazon Prime, customers in many countries can receive products the following day. Although this may not achieve true immediate product availability, it addresses Gen Z's demand for expedited receipt of their purchases. Nonetheless, instantaneous product availability remains a unique advantage of the offline shopping experience.

Next-day delivery provides a predictable timeframe for when their order will arrive and allows them to plan accordingly. Same-day delivery, on the other hand, may be more unpredictable and subject to delays or complications, which can be frustrating for Gen Z

consumers. It is worth noting that these preferences may vary depending on the type of product being purchased. For example, Gen Z may be more willing to pay for same-day delivery for urgent or time-sensitive purchases, such as last-minute purchases. Overall, Gen Z's expectations for fast and efficient delivery reflect their desire for a seamless and frictionless shopping experience.

The implementation of an omnichannel approach can present retailers with the opportunity to offer their customers a diverse range of delivery options, including but not limited to in-store pickup, same-day delivery, and next-day delivery. By doing so, retailers can provide customers with greater convenience and flexibility in terms of delivery preferences while simultaneously enhancing the overall efficiency and effectiveness of their supply chain management. This enables customers to select the option that best aligns with their specific requirements, whether they require immediate delivery or are willing to wait a few days. Moreover, an omnichannel approach can also contribute to the improvement of the overall customer experience by enabling greater convenience and flexibility in addition to faster delivery times.

In order to meet the expectations of Gen Z's customer journey, the use of social media has become a critical strategy for brands, as emphasized in [Chapter 2.6](#), which underscores the significance of social media as a key tool for marketers to reach this demographic. Given that this cohort places significant importance on the opinions of their peers, it is imperative for brands to establish a strong presence on social networks and attract attention in order to effectively engage with Gen Z customers. Furthermore, the contemporary social media landscape extends to the engagement of influencers, as emphasized in [Chapter 2.6.3](#), highlighting the importance of enlisting these opinion leaders. To captivate potential customers during the pre-purchase stage and ensure their

commitment throughout the subsequent phases of the customer journey, brands should use and improve these marketing instruments.

During the pre-purchase phase, Gen Z consumers anticipate finding inspiration and acquiring information via their preferred channels. This engagement may involve direct interaction or be facilitated by influencers. To foster such exchanges and promote them effectively, companies must develop the power of social commerce, as Gen Z values mobility and seeks to be addressed through these platforms. However, social media is not the sole channel of importance. The survey indicates that the most frequently utilized channel for online purchases is the website of the online retailer itself (see [Chapter 4.1.2](#)). Nonetheless, Gen Z discovers inspiration through social networks and the influence of friends, family, and influencers. This underscores the expectation that brands maintain a presence and remain accessible across multiple channels, necessitating an omnichannel approach. The significance of this omnichannel approach extends to the purchase phase, emphasizing its relevance throughout the entire customer journey.

The existing literature posits that social media, influencer marketing, and social commerce are gaining prominence, but to what extent does empirical evidence support this assertion? Survey results indicate that the majority of individuals continue to shop both online and offline. Contrary to the theoretical assumption that social commerce—product sales on social networks—is becoming increasingly vital for this generation, the most frequented channels for online purchases are not social networks. However, this discrepancy does not warrant dismissing the assumption altogether. Social commerce remains in its nascent stages and is likely to grow in importance in the coming years. This supposition is corroborated by survey findings, which reveal that nearly 20% of respondents are willing to engage with social networks for purchases, even though

features enabling this have only been available on platforms like Instagram since 2018 (see [Chapter 4.1.2](#)). Given the concurrent use of social media and television, it is reasonable to anticipate that social commerce, as a component of social media marketing, will gain traction among society at large. Consequently, future generations, including Gen Z and "Zoomers," can be expected to increasingly adopt, utilize, and demand social commerce.

During the purchase phase, product attributes play a crucial role in shaping customer decisions. Brands must identify and prioritize these attributes to satisfy customer demand effectively. Gen Z, characterized by its appreciation for uniqueness, convenience, sustainability, and price consciousness, holds specific expectations for brands in the online shopping context. This demographic anticipates that brands will cater to their digital preferences by offering user-friendly, visually appealing websites and maintaining a reputable standing. Credibility is crucial for this cohort, as it significantly influences their ultimate purchase decisions. The literature suggests that Gen Z exhibits reduced brand loyalty and is inclined to switch suppliers if presented with a better offer. In the survey administered, respondents were queried about individual attributes to discern their importance. For brands like Zara and Mango, the most important attributes for consumers are return policy, delivery time, and shipping costs, while for Asos, Shein, and H&M the priorities are price and discount. Across all brands, price emerges as the most critical attribute, with design and quality also holding substantial importance for Gen Z. Moreover, this group is highly receptive to discounts. Consequently, it can be inferred that Gen Z seeks a shopping experience featuring competitive pricing, high-quality clothing, appealing design, and periodic discounts (see Figure 30). To provide a positive customer experience, brands must recognize and fulfill these expectations by emphasizing crucial attributes.

Nonetheless, it is essential to acknowledge that, generally, all attributes can be deemed significant. Although the attributes mentioned may hold the greatest importance for Gen Z, it is likely that a positive purchase decision results from a combination of all attributes rather than the fulfillment of a single attribute. It is insufficient for brands to offer clothing at exceptionally low prices, as this may imply poor quality. While [Chapter 2.4](#) posits that Gen Z values uniqueness, convenience, and sustainability, these aspects are not unequivocally confirmed by the present study. The survey does, however, emphasize the cohort's price consciousness.

In the post-purchase phase, brands continue to face requirements and expectations from Gen Z consumers. As with the prepurchase phase, reviews and exchanges with the brand are also significant. [Chapter 2.5](#) highlights the importance of exchanging information and reading reviews among Gen Z, which is partially supported by the perceptual survey. While the survey reveals that social media is the primary source of inspiration for most in this cohort (see Figure 9), it does not delve into the nature of these exchanges.

Theoretical research suggests that exchanging information with the brand or other customers is crucial for Gen Z. Brands can encourage and facilitate this exchange using social commerce. Social commerce can bring customers closer to the brand and establish a connection. Similar to influencers, customers with an emotional attachment to a brand are more inclined to purchase products if they have a connection with the brand. This connection can be fostered not only through exchanges but also by representing the same values. Although the perceptual survey cannot definitively confirm that sustainability is as important as assumed for this cohort. However, it is reasonable, due to the results of the last survey, to assume that brands with a sustainable image can expect greater acceptance among Gen Z consumers.

In addition to reviews and exchanges with the brand, Gen Z has other expectations of its fashion brands in the post-purchase phase. [Chapter 2.5](#) highlights the relevance of return and refund policies for this cohort, which is partially supported by the perceptual survey. For the brands Mango and Zara, this attribute was selected as one of the top three most important attributes for consumers when purchasing one of these brands. Simultaneously, for H&M, Shein, and ASOS, these attributes are not as relevant for consumers as for the other brands. By synthesizing these findings, it can be inferred that it remains a crucial aspect, albeit not necessarily a decisive factor during the purchase phase for all brands. Return and refund policies are especially significant for online purchases, as in-store purchases can reduce the risk of ill-fitting clothing. However, to minimize the risk of online purchases, return policies become crucial for customers. If customers can easily return items that do not fit, their willingness to purchase items online increases, as they feel more confident about their ability to return items if needed. The researcher discovered that when customers were required to pay for shipping, it negatively influenced their product preference, as evidenced by a lower MWTP compared to the alternative options: free return via post office drop-off and home pick-up. Moreover, the study found that dropping off at the post office was the most preferred option, in terms of both MWTP and overall preference (see [Chapter 4.2.5](#)). Therefore, a well-designed return policy can enhance customer satisfaction and foster brand loyalty among Gen Z consumers.

Gen Z, a cohort characterized by their digital nativity and unique consumption patterns, places significant emphasis on diverse factors when engaging in online shopping, while not entirely dismissing the value of offline retail experiences. In both the pre-purchase and post-purchase phases, this cohort seeks active and dynamic interactions with other consumers, as well as the brands they prefer. Moreover, they are keen on deriving

inspiration for purchases from the very platforms on which they spend a considerable portion of their time, such as social networks and content produced by influencers. Interactions with family and friends also play a crucial role in shaping their purchasing behavior, often occurring within these digital spheres.

It is incumbent upon brands to engage with their customer across various touchpoints, extending beyond the realm of social media. Given that offline shopping remains a relevant aspect of Gen Z's consumer habits, brands are expected to adopt an omnichannel strategy that enables customers to interact with and experience the brand in a multitude of ways.

Members of Gen Z harbor specific expectations regarding the products they purchase, including competitive pricing, design, quality, and discounts. Their preferences extend to both in-store and online shopping experiences, with the latter often occurring on retailers' proprietary websites. These platforms should be well-designed and facilitate a seamless customer journey. Additionally, social media platforms are witnessing a growing trend in shopping activities.

In conclusion, alongside fostering interactive dialogues, Gen Z consumers place a premium on convenience, as evidenced by their preference for accommodating return policies. Brands that want to appeal to this cohort must take these differentiated expectations into account and adapt their strategies accordingly.

Research Question 3

This study aimed to answer the RQ3 – *How can Brands adapt their strategy to the shift of needs in this generation?*

The findings showed that price is of utmost importance to this cohort and has a significant influence on their purchasing decisions. Although this may be partly due to their limited

budgets as students, it is likely that price will continue to be a major factor in their purchasing decisions due to their high price sensitivity. Additionally, the survey revealed that brand loyalty is important to Gen Z, and they prefer to buy from specific brands. To effectively address Gen Z, brands must be aware of their needs and expectations and tailor their strategies accordingly. This study identified seven themes for brands to adapt their strategies to meet the needs of Gen Z: customer experience, omnichannel management, social media, influencer marketing, social commerce, brand awareness and loyalty, and price sensitivity. Further brand also has to take into account the attributes related directly to the product, the identified important attributes are product material, product quality, and delivery/return policies.

To succeed in today's digital age, brands must prioritize providing an excellent customer experience and adjust their strategies to cater to Gen Z's needs. This requires implementing various strategies such as omnichannel, social media, influencer marketing, and social commerce to build brand awareness and loyalty. Being transparent about expectations and flexible in their approach is also crucial for brands to remain relevant and offer the best customer experience.

Omnichannel management has become a vital component for catering to the needs and expectations of Gen Z as they grew up in a world where digitality is the norm, and a seamless shopping experience across online and offline channels is preferred. Brands need to prioritize processing online orders rapidly and effectively, providing convenient and hassle-free returns, as well as the flexibility to try on clothes in-store and have the purchased items delivered to the customer's preferred location.

Social media is an essential channel for brands to create awareness, promote brand loyalty, and foster a sense of community with their customers. Brands should also use

social media to connect with customers at every stage of the buying process, including before, during, and after purchase.

Influencer marketing is an effective way to build trust and authenticity with Gen Z as they pay close attention to the opinions of their peers and influencers, they follow on social media. Brands must carefully select influencers that align with their target market and have a trustworthy and authentic image.

Social commerce is an emerging trend that offers brands another opportunity to connect with customers and build relationships. As Gen Z wants to be able to buy anywhere and anytime, brands must engage with social commerce to be ready for the features that it will offer in the future.

Brand loyalty and awareness are created by adapting the strategy to meet the needs of Gen Z. This can be achieved by being present on social media, using influencers, and social commerce to sell on platforms, creating further touchpoints with customers, and engaging in exchange.

Given that price sensitivity has been identified as the most crucial attribute, it is recommended that brands modify their marketing strategies to incorporate discounts and personalized rewards to entice and maintain Gen Z customers. By offering such incentives, brands can effectively address the budgetary constraints that are of particular concern to Gen Z, and thereby enhance their overall appeal and competitiveness in the market. Such strategic adaptations are likely to facilitate increased brand engagement and loyalty among this demographic, ultimately leading to greater profitability and sustained success in the long term.

Moreover, the prominent factors associated with the product itself warrant careful consideration. The composition of the summer jacket's material assumes a significant role in the purchase decision-making process. The empirical investigations have revealed that

the material composition exerts an influence on consumers' willingness to pay. Furthermore, product quality constitutes another pivotal determinant in the purchase decision. Additionally, as previously alluded to, the policies governing delivery and returns also wield considerable influence over the purchase decisions made by Generation Z, thereby underscoring their significance.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that brands must adapt their strategies to meet the needs and expectations of Gen Z to attract and retain them as customers. The themes identified in this study can serve as a guideline for brands to effectively address this cohort and stay relevant in a constantly evolving market.

5.2 Managerial Implications

As Gen Z continues to grow in significance for businesses, it is becoming increasingly crucial for marketers to tailor their products and services to cater to the special needs and preferences of this demographic. Marketers wanting to address Gen Z should primarily focus on the following attributes identified further within the discussion: customer experience, omnichannel management, social media, influencer marketing, social commerce, brand awareness and loyalty, and price sensitivity. For the Product itself, the brand has to take care of the following attributes: product material, product quality, and delivery/return policies.

In the subsequent section, the researchers have documented and investigated proposals for modifying fashion brands' strategies.

The importance of an omnichannel strategy to cater to Gen Z cannot be overstated. This cohort's experiences and upbringing are fundamentally different from previous generations, such as the Baby Boomers or millennials. For this Generation, shopping should be easy, convenient, and frictionless. To adapt to the preferences of Gen Z

consumers, brands can bridge the gap between online and offline shopping experiences by providing a seamless omnichannel experience.

The integration of a "click and go" option, allowing customers to place orders via digital channels and retrieve their purchases in brick-and-mortar stores, has emerged as a salient feature of contemporary retail practices. The popularity of this feature, particularly among Gen Z, has been evidenced by the results of the additional survey. Specifically, the survey revealed that a substantial majority of respondents belonging to Gen Z had availed themselves of this option, using it as a way to quickly obtain seasonal items, like summer jackets.

Brands that can provide an omnichannel experience that meets these expectations are well-positioned to attract and retain Gen Z customers.

The significance of social media in the digital age is well-established and has been acknowledged by most companies as an essential aspect of their marketing strategy. Social media platforms offer a wide range of content, from influencer collaborations to user-generated content, that can inspire and inform Gen Z consumers' fashion choices. In the context of the fashion industry, it is imperative for brands to have a strong presence on social networks in order to create awareness among potential customers. By effectively leveraging social media, companies can not only enhance their brand awareness but also cultivate brand loyalty and foster a deeper connection with customers. A sense of community can be established through social media interactions, which can lead to a lasting impression on customers. Additionally, social media provides a valuable opportunity for brands to engage with customers throughout the entire buying process, including before, during, and after the purchase. Customer service can be effectively

provided through social media, enabling brands to build strong relationships with their customers.

Considering the significance of social media, companies must ensure that they establish authentic and trustworthy contact points with their customers, given the rapidly changing trends on social media platforms. Influencers play a vital role in providing inspiration to the target audience and can be seen as more credible and trustworthy than brands by Gen Z, as identified in theory. The researchers have revealed that when summer jackets fall slightly outside of a consumer's price range, the involvement of influencers can have a significant impact on the individual's willingness to spend more and their overall propensity to purchase. Accordingly, it is recommended that brands leverage the power of influencer marketing as a means of driving consumer engagement and facilitating purchase decisions. However, brands must ensure they select the appropriate influencers on the right platform, delivering the right message, to effectively leverage influencer marketing and reach Gen Z. In this manner, brands can effectively harness the power of influencers to drive consumer engagement and facilitate purchase decisions, particularly in relation to seasonal items such as summer jackets.

As the digital landscape continues to evolve, social commerce has emerged as a new and important avenue for brands to connect with their customers. Social Commerce presents an opportunity for companies to not only sell their products but also to establish a relationship with their customers.

As previously noted, influencers have emerged as a powerful tool for facilitating consumer purchase decisions. By leveraging their social capital and influence, they can effectively sway consumer behavior and drive sales. However, it is also important to consider the role of social commerce in enhancing the accessibility of products and streamlining the purchase process.

By linking products directly to social media posts and incorporating social commerce functionalities, brands can reach their customers on their preferred social media platforms and effectively reduce barriers to purchase and increase the ease of access to their products. This strategy can be particularly effective in relation to influencer marketing, as it allows influencers to seamlessly incorporate product links and calls-to-action within their posts, thereby driving traffic and sales. Therefore, it is recommended that brands explore the potential of social commerce as a means of enhancing the accessibility of their products and improving the overall user experience.

Brand loyalty and awareness are essential for brands to establish a strong customer base and maintain their market position. These can be created by adapting the brand's marketing strategies to meet the needs and expectations of the target generation. In doing so, brands can establish multiple touchpoints with customers, enabling them to engage in a more meaningful exchange and strengthen the connection between the brand and the customer. Thus, companies should focus on developing strategies that address the needs and preferences of the target generation, as this is crucial to maintaining a loyal customer base and creating brand awareness. To gain more loyalty from Gen Z consumers, brands can adopt the following strategies:

Sustainability: Brands can demonstrate a commitment to sustainability by using eco-friendly materials, reducing waste in the supply chain, or implementing recycling programs. Specifically, the survey revealed that H&M's "Close the Loop" campaign, which focuses on promoting sustainable fashion and reducing textile waste, was positively received by consumers when accompanied by price incentives.

Transparency: Brands can be transparent about their pricing strategy, supply chain, and manufacturing process, which can help build trust with Gen Z consumers who value

authenticity and honesty. Providing clear explanations for pricing decisions and avoiding hidden fees can help increase transparency and build loyalty.

Authenticity: Brands can showcase their brand values and mission and engage with Gen Z consumers through authentic and meaningful communication. This could involve using social media platforms to engage with consumers, sharing user-generated content, and providing a personalized shopping experience.

Brands need to understand the factors that impact the purchasing decisions of Gen Z. This study has revealed that price is the most important attribute that Gen Z considers when making a purchase. To respond to the price sensitivity of Gen Z, brands could implement the following strategies:

1. *Offer competitive prices:* Brands can offer competitive prices to attract Gen Z consumers who prioritize cost savings. This could involve offering frequent promotions, discounts through influencers, or loyalty programs that provide tangible economic incentives to purchase. Specifically, these programs accumulate points with each purchase, which can then be redeemed for discounts or other rewards. Moreover, the survey suggests that incentivizing self-pickup options in order to save delivery fees can be an effective means of driving sales. Offering discounts or other incentives associated with self-pickup allows brands to motivate consumers making more frequent and larger purchases, while also encouraging repeat purchasing behavior.
2. *Transparency in pricing:* Brands can be transparent about their pricing strategy, which can help build trust with Gen Z consumers who value authenticity and honesty. This could include displaying prices clearly on products, avoiding hidden fees, and providing clear explanations for pricing decisions.

3. *Quality assurance*: Brands can provide quality assurance by offering warranties, guarantees, or free returns, which can help alleviate the concerns of Gen Z consumers who are hesitant to make a purchase due to quality concerns.
4. *Limited edition and exclusivity*: Brands can create limited edition or exclusive products that appeal to Gen Z's desire for uniqueness and individuality. This can help justify higher prices and create a sense of exclusivity that Gen Z consumers are willing to pay for.
5. *Social responsibility*: Brands that demonstrate social responsibility and commitment to causes that Gen Z cares about, such as sustainability, can appeal to their values and justify higher prices.
6. *Price Range*: online retailers should especially offer jackets in the 30-75€ range, with jackets up to 150€ being also acceptable. Higher-priced jackets should only sparingly be offered as they currently address a niche consumer base, which could change once Gen Z becomes more financially stable. As females are more price-conscious, offering lower prices for female summer jackets could be beneficial.

Additionally, also the product material and the product quality needs to be taken into account when adapting a brand strategy. Consumers favor jackets made out of cotton due to their favorite product properties. Retailers should adopt a summer portfolio primarily comprised of cotton jackets but also offer a lean product portfolio of other materials.

Aside from the jacket material, the quality of the jacket is also essential to consumers. Consumers prefer durable jackets that can be used for numerous years over "throw-away items", which aligns with their preference for sustainable items. Ideally, retailers should offer jackets of good quality, as due to the importance of price, it is not feasible to offer jackets with superb quality.

Consumers have a clear preference for black jackets, which is why these should make up the biggest part of the portfolio, with brown being the second most popular option. Green jackets are also interesting to include in the portfolio to a larger extent as they have the second biggest willingness to pay amongst consumers.

Due to the nature of online shopping, the delivery and return policy is a concern. Online shops should offer a few options in terms of speeds, as consumers may face occasions where for instance, they are heavily constrained by time. Concerning return policies, consumers prefer returns where they do not have to pay for shipping, as consumers are willing to pay a premium for this service. For retailers, however, it is essential to assess the return ratios for a product to identify the best option, as high returns could negate the effect of them paying a premium.

Overall, brands must be strategic in their approach to targeting Gen Z. By adapting their strategies to align with the needs and expectations of this cohort, brands can increase their brand loyalty and awareness, and ultimately drive sales.

5.3 Future Research

The work inherits a range of limitations due to the nature of the design of the research instruments that were applied and the collected sample, which provide room for future research in this context.

A significant limitation of the work is that the research instruments covered only a narrow set of attributes. The jacket design was only covered on a surface level by including the jacket material and color. Considering that cotton jackets are preferred the most, future research could be, for instance, on the exact product design. Attributes that could be included in a further study could be:

1. Jacket closing: Zipper vs. buttons (incl. different zippers and button types)

2. Pockets: Availability of pockets and positioning of them
3. Coloring: unicolor vs. multi-colored vs. patterns vs. picture motives
4. Jacket Hood: Availability of a jacket hood
5. Jacket Cut: Overall cut of the jacket (regular/tailored/slim fit and jacket length)
6. Cuffs: Cuffs style (e.g., buttoned vs. folded)
7. Sleeves: Sleeve Length (long vs. short)

While the jacket functionality is addressed to a certain extent by the material used, it could also be beneficial to address the functional benefits specifically. Relevant could be, for instance, whether a jacket is water resistant, wind resistant, or offers UV protection.

Aside from characteristics that are purely of a design nature, a range of other factors could be considered. The impact of social proof could be addressed more extensively to see how Gen Z is impacted by various forms, such as reviews, user ratings, and recommendations from influencers or experts.

A limitation related to the pricing could be that the conducted conjoint survey had values considered “extreme”, such as the price tags of 150€ and above. As these price tags might be out of the financial scope of survey participants, this could have led participants to focus on the price to a much larger extent leading to an increased relative attribute importance of price. To test whether this is the case, another survey could be conducted with price points below 150€.

Furthermore, attributes were, in some cases, potentially mapped with brands that are not known for these factors, which could cause these factors to be considered less critical. Shein, for instance, is considered to refrain from taking meaningful actions to reduce their environmental impact (Wolfe 2023), so participants subconsciously might not consider this an option when matched with sustainable materials.

The work highlighted that price, quality, and sustainability are significant consumer concerns. While high-quality (high life span) summer jackets could be mapped with low prices in the research environment, this is typically not the practice case, as brands charge for this added value to consumers. Furthermore, jackets using recycled materials could be more costly due to a complicated production process leading to higher production costs. As the work did not consider material costs (except for leather jackets being restricted from matching with 30€) and production costs, additional research should focus on the interplay of these three factors. It is essential to provide options that offer a financially feasible option for retailers while also matching the price-conscious needs of Gen Z.

Another limitation of the conducted surveys is their left-tailored age distribution. As younger individuals belonging to Gen Z are currently as young as eleven, it would be beneficial to conduct a similar study in a few years. Additional research would first allow also to consider these younger individuals and check whether there are differences to older individuals that belong to Gen Z, as inter-generation differences could be a possibility. Furthermore, this subsequent study can also help to understand whether Gen Z's currently high price consciousness is driven by their limited financial means.

The attitude-behavior gap is another significant limitation to consider in this work, as the constructed surveys are concerned with the consumers' attitudes towards a product or brand in an environment where decisions have no real-life implications. This could lead participants to favor factors such as sustainability or to actively not choose a retailer due to their brand image. However, due to the decision's financial impact, these considerations might be less critical in their day-to-day life. Shein could, for instance, be heavily impacted by this limitation and perceived differently in Gen Z's daily life. Future research in this area could specifically focus on online retailer brand images, which includes, on

the one hand, a detailed analysis of their environmental impact and whether they operate ethically and, on the other hand, a detailed analysis of where consumers tend to shop. Conducting research in this area would contribute to the attitude-behavior gap and the analysis of the deep causes of why consumers might dislike certain brands. Aside from the attitude-behavior gap, this research could provide an overview of factors that positively influence the brands' image and which erode the brand image.

The researchers additionally noted that social media and social commerce play an essential role in the life of Gen Z. These factors were, however, not extensively addressed by the applied research instruments. While influencers were identified as a significant source of inspiration, the work does not outline the kind of content that consumers want to see from them. Fashion and styling advice could be a more significant driver than product reviews in fashion and jackets. Additionally, the research does not provide insights into how Gen Z perceives sponsored content by influencers, which could be deemed unauthentic. It would be beneficial to research which kind of content Gen Z prefers and which is most persuasive.

Furthermore, as mobile devices continue to be increasingly prevalent in consumers' daily lives, future research could focus on identifying the importance of mobile shopping apps in the customer journey. Future research can provide valuable insights into the design and functionality to ensure meeting the evolving needs and expectations of Gen Z. Through this research, the effectiveness of specific features and design elements of mobile shopping apps can be examined to drive customer engagement, loyalty, and satisfaction. Based on the findings, retailers can optimize their mobile shopping apps to enhance customer experience and gain a competitive advantage in the new retail world. In addition to mobile shopping apps, there is a need for future research to investigate other digital touchpoints that are relevant for Gen Z consumers, such as in-store technologies and the

potential of developing stores of the future. This could involve analyzing the impact of digital technologies on the in-store experience and identifying the key design and functional elements that are most effective in enhancing the customer experience.

The researchers also noted conflicting information. While Gen Z is said to be focused on sustainability, as indicated in their preference for recycled materials, participants did not prefer sustainable delivery options (CO₂-neutral delivery) with the same delivery time as the non-eco-friendly option. Future research could help understand whether this observation is correct or whether it is a statistical error.

As the research solely focused on fast-fashion retailers, the findings could be enriched by considering brands operating in the slow-fashion segment. Consumers might value factors such as sustainability much higher when buying from slow-fashion brands, as the claims are perceived as more authentic than those from fast-fashion brands. Furthermore, consumers could be less price-conscious when shopping at those brands.

The researchers believe strongly that addressing these areas can enhance the understanding of this new generation even more and provide further guidance on how brands can adapt their strategies to Gen Z's needs.

Considering the promising results generated through the application of ChatGPT, the researchers believe that it would be interesting to conduct more substantial research in this area in the future. Once ChatGPT can draw live data from the web, results could become even more accurate. Depending on the result accuracy, it might be possible to increasingly rely on this tool and increase the productivity of researchers and marketers by allowing them to focus more on providing recommendations rather than conducting tedious studies.

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Appendices

List of Tables

Table 1 Perceptual Map: Survey Design.....	XXXVI
Table 2 Perceptual Map: Respondent counts by status	XXXVII
Table 3 Perceptual Map: Sample Geographical Distribution (n=215).....	XXXVII
Table 4 Perceptual Map: Sample Gender Distribution (n=215).....	XXXVIII
Table 5 Perceptual Map: Sample Education Distribution (n=215).....	XXXVIII
Table 6 Perceptual Map: Sample Professional Status Distribution (n=215).....	XXXVIII

Table 7 Perceptual Map: Total Variance Explained.....	XXXVIII
Table 8 Perceptual Map: Correlation between the different Attributes.....	XXXIX
Table 9 Perceptual Map: Component Score Coefficient Matrix	XXXIX
Table 10 Scenario Analysis: Survey Design.....	LI
Table 11 Scenario Analysis: Answer Selection.....	LIII
Table 12 Scenario Analysis: Answer Selection Male vs. Female	LIV
Table 13 Scenario Analysis: Selection Ratio based on Gender	LIV
Table 14 Scenario Analysis: ANOVA Selection based on Professional Status.....	LV
Table 15 Scenario Analysis: ANOVA Selection based on Professional Status.....	LV
Table 16 Comparison of Relative Attribute Importance by ChatGPT and findings of the researchers after adjustments.....	LVI

List of Figures:

Figure 1: Lemon and Verhoef (2016)	Erro! Marcador não definido.
Figure 2 Perceptual Map: Ratio of respondents that are part of Gen Z (n=231)	84
Figure 3 Perceptual Map: Ratio of respondents that know at least one of the brands (n=231)	84
Figure 4 Perceptual Map: Ratio of respondents that have bought from at least one of the brands (n=230)	85
Figure 5 Perceptual Map: Histogram of Age (n=215)	85
Figure 6 Perceptual Map: Sample Monthly Liquid Income (n=215)	86

<u>Figure 7 Perceptual Map: Sample Online Shopping Frequency (n=215)</u>	86
<u>Figure 8 Perceptual Map: Histogram of Channels</u>	87
<u>Figure 9 Perceptual Map: Sample Influences</u>	87
<u>Figure 10 Perceptual Map: Sample Inspiration</u>	87
<u>Figure 11 Perceptual Map: Sample Preference of Place(n=215)</u>	88
<u>Figure 12 Perceptual Map: Histogram of Reasons to Shop In-Store</u>	88
<u>Figure 13 Perceptual Map: Histogram of Brand Awareness</u>	89
<u>Figure 14 Perceptual Map: Histogram of Ratio of respondents that have bought from the brand (n=215)</u>	89
<u>Figure 15 Perceptual Map: Scree Plot</u>	90
<u>Figure 16 Perceptual Map: Attributes Distribution</u>	90
<u>Figure 17 Perceptual Map: Brands Distribution</u>	91
<u>Figure 18 Perceptual Map: Combination of Attributes and Brands Distribution</u>	91
<u>Figure 19 Scenario Analysis: Ratio of Respondents that are Part of Gen Z (n=221)</u>	92
<u>Figure 20 Scenario Analysis: Ratio of Respondents that Shop Online (n=220)</u>	92
<u>Figure 21 Scenario Analysis: Gender Distribution (n=219)</u>	92
<u>Figure 22 Scenario Analysis: Histogram of Age (n=219)</u>	93
<u>Figure 23 Scenario Analysis: Distribution of Educational Level (n=219)</u>	93
<u>Figure 24 Scenario Analysis: Histogram of Professional Status (n=219)</u>	93
<u>Figure 25 Scenario Analysis: Histogram of Monthly Liquid Income (n=219)</u>	94
<u>Figure 26 Scenario Analysis: Distribution of Nationality (n=219)</u>	94
<u>Figure 27 Conjoint Analysis via ChatGPT: Relative Importance of Gen Z according to ChatGPT</u>	95
<u>Figure 28 Conjoint Analysis via ChatGPT: Relative Attribute Importance for Gen Z after providing extra information</u>	96

<u>Figure 29 Conjoint Analysis via ChatGPT: Chat Log ChatGPT Evaluation of highest preferred level</u>	96
<u>Figure 30 Perceptual Map: Overall Average of Attributes</u>	97

Table 1 Perceptual Map: Survey Design

Section	Description	Question		Answer
Section 1	Determine whether the participant corresponds to our study	1. Are you part of Gen Z ? (1997-2012)		1. Yes
				2. No (If "no", survey will not appear)
		2. From all the brands shown under, do you know at least one?		1. Yes
		2.1. Which (Choose all the brands you know)?		2. No (If "no", question 2 will not appear)
Section 2	Importance of the attributes for the consumer when buying jackets	3. From all the brands shown under, did you consumed at least one? / Of the brands shown above, have you ever consumed any of them?		1. Yes
		3.1. Which (Choose all the brands you have consumed)?		2. No (If "no", section 2 will not appear)
				1. Zara
				2. Mango
Section 3	Assess the frequency distribution on the collected sample	5. How frequently do you shop online ?		3. Shein
				4. Asos
				5. H&M
Section 4	Determine the channel	6. If you shop online, on which channel do you make your online purchases?		
Section 5	Assess who influenced the consumer to buy fashion online	7. Who do you feel that influences you the most before purchasing?		
Section 6	Assess in which situations the consumer feel inspired to buy fashion online	8. Where do you feel inspired to shop fashion online ?		
Section 7	Assess where consumers buy clothes	9. Where do you buy clothes ?		
Section 8	Assess the motivation of the users that drive them to shop in-store	10. What are the drivers to make you shop in-store?		
Section 9	Analyze the demographics features of the collected sample	11. What is your gender?		
Section 10		12. What is your age?		
Section 11		13. What is the highest education you have completed?		
Section 12		14. What is your current professional status?		
Section 13		15. Where are you from?		

Table 2 Perceptual Map: Respondent counts by status

Status	Included/ Excluded	Number Observations (n)	of %	% of total
Completed Survey	Included	231		23.1%
Disqualified – Incomplete Survey	Excluded	1		0.1%
Send Survey but did not complete	Excluded	768		76.8%
Total		1000		100,00%

Table 3 Perceptual Map: Sample Geographical Distribution (n=215)

Country	Sample distribution
Germany	61.04%
Portugal	29.44%
Brazil	2.60%
Italy	1.73%
Austria	1.73%
Denmark	0.87%
China	0.87%
Belgium	0.43%
Ireland	0.43%
Tailand	0.43%
United States	0.43%

Table 4 Perceptual Map: Sample Gender Distribution (n=215)

Gender	Sample distribution
Female	50.70%
Male	43.72%
Others	2.79%
Prefer to not disclose	2.79%

Table 5 Perceptual Map: Sample Education Distribution (n=215)

Education	Sample distribution
Less Than High School	10.70%
High School Diploma	35.35%
Bachelor's Degree	40.00%

Master's Degree	13.49%
MBA/PHD	0.47%

Table 6 Perceptual Map: Sample Professional Status Distribution (n=215)

Professional Status	Sample distribution
Student	79.07%
Part-Time Employed	4.19%
Full-Time Employed	13.95%
None of the above	2.79%

Table 7 Perceptual Map: Total Variance Explained

Total Variance Explained			
Component	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.563	50.572	50.572
2	4.657	42.339	92.911

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 8 Perceptual Map: Correlation between the different Attributes

Correlation Matrix ^a												
	Brand.Reputation	Price	Discounts	Quality.Materials	Design	Uniqueness	Sustainability	Gender.Association	Shipping.Cost	Delivery.Time	Return.Policy	
Correlation	Brand.Reputation	1.000	-.729	-.714	.786	-.117	.770	-.084	-.211	-.775	-.740	-.938
	Price	-.729	1.000	.933	-.911	-.498	-.880	-.530	-.178	.210	.478	.450
	Discounts	-.714	.933	1.000	-.910	-.540	-.847	-.611	-.278	.131	.264	.465
	Quality.Materials	.786	-.911	-.910	1.000	.513	.991	.512	.389	-.242	-.346	-.550
	Design	-.117	-.498	-.540	.513	1.000	.498	.983	.863	.705	.471	.422
	Uniqueness	.770	-.880	-.847	.991	.498	1.000	.472	.411	-.257	-.365	-.540
	Sustainability	-.084	-.530	-.611	.512	.983	.472	1.000	.797	.693	.471	.386
	Gender.Association	-.211	-.178	-.278	.389	.863	.411	.797	1.000	.677	.661	.402
	Shipping.Cost	-.775	.210	.131	-.242	.705	-.257	.693	.677	1.000	.861	.913
	Delivery.Time	-.740	.478	.264	-.346	.471	-.365	.471	.661	.861	1.000	.740
	Return.Policy	-.938	.450	.465	-.550	.422	-.540	.386	.402	.913	.740	1.000

a. This matrix is not positive definite.

Table 9 Perceptual Map: Component Score Coefficient Matrix

Component Score Coefficient Matrix		
	Component	
	1	2
Brand.Reputation	-.165	-.079
Price	.166	-.049
Discounts	.161	-.068
Quality.Materials	-.172	.058
Design	-.049	.205
Uniqueness	-.168	.055
Sustainability	-.053	.201
Gender.Association	-.017	.193
Shipping.Cost	.087	.186
Delivery.Time	.105	.152
Return.Policy	.131	.132

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Component Scores.

Table 10 Scenario Analysis: Survey Design

Section	Description	Question	Answer
Section 1	Determine whether the participant corresponds to our study	1. Are you part of Gen z ? (1997-2012)	1. Yes
			2. No (If "no", survey will not appear)
		2. Have you ever shopped online ?	1. Yes
			2. No (If "no", question 2 will not appear)

Section 2	Analyze the different Scenarios	3.1. You need a new summer jacket. Scrolling through Instagram, you see a jacket from Zara that you like. You go to the website and search for this jacket. If you order the jacket online and choose to have it delivered at home, this option will cost you an additional 5€ (shipping costs). If you decide to ship it to the store and pick it up there, you will have no extra costs. What would you rather do?	1.I would rather spend the 5€ and have it delivered at home.
			2.I would rather save the 5€ and pick it up in-store.
		3.2. A brand offers you reward points through their app, that you can accumulate every time you make purchases. These points can be redeemed, and a discount can be obtained and used on any channel of the brand (in store/online). Would this offer increase your willingness to buy?	1. Yes, discounts sound like a great idea
			2.No, that doesn't make a difference
			1. Yes

	3.3. An influencer that you like and have been following for a long time recommends a summer jacket. This jacket has a nice design and has good quality. However, the price is slightly higher than you would typically spend. Would the recommendation of your favorite influencer increase your willingness to buy?	2. No
	3.4. You are about to purchase a summer jacket online that you have been looking for, for over a couple of weeks. Before you decide if you want to purchase the jacket, you search on social media for reviews. Overall you found good reviews and recommendations of the jacket online. Further, you discuss the possible purchase with your friends, and they say the price-quality ratio of	1.I would still buy the jacket, because I found good reviews online.
		2.I would still buy the jacket, because neither my friends nor the online reviews influence my purchase decision
		3.I would not buy the jacket, because I value my friends' opinion

	this jacket is not worth it. What would influence your purchase decision?	
	3.5. You are about to purchase a summer jacket online, without any extra costs, the delivery time is estimated at 2-3 days. The option "clicks and go" shows you the real-time stock of the nearest store, so you can pay online and pick it up immediately. Which option do you choose?	1. I don't want to wait, so I prefer to buy online and pick it up in-store
		2.I don't mind waiting, I prefer having it delivered to my house
	3.6. H&Ms Marketing campaign "Close the Loop" promotes sustainable fashion through its clothing recycling program. The campaign encourages consumers to recycle using the hashtag "Closing the Loop" on Instagram. Through these actions, H&M rewards customers who participate in the initiative. Would campaigns like these	1.Yes, I'm more likely to shop at brands that support sustainable causes
		2.No, this campaigns don't really make a difference in the way I perceive the brand

		influence the way you perceive this brand?	
Section 3	Analyze the demographic features of the collected sample	5. What is your gender?	1. Male
			2. Female
			3. Others
			4. Prefer to not disclose
		6. What is your age?	1. 1997-2000
			2. 2001-2004
			3. 2005-2008
			4. 2009-2012
		7. What is the highest education you have completed?	1. Less than High School
			2. High School Diploma
			3. Bachelor's degree
			4. Master's degree
			5. MBA/PhD
		8. What is your current professional status?	1. Student
			2. Part-Time Employed
			3. Full-Time employed
			4. None of the above (e.g., job seeking)
		9. What is your monthly household liquid income ?	1. 500€ or less
			2. Between 501 and 999€
			3. Between 1000 and 1999€
			4. Between 2000 and 2999€

			5. Between 3000 and 3999€
			6. More than 4000€
		10. Where are you from?	1. Insert Country

Table 11 Scenario Analysis: Answer Selection

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Total (n=219)	0.3790	0.1324	0.2100	0.8174	0.3014	0.2557

Table 12 Scenario Analysis: Answer Selection Male vs. Female

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Q1	Between Groups	.161	1	.161	.680	.411
	Within Groups	51.382	217	.237		
	Total	51.543	218			
Q2	Between Groups	.002	1	.002	.021	.886
	Within Groups	25.157	217	.116		
	Total	25.160	218			
Q3	Between Groups	.007	1	.007	.044	.834
	Within Groups	36.331	217	.167		
	Total	36.338	218			
Q4	Between Groups	.060	1	.060	.092	.762
	Within Groups	142.634	217	.657		
	Total	142.694	218			
Q5	Between Groups	.160	1	.160	.758	.385
	Within Groups	45.949	217	.212		
	Total	46.110	218			
Q6	Between Groups	2.084	1	2.084	11.419	<.001
	Within Groups	39.597	217	.182		
	Total	41.680	218			

Table 13 Scenario Analysis: Selection Ratio based on Gender

Gender/Question	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Female (n=116)	0.3534	0.1293	0.2155	0.8017	0.2759	0.1638
Male (n=103)	0.4078	0.1359	0.2039	0.8350%	0.3301	0.3592
Total (n=219)	0.3790	0.1324	0.2100	0.8174	0.3014	0.2557

Table 14 Scenario Analysis: ANOVA Selection based on Professional Status

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Q1	Between Groups	3.361	3	1.120	5.000	.002
	Within Groups	48.182	215	.224		
	Total	51.543	218			
Q2	Between Groups	.224	3	.075	.644	.587
	Within Groups	24.936	215	.116		
	Total	25.160	218			
Q3	Between Groups	.825	3	.275	1.665	.176
	Within Groups	35.513	215	.165		
	Total	36.338	218			
Q4	Between Groups	3.022	3	1.007	1.550	.202
	Within Groups	139.672	215	.650		
	Total	142.694	218			
Q5	Between Groups	.947	3	.316	1.502	.215
	Within Groups	45.163	215	.210		
	Total	46.110	218			
Q6	Between Groups	.332	3	.111	.576	.631
	Within Groups	41.348	215	.192		
	Total	41.680	218			

Table 15 Scenario Analysis: ANOVA Selection based on Professional Status

		Descriptives							
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
Q1	Student	147	.3061	.46246	.03814	.2307	.3815	.00	1.00
	Part-Time Employed	23	.3913	.49901	.10405	.1755	.6071	.00	1.00
	Full-Time employed	48	.6042	.49420	.07133	.4607	.7477	.00	1.00
	None of the above	1	.0000	.	.	.	.	.00	.00
	Total	219	.3790	.48625	.03286	.3142	.4438	.00	1.00
Q2	Student	147	.1429	.35112	.02896	.0856	.2001	.00	1.00
	Part-Time Employed	23	.0435	.20851	.04348	-.0467	.1336	.00	1.00
	Full-Time employed	48	.1458	.35667	.05148	.0423	.2494	.00	1.00
	None of the above	1	.0000	.	.	.	.	.00	.00
	Total	219	.1324	.33972	.02296	.0872	.1777	.00	1.00
Q3	Student	147	.2245	.41867	.03453	.1562	.2927	.00	1.00
	Part-Time Employed	23	.1304	.34435	.07180	-.0185	.2793	.00	1.00
	Full-Time employed	48	.1875	.39444	.05693	.0730	.3020	.00	1.00
	None of the above	1	1.0000	.	.	.	.	1.00	1.00
	Total	219	.2100	.40827	.02759	.1557	.2644	.00	1.00
Q4	Student	147	.8912	.82867	.06835	.7561	1.0262	.00	2.00
	Part-Time Employed	23	.7391	.81002	.16890	.3889	1.0894	.00	2.00
	Full-Time employed	48	.6458	.72902	.10523	.4341	.8575	.00	2.00
	None of the above	1	.0000	.	.	.	.	.00	.00
	Total	219	.8174	.80905	.05467	.7096	.9251	.00	2.00
Q5	Student	147	.2857	.45330	.03739	.2118	.3596	.00	1.00
	Part-Time Employed	23	.2174	.42174	.08794	.0350	.3998	.00	1.00
	Full-Time employed	48	.3750	.48925	.07062	.2329	.5171	.00	1.00
	None of the above	1	1.0000	.	.	.	.	1.00	1.00
	Total	219	.3014	.45990	.03108	.2401	.3626	.00	1.00
Q6	Student	147	.2789	.45000	.03712	.2056	.3523	.00	1.00
	Part-Time Employed	23	.1739	.38755	.08081	.0063	.3415	.00	1.00
	Full-Time employed	48	.2292	.42474	.06131	.1058	.3525	.00	1.00
	None of the above	1	.0000	.	.	.	.	.00	.00
	Total	219	.2557	.43726	.02955	.1975	.3139	.00	1.00

Table 16 Comparison of Relative Attribute Importance by ChatGPT and findings of the researchers after adjustments

Factor	Chat GPT	Researcher Results	Delta to Range
Price	23-25%	28.5%	+3.5%
Online Retailer	15-20%	19.7%	Within Range
Jacket Material	15-20%	14.8%	-0.2%
Color	12-15%	13.2%	Within Range
Minimum Lifespan	10-15%	7.9%	-2.1%
Sustainability	8-12%	5.1%	-2.9%
Delivery	3-5%	6.7%	+1.7%
Return Policy	1-3%	4.1%	+1.1%

Figure 1 Perceptual Map: Ratio of respondents that are part of Gen Z (n=231)



Figure 2 Perceptual Map: Ratio of respondents that know at least one of the brands (n=231)

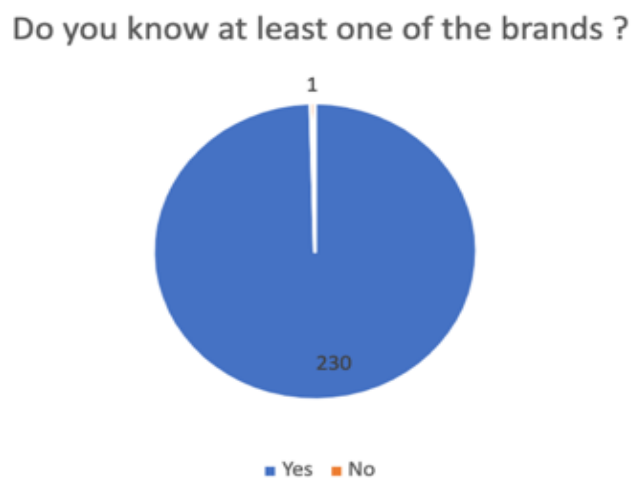


Figure 3 Perceptual Map: Ratio of respondents that have bought from at least one of the brands (n=230)

From all the brands shown above, have you ever bought at least one?



Figure 4 Perceptual Map: Histogram of Age (n=215)

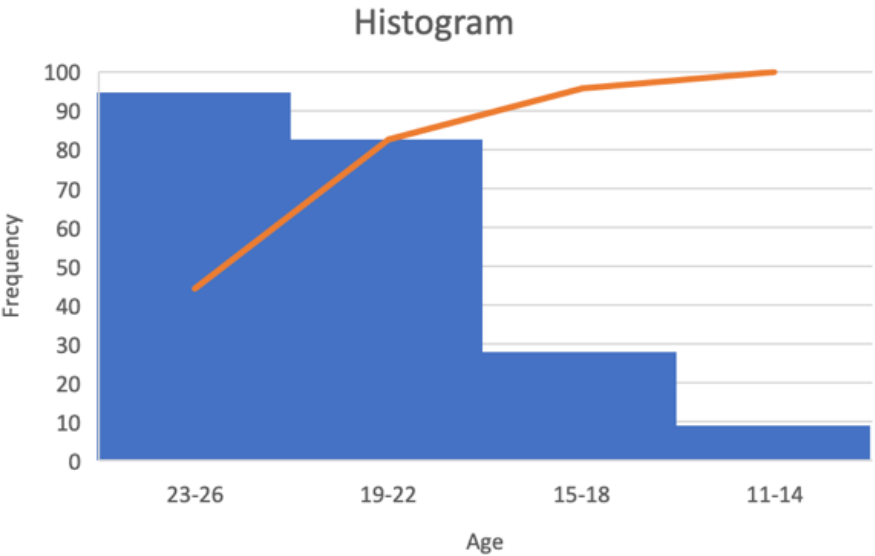


Figure 5 Perceptual Map: Sample Monthly Liquid Income (n=215)

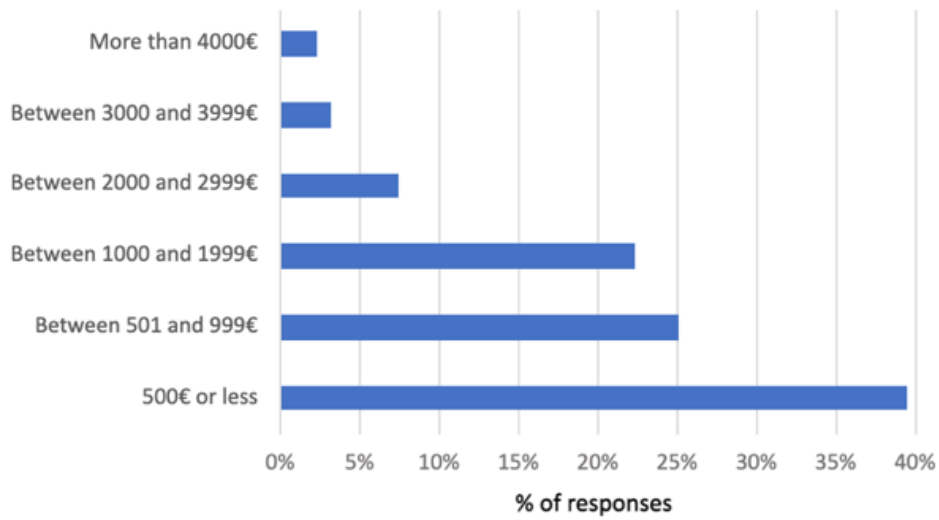


Figure 6 Perceptual Map: Sample Online Shopping Frequency (n=215)

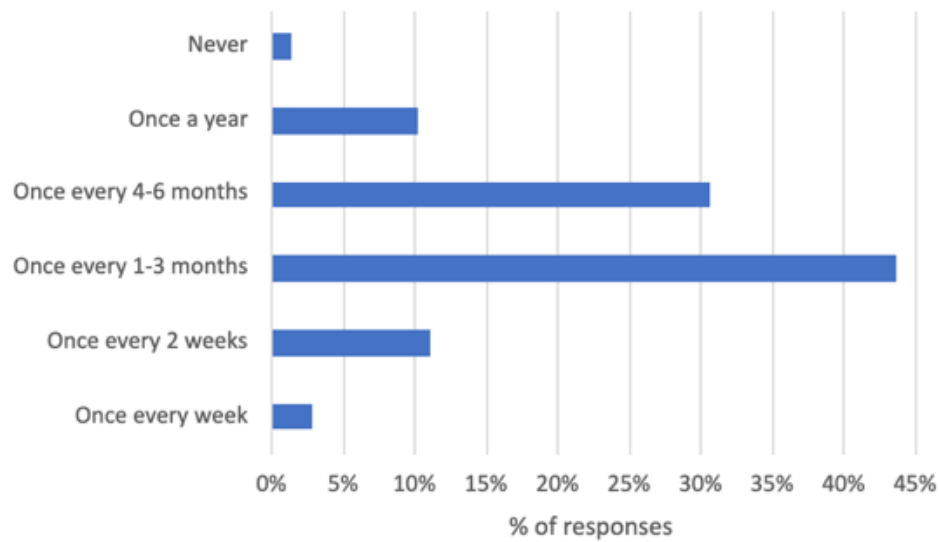


Figure 7 Perceptual Map: Histogram of Channels

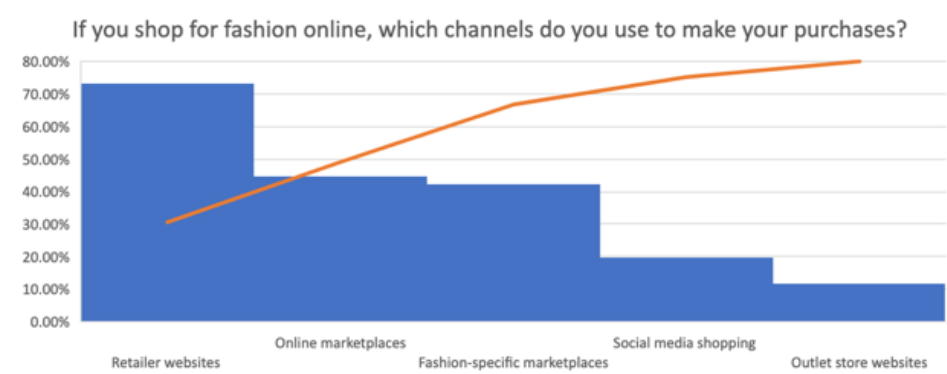


Figure 8 Perceptual Map: Sample Influences



Figure 9 Perceptual Map: Sample Inspiration



Figure 10 Perceptual Map: Sample Preference of Place(n=215)

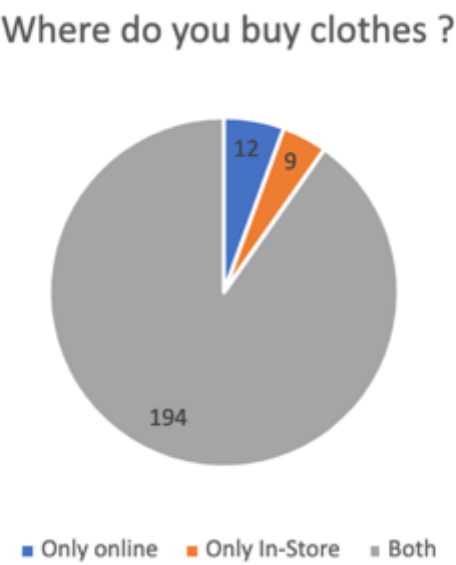


Figure 11 Perceptual Map: Histogram of Reasons to Shop In-Store



Figure 12 Perceptual Map: Histogram of Brand Awareness

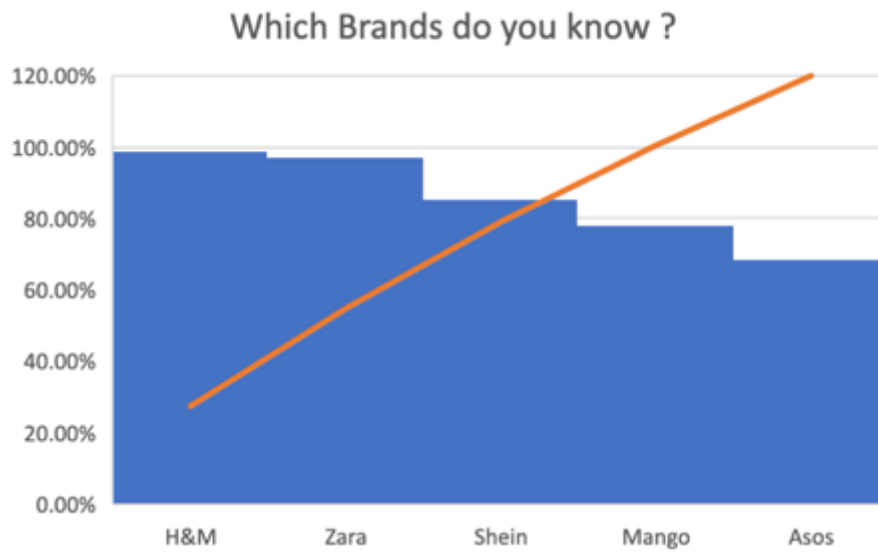


Figure 13 Perceptual Map: Histogram of Ratio of respondents that have bought from the brand (n=215)

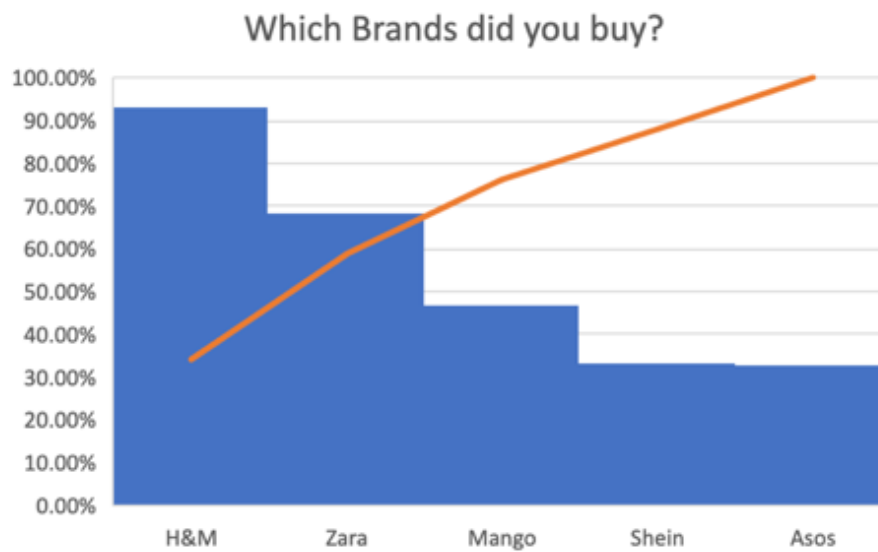


Figure 14 Perceptual Map: Scree Plot

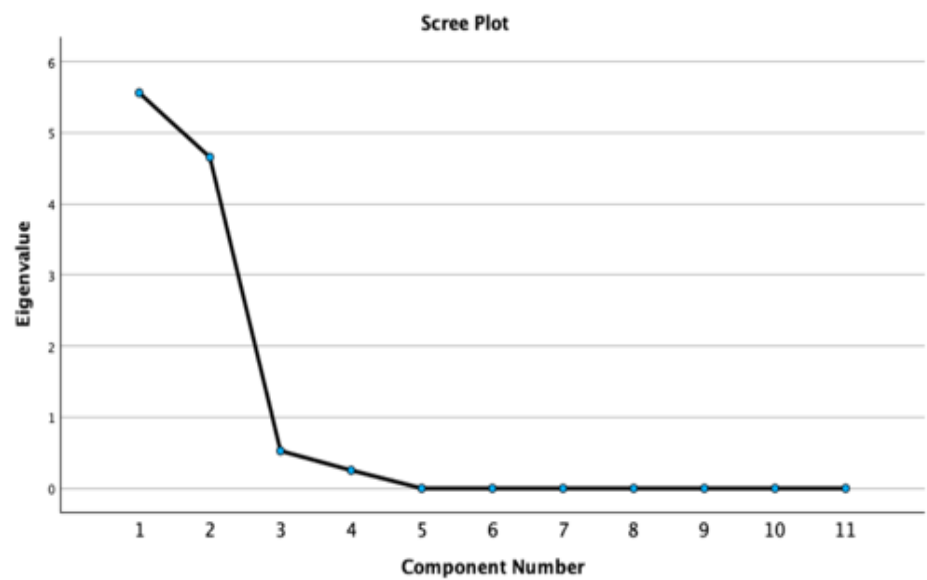


Figure 15 Perceptual Map: Attributes Distribution

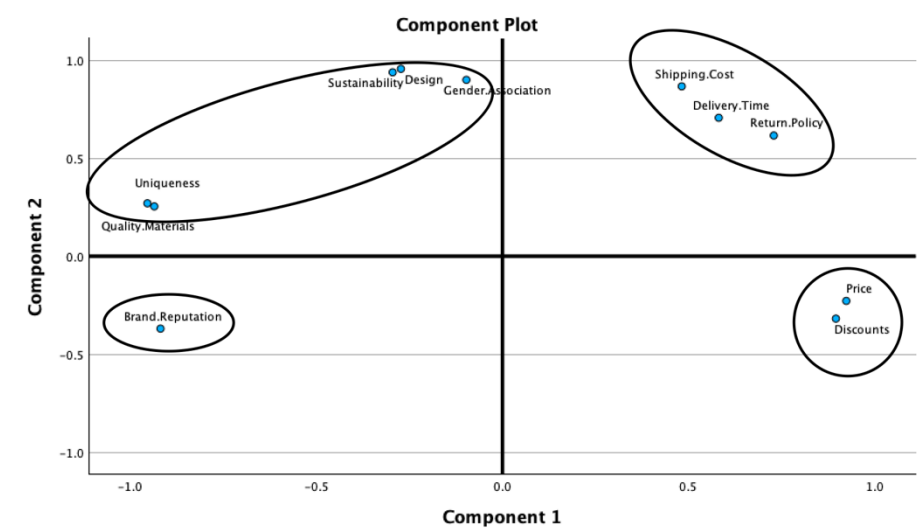


Figure 16 Perceptual Map: Brands Distribution

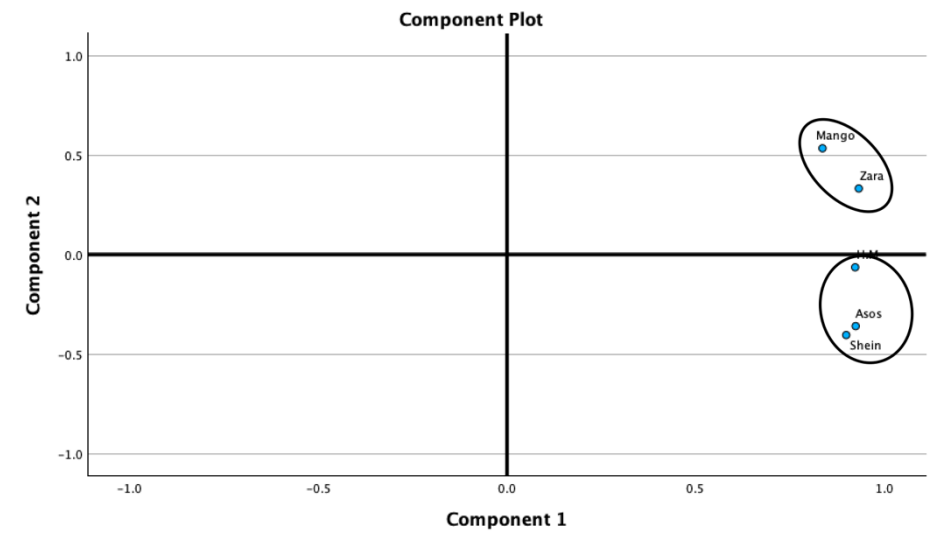


Figure 17 Perceptual Map: Combination of Attributes and Brands Distribution

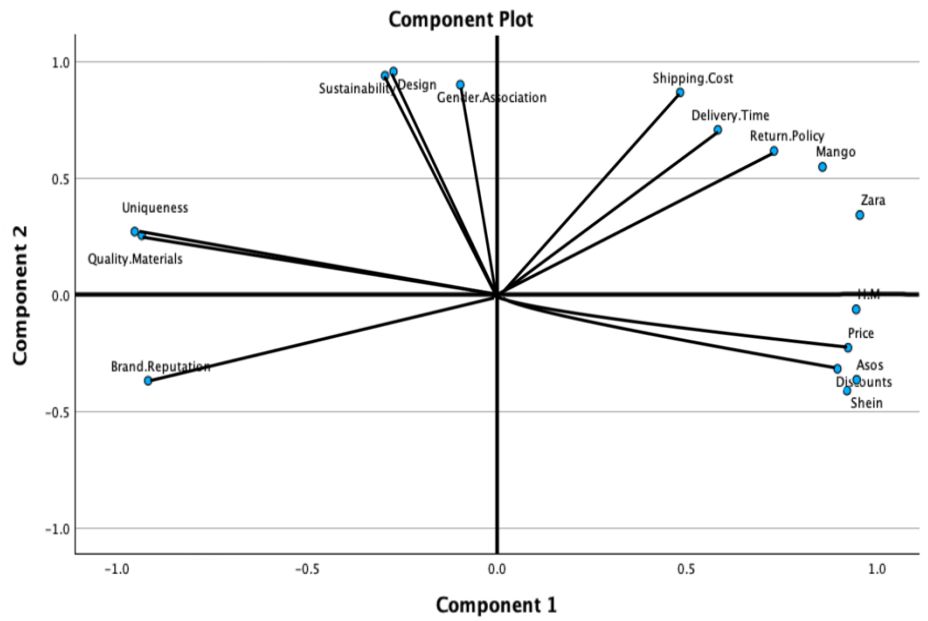


Figure 19 Scenario Analysis: Ratio of Respondents that are Part of Gen Z (n=221)

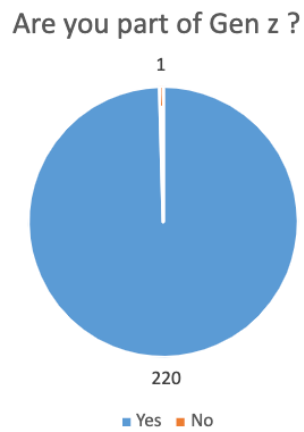


Figure 20 Scenario Analysis: Ratio of Respondents that Shop Online (n=220)



Figure 21 Scenario Analysis: Gender Distribution (n=219)

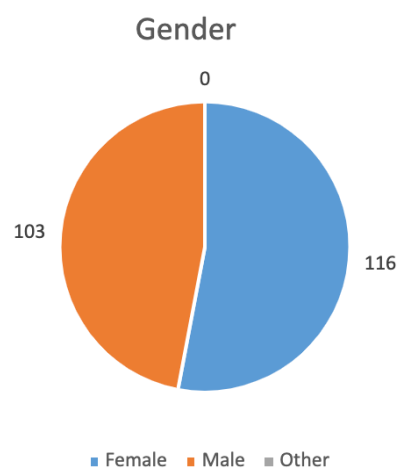


Figure 22 Scenario Analysis: Histogram of Age (n=219)

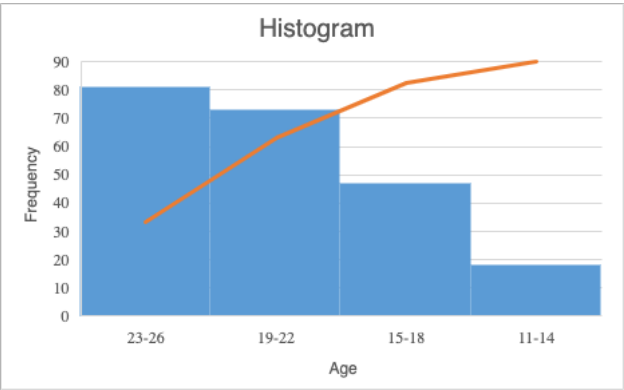


Figure 23 Scenario Analysis: Distribution of Educational Level (n=219)

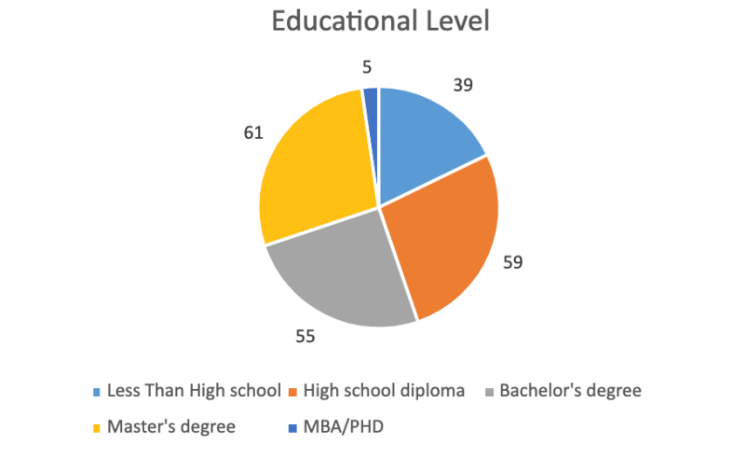


Figure 24 Scenario Analysis: Histogram of Professional Status (n=219)

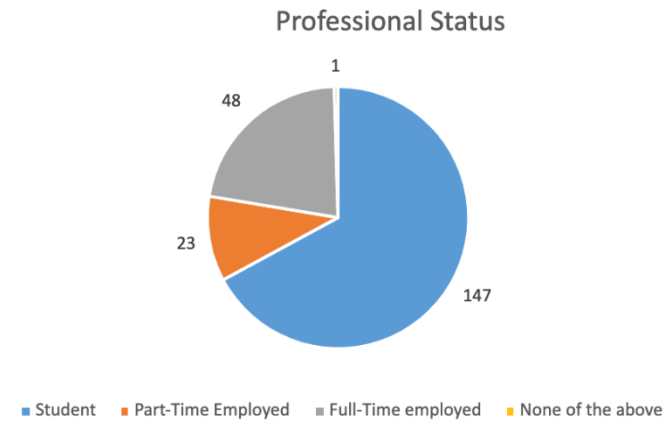


Figure 25 Scenario Analysis: Histogram of Monthly Liquid Income (n=219)

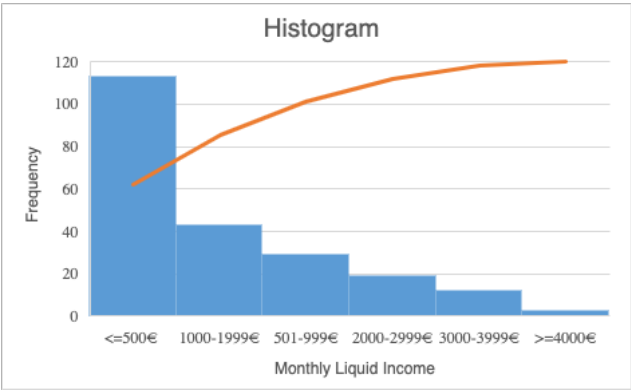


Figure 26 Scenario Analysis: Distribution of Nationality (n=219)

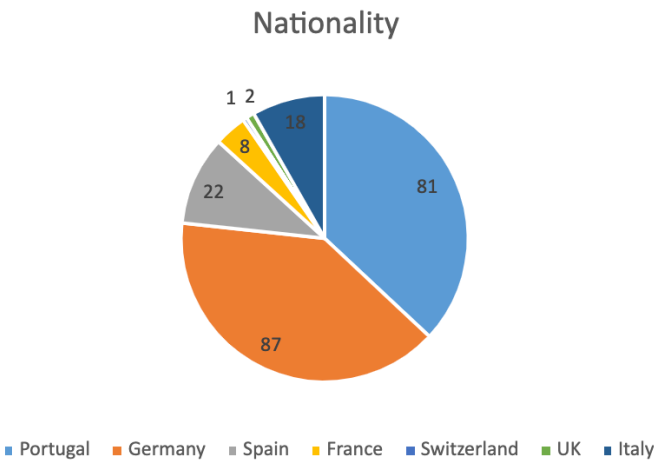


Figure 27 Conjoint Analysis via ChatGPT: Relative Importance of Gen Z according to ChatGPT

 Ok let's do an experiment. Please do a simulation for a conjoint analysis that addresses Generation Z, specifically those born between 1997 and 2012. The analysis focuses on summer jackets. There Attributes with its respective levels are:

- Online Retailer: Asos, Zara, Shein, Mango and H&M
- Jacket Material: Authentic Leather, Leatherette, Wool, Fleece, Polyester and Cotton
- Sustainability: Recycled materials and conventional (non recycled materials)
- Jacket Colors: Brown, Black, White, Blue and Green
- Minimum Lifespan of the jacket: 2-3 years, 4-5 years, 6-7 years, 8-9 years, 10 years
- Delivery: Same-day delivery, next-day delivery, standard delivery (3-5 days), economy delivery (6-7 days) and CO2 neutral delivery (3-5 days)
- Return Policy: 30 days free return with dropoff at post office, 30 days free return with pick up at your house, 30 days free return with 5€ shipping costs
- Price: 30€, 50€, 75€, 100€, 150€, 200€, 250€, 300€

Please estimate the relative attribute importance by attribute for the average consumer

 Sure! Based on the simulation results and assuming a linear model, here are the relative attribute importance estimates for the average consumer:

- Online Retailer: 22.6%
- Jacket Material: 21.3%
- Sustainability: 16.2%
- Jacket Color: 13.6%
- Minimum Lifespan: 11.8%
- Delivery: 7.6%
- Return Policy: 5.8%
- Price: 1.1%

This suggests that for the average consumer, the retailer and the material of the jacket are the most important attributes, followed by sustainability, color, minimum lifespan, delivery, return policy, and finally price.

Figure 28 Conjoint Analysis via ChatGPT: Relative Attribute Importance for Gen Z after providing extra information

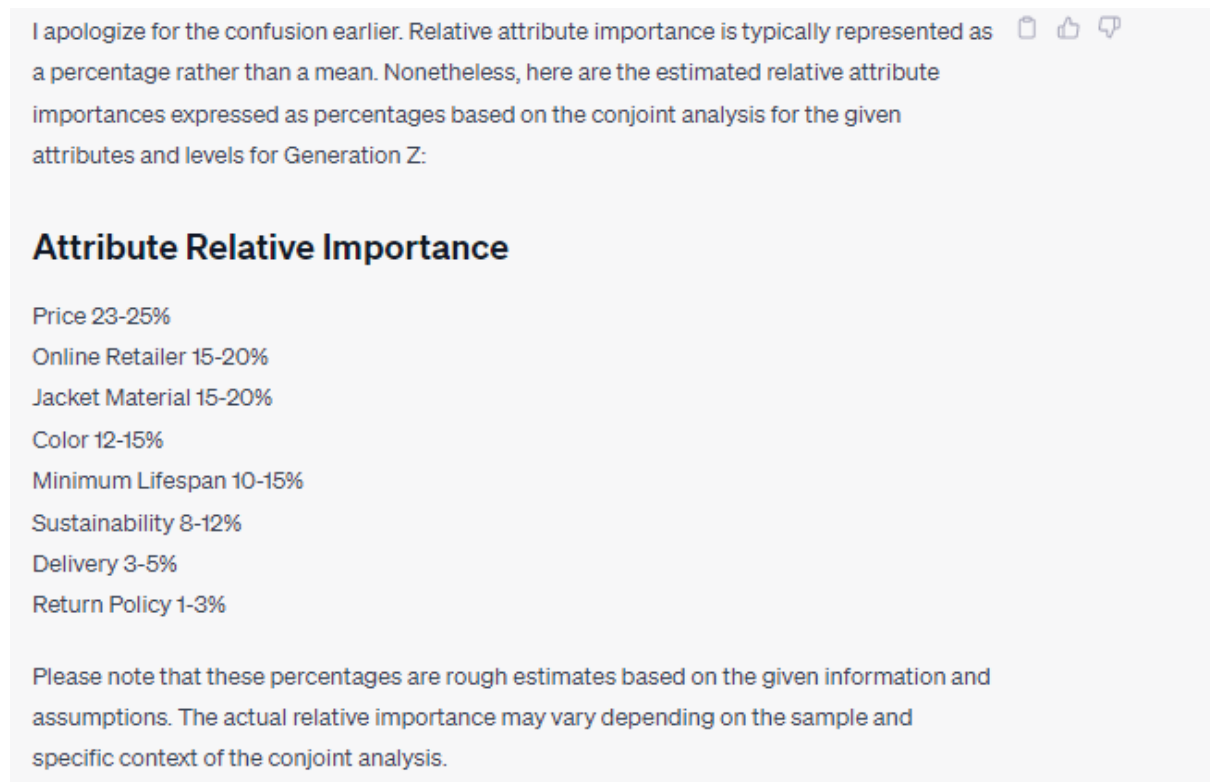


Figure 29 Conjoint Analysis via ChatGPT: Chat Log ChatGPT Evaluation of highest preferred level

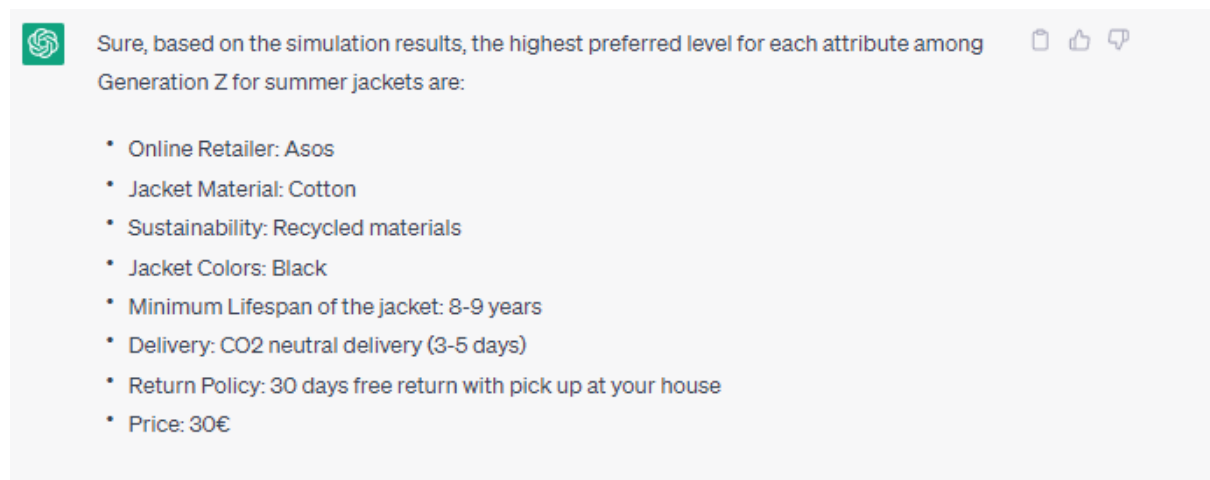


Figure 30 Perceptual Map: Overall Average of Attributes

