

Why We Buy What We Want: Indulgence in Consumer Decisions Across Disciplines

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Abstract

This study explores how Generation Z perceives indulgence and how it influences their decision-making in daily life. Indulgence, a concept that has evolved across cultures and societies, remains a key driver of behavior, shaping individual choices and lifestyle preferences. Previous research (Dychfwald, 2021; Moore, 2005) suggests that different generations seek self-indulgence in unique ways, with Millennials and Gen Zers prioritizing entertainment, while older generations focus on leisurely pastimes. For younger generations, indulgence manifests in various forms, including food, beverages, leisure activities, and material consumption.

To investigate these patterns, 34 in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted between 2024 and 2025 in Tokyo, Japan. Each interview lasted a minimum of 45 minutes and was later transcribed for analysis. Preliminary findings suggest that Gen Zers exhibit a nuanced understanding of indulgence, often balancing it with self-care, digital engagement, and personal growth. Unlike previous generations, their indulgence is intertwined with social media influence, ethical consumption, and the pursuit of experiences over material possessions. Additionally, the findings indicate that Gen Zers differentiate between short-term gratification and long-term self-reward, with many expressing a preference for sustainable or meaningful indulgence.

This research contributes to the growing discourse on generational behavior and consumer decision-making, offering valuable insights for businesses, policymakers, and marketers aiming to engage with Gen Z consumers effectively. Understanding how this generation defines and practices indulgence can inform strategies for product development, branding, and service offerings tailored to their evolving preferences and values.

Keywords: Gen Z, indulgence, preferences, price and value,