

Why Do You Buy? Introducing a Reflective Café Approach to Foster Mindful Clothing Purchases in Generation Z

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Keywords: Impulse buying; post-purchase; guided introspection; reflective thinking; mindful consumption.

Introduction

Owning a wardrobe filled with ever-changing fashionable clothes allows young people to stay trendy, express their individuality, and build a sense of community with their peers. However, this pursuit often comes at the cost of excessive and impulsive purchases that can lead to substantial waste and harm the environment (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009; Niinimäki et al., 2020). Research indicates that 41% of Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers—those born in the late 1990s and early 2000s—are impulsive buyers (Djafarova & Fouts, 2022). A major driver of this behavior is the pervasive use of social media and e-commerce platforms, which provide constant exposure to advertisements and create shortcuts in decision-making (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Herzallah et al., 2021; Thangavel et al., 2022).

Impulsive Purchase of Gen Z

Gen Z often faces contradictory situations when reflecting on their impulsive purchasing behaviors (Ayuni, 2019). On the one hand, Gen Z demonstrates strong concern for sustainability challenges and the environmental impacts of their behaviors and lifestyles, as evidenced by their willingness to pay for eco-friendly products (Djafarova & Fouts, 2022; Gomes et al., 2023). On the other hand, growing up in the digital era, their consumption habits have inevitably been shaped by shifting cultural trends, the fast fashion boom, and the convenience of online shopping (Rosely et al., 2024). Therefore, for Gen Z, the question of whether to buy inherently reflects a motivational dilemma: balancing their climate awareness and sustainability values with their need for self-expression and social belonging (Chan et al., 2017).

According to Rook and Fisher (1995), impulsive buying can be understood as "*a consumer's tendency to buy spontaneously, unreflectively, immediately, and kinetically.*" Persuasive marketing strategies on social networking sites—such as targeted campaigns, time-bound offers, and influencer endorsements—often trigger careless, irrational, heat-of-the-moment purchases (Herzallah et al., 2021; Rosely et al., 2024). The phenomenon of impulsive purchases among Gen Z exemplifies the value-action gap, in which sustainable consumption intentions are often undermined by contextual and social influences on actual purchasing behavior (Carrington et al., 2014; Park & Lin, 2020). This tension, therefore, highlights opportunities for tailored design interventions.

Post-Purchase Reflection

Existing interventions to curb impulse buying have primarily focused on the decision-making process, particularly at the moment of purchase. Previous research has investigated various strategies throughout the shopping process, including but not limited to promoting delayed purchases, incorporating gamified distractions, increasing checkout effort, and reducing product desirability (Moser et al., 2019; Sin et al., 2022; Tobon & Abril, 2024). Despite their diversity, these approaches share common goal: encouraging rational thinking over impulsive decision-making. However, limited attention has been given to the post-purchase stage, where rational and reflective thinking could play a more fundamental role in shaping future purchasing behavior and exerting long-term influence (Dahl et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2019; Obukhovich et al., 2024). This

study aims to address the often-overlooked post-purchase stage by introducing the Reflective Café, a group-based reflection approach designed to encourage mindful clothing purchases among Gen Z.

Methods

The design and development of the Reflective Café unfolded in two phases. The first phase aimed to deepen our understanding of Gen Z's attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics concerning impulsive shopping. To do so, we conducted several research activities, like literature review, introspective studies, and generative sessions with five Gen Z participants using tools adapted from Desmet (2018). After analyzing and synthesizing the research outcomes, we distilled the insights into three primary design criteria to guide the next phase:

- **Group-Based Reflection as a Social Activity:** Gen Z values open conversations and bidirectional feedback (Dolot, 2018). Engaging in group-based reflection may enhance engagement and stimulate deeper reflective thinking.
- **Visual Communication:** Representing thoughts and emotions in a tangible format makes abstract ideas explicit and easier to grasp, facilitating effective communication.
- **Guided Reflection with Room for Creativity:** Open-ended prompts may encourage mindful reflection while allowing flexibility for self-expression and creative exploration.

The second phase included five rounds of concept iteration, which were informed by continuous user testing and evaluation (Figure 1). We explored several design directions to address the identified design criteria, with group-based collage ultimately emerging as the most effective medium. During the concept evaluation, we observed an interesting phenomenon: some participants became more critical when reflecting on their peers' recent purchases. Figure 2 provides two examples. For further details, see Bakker (2023).



Figure 1. Concept evaluation.



Figure 2. Collages created by two participants reflecting on their recent purchases of a T-shirt and a pair of shoes.

The Reflective Café

The final concept, Reflection Café, is a group-based intervention designed to encourage Gen Z to reflect on their impulsive buying behaviors. As shown in Figure 3, the Reflection Café menu outlines provided stationery, a set of guiding cards with reflective prompts, and clear instructions for implementation.

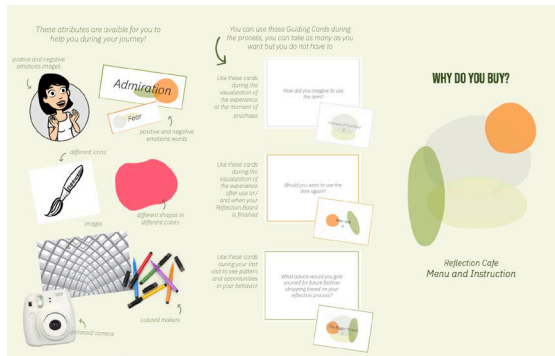


Figure 3. Reflective Café menu.

The reflection process begins by inviting a friend to join on a three-stage reflective journey spanning six months:

- Stage 1: Exploring the most recent purchase.
- Stage 2: Delving deeper into the most recent purchase to generate insights about its context and motivations.
- Stage 3: Discussing both one's own and the peer's purchasing decisions and their associated effects.

Throughout this process, participants are invited to critically examine their wardrobe and consumption patterns, thereby gaining valuable insights into their decision-making, the functional, emotional, and economic value of their purchased items, together with their associated social and environmental impacts (Figure 4).

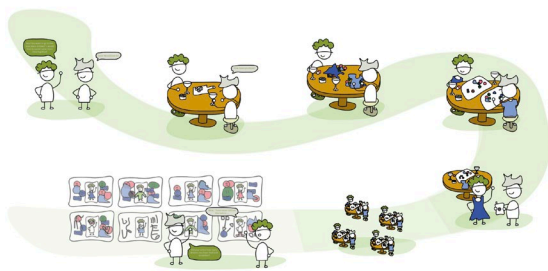


Figure 4. Overview of the Reflective Café process.

Conclusion

The Reflection Café offers Gen Z a creative and collaborative environment to explore the question: "Why do you buy?" Through structured group reflections, participants are guided to openly share and discuss their viewpoints with peers and critically reflect on their recent clothing purchase decisions across three stages. By turning self-reflection into an engaging social experience, this approach

aligns with Gen Z's desire for social connection and self-expression. This paper focuses on the conceptualization and initial development of the Reflective Café; the empirical evaluation of its long-term impact on cultivating mindful clothing purchasing behaviors among Gen Z remains an area for future research.

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