Decoding the modern consumer

Solving the digital advertising
puzzle when everything is shoppable

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Cracking the consumer behavior code

Welcome to the era where everything, everywhere, is shoppable. For brands to stand out and connect with today's buyers, they must focus on grabbing attention, personalization, and engagement.

New research commissioned by **Microsoft Advertising**[1] among digital shoppers found:

5.5
is the average number of online resources people turn to when making a product decision.

59%
of surveyed respondents find personalized product recommendations helpful.

56%
of Gen Z shoppers said they find interactive content helpful.

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What's inside

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Introduction
Decoding the modern ... . --- .--. .--. . . .-.

Morse code was like the emojis of its time. Symbols communicated messages, and you needed the key to crack the code.

Our message above decodes to **"shopper,"** but 'ol Samuel Morse probably wasn't using his telegraph to buy a top hat online. Consumer behaviors and the ways people can buy have evolved.

So let's decode what defines today's digital buyers to uncover opportunities for brands to connect with them.

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01

What's **missing** from today's shopping journey?
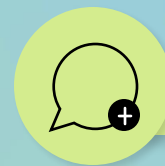
Honestly?
Not much...

Like that sofa in your favorite show? Just scan a QR code.
A sweater on your feed catches your eye? Two clicks and it's yours.

With e-commerce booming and more time being spent online, consumers now encounter a wider array of products, digital ads, and commercial messages.

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Digital shopping platforms and algorithms are smarter and faster

Thank you, AI! It's enabling personalization and serving up relevant products, often to a level that sometimes makes you wonder if advertisers overheard you spilling the tea.

12:15

Copilot

Your everyday AI companion

Copilot, give me some gift ideas for my puzzle-loving friend's birthday.

EXAMPLES

Copilot, suggest some of the best headphone choices for me. I don't like over-the-ear styles, and I'm trying to spend $50 or less.

Ask me anything...

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The upside and downside of everything is shoppable

The uber convenience of today's constant stream of offers, deals, and product drops can make buyers feel seen and empowered. But there are some downsides to having it all, too.

Like an adhesive price tag that won't come off, a brand can quickly go from a sensation to an irritation because of:

Aggressive advertising targeting

Irrelevant messaging offers

Crossing the privacy line

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If brands don't want buyers **breaking up with them**, they should consider that **most shoppers prefer multiple touchpoints before converting to a purchase**, per Microsoft Advertising research.

56%

of consumers say they now spend more time researching products before deciding[1].

39%

have increased their use of wish lists[1].

72%

save items to purchase later[1].

1. Microsoft & Suzy Inc, Digital Shopping Journey: US, Aus, UK, Dec 2024

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This just in: New shopping industry trends

Inflation increasing price sensitivity

As economic uncertainties loom, advertisers are considering the right pricing strategies and consumers are waiting for valuable promotions and sales.

The growing importance of peer reviews and influencers

Influencer marketing is surging and in 2025, 59% of marketers plan to partner with more influencers compared to 2024—adding another essential touchpoint ([Marketing Dive](#)).

The emerging behavior of viewing digital shopping as a sport or entertainment

So-called 'shoppertainment' has advertisers blurring the lines by leaning into initiatives such as livestream events and immersive experiences.

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02

A clue about today's consumers

It was the **shopper** in the study with the laptop!

Or was it the **consumer** on the go with their mobile phone?

Sometimes, the world of shopping can feel like a mystery board game—where you're not sure who your suspects are, their motives, or their methods.

Advertisers need to know about their digital consumers' behaviors and consider how they can shift from one mindset to another throughout the course of the day.

Let's get sleuthing to find the prime suspects of shopping that we've identified in our research.

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Was it the entertainment shopper

… in the billiard room with **MSN, Outlook, LinkedIn, Solitaire,** and so much more?

Shopping isn't just a transaction to these shoppers, it's entertainment. They can be compulsive and are open to discovering new products everywhere via streaming platforms, gaming devices, social media ads, and influencers.

1. Microsoft & Suzy Inc, Digital Shopping Journey: US, Aus, UK, Dec 2024

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These "shoppertainers":

01 Browse and purchase across multiple devices, including these top five channels: social media ads, search engines, brand/retailer sites, online ads, and CTV/e-commerce apps.[1]

02 Tend to find interactive content helpful with almost half (**46%**) doing so when making a purchase.[1]

03 Rely on recommendations to narrow down options, like pots and pans recs, with consumers saying user reviews and ratings (**86%**) and customer testimonials and success stories (**75%**) being helpful when making a purchase.[1]

Was it the **task-oriented shopper**

... in the lounge via the secret passage from the conservatory with the promo email?

Task-oriented shoppers focus on immediacy and functionality. They're pressed for-time and need to make fast decisions-like the quick move to the lounge where the Wi-Fi is.

These consumers:

01 Discover products through more traditional digital means, like search engines, email newsletters, promo emails, e-commerce apps, and SMS promos.[1]

02 Value shopping experiences with curated/limited options—**69%** of consumers use filters or sorting options to quickly narrow down choices.[1]

03 Often shop for clothing and accessories, gifts for others, and home décor online—sometimes even during work—with **32%** of consumers spending one to two plus hours a day on their work computer doing personal tasks.[1]

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12

Was it the **price-conscious shopper**

... in the study with the knife to slash prices?!

Who doesn't love a good deal? Price-conscious shoppers are always hunting for the best value, though in real life, they're probably not using a knife as their modus operandi.

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These shoppers:

01 Skew high toward visiting comparison-shopping sites and saving products for a later date.[1]

02 Discover new products through search engines, online ads, comparison shopping websites, and email newsletters, along with promotions, digital marketplaces, and online communities.[1]

03 Frequently shop online for groceries (**59**%) and household items, electronics, and white goods/appliances.[1]

03

The clock is ticking! Can you **unravel** this Gen Z mystery?

1. Microsoft & Suzy Inc, Digital Shopping Journey: US, Aus, UK, Dec 2024

You've been trapped
in the **Gen Z** escape room!

Gen Z, born between 1997 and 2012, cuts across all three shopper groups, with several unique twists. You might be confused by the initial perception that they're driven by impulse purchases on social media. But don't let the red herrings throw you off because Gen Z *actually spends more time making purchase decisions* than their other cohorts.[1]

Advertisers who unlock the clues will be rewarded with campaigns that meet Gen Z where they shop across social, connected TV, gaming, and online.

So, let's find the hidden data to break free...

Found!

Gen Z shops online more frequently and is more comfortable shopping via mobile and social platforms than other demographic groups. They lean heavily on peer and expert reviews when making choices about what to buy.

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Among Gen Z respondents

6.3%

are more likely than the average consumer to make **frequent online purchases** (Capital One Shopping).

61%

said they spend more time researching products before making a decision—roughly **five percentage points higher** than other demographics.[1]

43%

rely on recommendations from reviews, influencers, or friends to narrow down options—versus **32%** and **31%** among millennials and Gen X.[1]

Thinking about your online shopping habits over the past year, how have your habits changed, if at all?

Sentiment	Total	Gen Z (18–27)	Millennial (28–43)	Gen X (44–59)	Boomers (60+)
I spend more time researching and comparing products before making a decision	56%	61%	59%	52%	42%
I rely more on recommendations (e.g., reviews, influencers, or friends) to narrow down options	31%	45%	31%	28%	15%
I have increased the use of wishlists or online shopping baskets/carts to save items while I decide what to buy	39%	52%	38%	40%	19%
I abandon my basket/cart more often because I'm unsure which product to choose	22%	31%	19%	23%	15%
I have reduced my online shopping in favor of in-store shopping	19%	28%	17%	15%	16%
I have incorporated tools like chat (e.g., Copilot, Gemini, ChatGPT) to make research easier	18%	23%	21%	16%	1%
Other	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
I have not noticed any changes in my shopping habits	18%	7%	16%	22%	40%

Microsoft & Suzy Inc, Digital Shopping Journey: US, Aus, UK, Dec 2024

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Found!

Gen Zers are heavy consumers of social media, short-form video, and console gaming.

Nearly nine in ten U.S. Gen Zers (89.3%) are on **YouTube**, with **Instagram** (72.5%), **TikTok** (71.2%), and **Snapchat** (70.3%) coming in right behind (eMarketer).

39% of U.S. Gen Z clothing buyers have used social media to discover new apparel brands or products, versus just 28.2% of the general market (eMarketer).

Gen Z will spend **more time on console games** than linear TV this year (WARC Media).

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04

Riddle me this

You've come this far on your consumer behavior quest. Now, it's time to **decode** which campaign strategy **is best.** If you're not sure which approach is the way, here's a hint: **Look at your buyer's day.**

Microsoft Advertising found that consumers are using **four devices per day**, and they typically turn to an average of **5.5** online resources when making product decisions.[1]

Nearly every digital channel a consumer turns to presents an opportunity to put your brand and product into the spotlight:

Social apps	Comparison shopping sites
E-commerce sites	Review platforms
Emails	Ads within streaming services
Messaging apps	Gaming consoles

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It's not easy to solve the advertising riddle and stand out in such a complex environment

But those who lean into consumers' multi-device purchase patterns can reach their audiences during every part of their day.

| Microsoft's interconnected ecosystem empowers advertisers to resonate with their audiences across their digital lives, where they work, browse, and play.

| And with personalization tactics, brands can tailor messaging to make customers, like Gen Z, feel seen.

2. CivicScience, January 2025 3. Activision Blizzard Media, March 2024

60%
of MSN users say they consume news content daily, followed by sports and money content. [2]

42%
of those who grew up cross-platform gaming dedicate time every day to playing on console. [3]

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05

Four code words to access digital buyers today

Multiple touchpoints

Consumers' purchase journeys are longer and involve multiple touchpoints, requiring advertisers to meet them across various digital channels.

Daily shifts

Understanding the different mindsets consumers shift through during the day is essential for crafting effective campaigns.

Gen Z

Connecting with Gen Z requires developing a fresh, authentic strategy to capture their attention and meet them where they spend the most time-whether that's on social media, connected TV, gaming platforms, or online.

Personalization

Delivering personalized messages while respecting consumer privacy is vital for maintaining customer trust and engagement.

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Let's crack the code together

Leverage the right tools, strategies, and ad opportunities to effectively navigate your target audiences' behaviors.

Get your fingerprints on your phone and connect with a Microsoft Advertising representative to learn more. Or, schedule a free consultation with our team of experts.

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Thank you

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