



ELISA TINEL

Consumer behavior with focus on psychological factors of Belgian Gen Z in pharmacies

DEGREE PROGRAMME IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS
2025

ABSTRACT

Tinel, Elisa: Consumer behavior with focus on psychological factor of Belgian Gen Z in pharmacies.

Bachelor's thesis

Degree programme in International Business

May 2025

Number of pages: 49

The aims of this thesis were to understand how Generation Z behaves in Belgian pharmacies, what factors influence this behavior, and how psychology plays a role in this generation's purchasing decisions. Understanding all this enabled the author to develop recommendations for pharmacies to optimally attract young Belgians.

To achieve this aim, the author of this thesis first established the questions she wanted to answer. She then carried out a great deal of research to develop the theoretical points of her subject, to better understand the context and get a better overview of what she was going to develop next. She explained theoretical points such as the Z generation, marketing strategies, consumer behavior and several factors, as well as the pharmaceutical context in Belgium.

Then, the author developed a questionnaire, to conduct a quantitative survey, which she published on social networks, obtaining 59 responses from the Belgian Gen Z. This enabled her to hear directly from the people most concerned by this thesis, and to understand how young Belgians really behave in the field. Finally, she was able to analyze the results obtained from this questionnaire and develop recommendations and advice for pharmacies, so that they can develop and attract Gen Z to their stores.

At the end of all these steps, it became clear that what would appeal to Generation Z would be the range of products offered by pharmacies, which could be more extensive and varied; the layout of the store, which could be more attractive; the digitalization of pharmacies, which could be more up to date in this respect; and, last but not least, the knowledge and friendliness of pharmacists and staff.

Keywords: pharmacies, consumer behavior, generation Z, Belgium, psychology, marketing strategy.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	4
2 PROBLEM SETTING AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	5
2.1 Problem setting	5
2.2 Conceptual framework.....	6
3 BELGIAN PHARMACEUTICAL CONTEXT.....	7
4 GENERATION Z.....	11
5 MARKETING STRATEGIES	13
6 CONSUMER BEHAVIOR.....	15
6.1 Psychological factors	17
6.2 Personal factors	19
6.3 Social factors.....	20
6.4 Store design.....	21
7 METHODOLOGY	22
8 RESEARCH FINDINGS	25
9 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....	33
9.1 Summary	33
9.2 Conclusions.....	34
10 RECOMMENDATIONS	36
10.1 Pharmacist	36
10.2 Product range.....	37
10.3 Pharmacy layout and design	37
10.4 The digitalization	38
11 FINAL WORDS AND EVALUATION.....	38
REFERENCES	41
APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE	45

1 INTRODUCTION

The Belgian pharmaceuticals market is growing every year. Macro-economic, political and demographic circumstances are all conducive to growth in this sector. The Belgian population is getting older and older, which is one of the reasons for this development (Statista, 2024). But what about young Belgians? And more specifically, generation Z, the young people born between 1997 and 2012? Do they visit pharmacies? What factors influence their use or non-use of pharmacies?

The aim of this thesis, entitled “Consumer behavior with focus on psychological factors of Belgian Gen Z in pharmacies” is to answer these questions and find marketing elements that could help pharmacies attract the Belgian Gen Z.

The author chooses the topics of consumer behavior with a focus on the psychological factors because it is a subject that always interested her. She chooses to analyze the Gen Z because it is the actual and future consumer of our society. Then she wants to do her work in Belgium and more specifically in Wallonia and Brussels because it is more interesting for her to study the Belgian's behavior since she wants to work there later. And finally, she chooses pharmacies because for her it is a complex sector that she really wants to understand.

To achieve this goal, the author will first explain the current situation in the Belgian pharmaceutical market and discuss some theoretical concepts, such as the definition of the generation Z, the consumer behavior, and the marketing. Then she will conduct a survey of the Belgian Gen Z to understand the buying habits of the Belgian Gen Z in pharmacy and analyze the

responses. Finally, she will draw some conclusions and give some recommendations.

The author uses AI to clarify her ideas and to help her in the translation and to rephrase some passages.

2 PROBLEM SETTING AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Problem setting

The main aim of this thesis is to find ways of attracting young Belgians to pharmacies. In other words, consumers are going into physical pharmacies less and less, so this thesis aims to understand why, and find out what needs to be put in place, from a marketing point of view, to repopulate these pharmacies. All of that with mainly a focus is on psychological influences and factors.

So the question is how can pharmacy attract more efficiently the Belgian Gen Z?

In order to answer this question properly, we will need to ask other questions, such as:

1. What are the current habits of the Belgian Gen Z on the pharmaceutical market?
2. What are the factors that influence the psychology of the Belgian Gen Z in a pharmacy?
3. How the psychology of the consumers influences their behavior in a pharmacy?

2.2 Conceptual framework

This framework (Figure 1) visualizes the subject of this thesis, i.e. consumer behavior with a focus on the psychology of Belgian Gen Z. Various elements are linked to this subject, such as consumers' needs, perceptions, motivations, disincentives, etc., but also external factors such as social influence, culture, store design, etc. All these elements are analyzed to attract the Belgian Gen Z in pharmacies.

Indeed, the aim is to analyze the consumer behavior, focusing more on psychology, so that Belgian Gen Z consume more pharmaceutical products and visit pharmacies more. To understand the behavior of Belgian Gen Z, we need to analyze the psychology of these young people (their needs, motivations, perceptions, etc.) and the factors external to consumers but which have an impact on their psychology (social influence, culture, store layout, etc.).

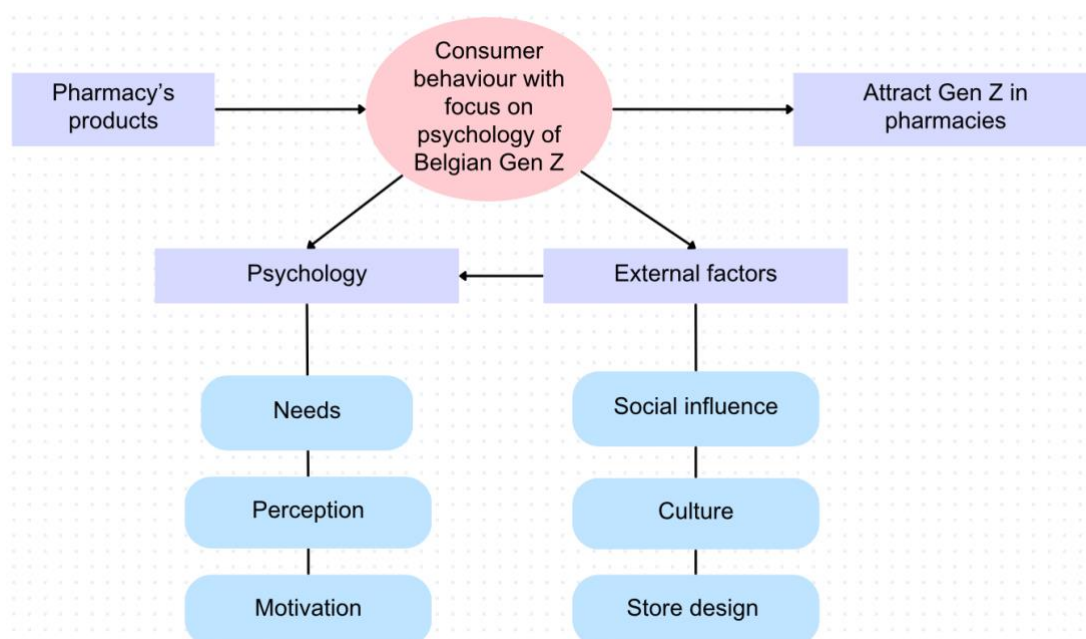


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the consumer behaviour with a focus on psychology of Belgian Gen Z. (Author of the thesis, 2025)

3 BELGIAN PHARMACEUTICAL CONTEXT

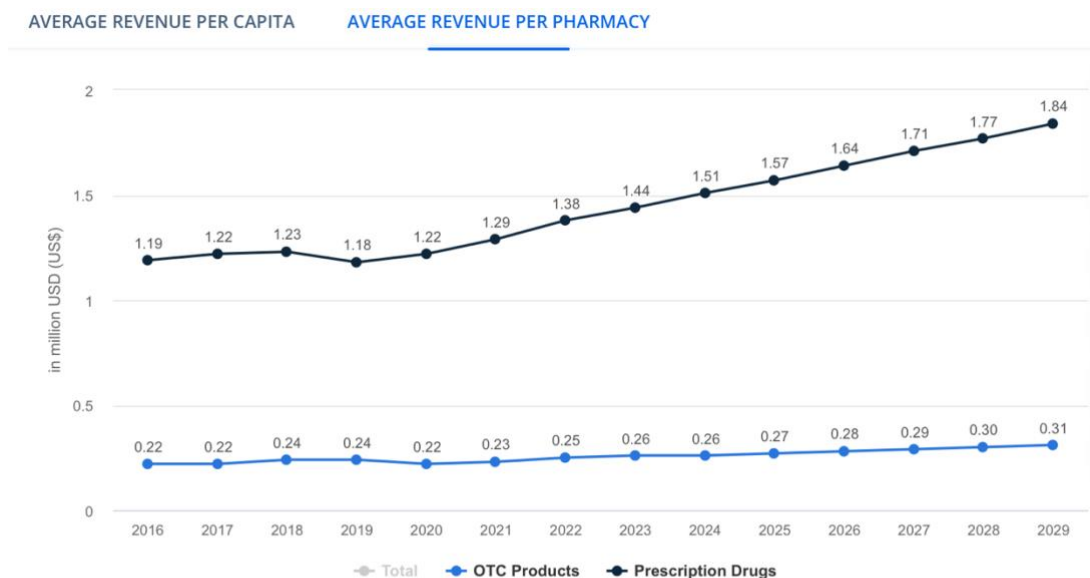
In order to form a better opinion and make a better analysis of the situation, it is important to understand the current context of the Belgian pharmaceutical market.

In Belgium, there are both physical and online pharmacies selling medical products, dietary supplements, cosmetics, shower products, etc. Some products are available on prescription, while others are sold directly over the counter (OTC) (Statista, 2024).

In addition to selling these products, pharmacists advise customers, warn them of side effects, etc.

The pharmaceutical market is therefore divided into 2 categories: products requiring a prescription and OTC products.

In Belgium, this market is growing steadily, as shown in Figure 2. This increase is mainly driven by prescription drugs. This may reflect the ageing of the Belgian population, or an increase in chronic illnesses. As for OTC products, they account for a minority of sales, but generate a constant income, showing a certain stability in the market.



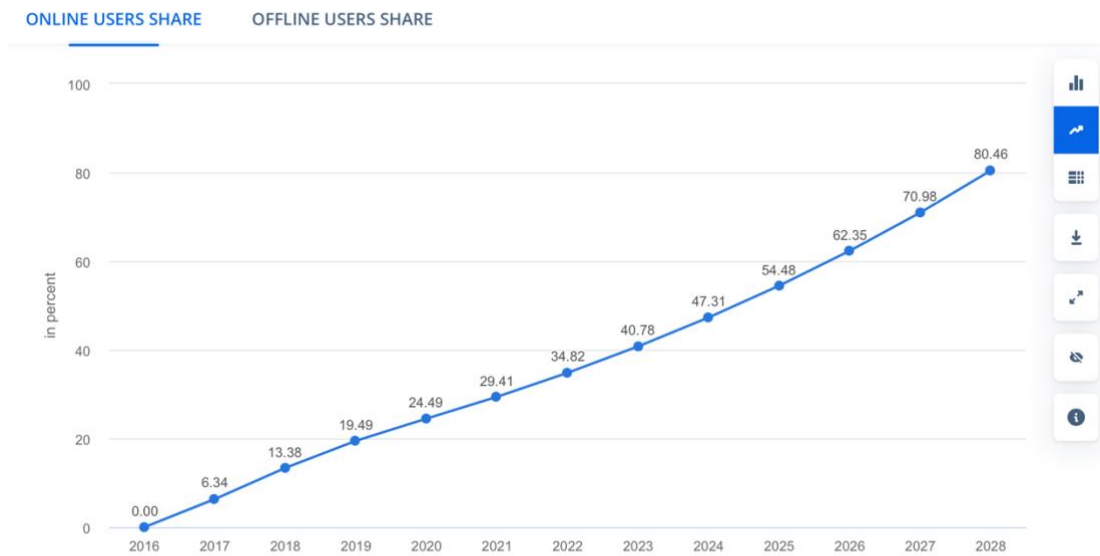
Most recent update: Jun 2024

Source: Statista Market Insights

Figure 2. Average revenue per pharmacy in Belgium. (Statista, 2024)

Online sales are developing very rapidly over the years. Between 2020 and 2024, online users almost doubled, rising from 24.49% to 47.31% in just 4 years (Figure 3). While for their part, in-store sales are declining more and more. For the time being, this decline stays slight, with only 5% fewer users buying in-store between 2020 (92.5%) and 2024 (87.63%). Nevertheless, this decrease remains constant and shows no sign of improvement. (Figure 4).

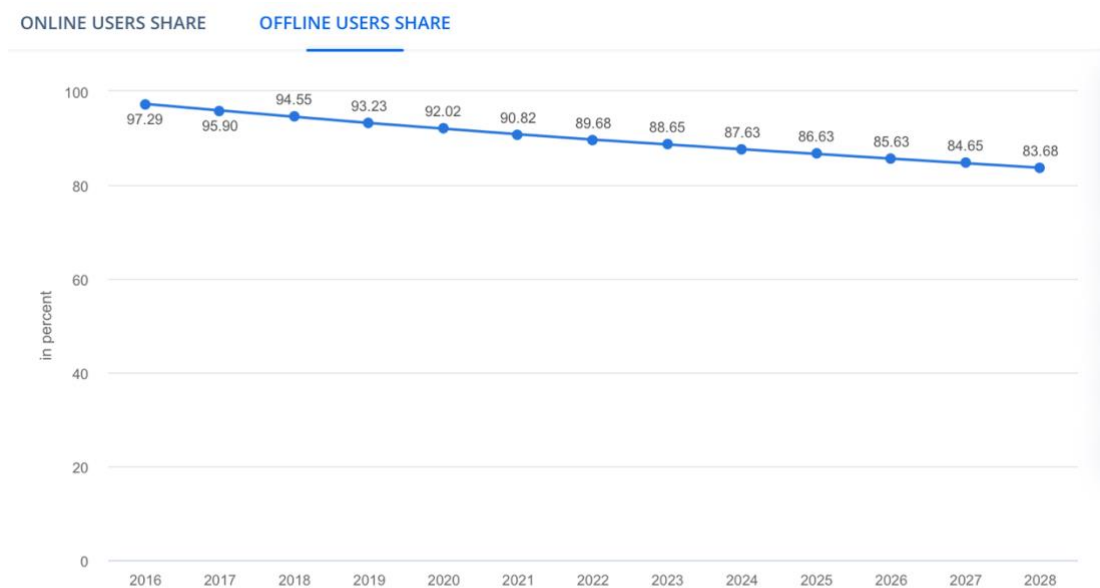
This thesis will attempt to understand why in-store sales are declining, and how to attract younger customers to pharmacies.



Most recent update: Mar 2024

Source: [Statista Consumer Insights Global](#)

Figure 3. Online users share in Belgium. (Statista, 2024)



Most recent update: Mar 2024

Source: [Statista Consumer Insights Global](#)

Figure 4. Offline users share in Belgium. (Statista, 2024)

Unsurprisingly, Generation Z are among the consumers who order their products most frequently online. Indeed, more than a third of Belgium's Generation Z say they prefer to buy their products online, according to a survey conducted in 2023 by Statista. (Statista, 2025)

Market trends are convenience and accessibility of health services, making pharmacies a popular choice with consumers. Other rising trends are the demand for personalized services and the appeal of natural remedies, to which pharmacies respond very well. (Statista, 2024)

Belgian pharmacies are also helped by the highly regulated Belgian healthcare system. Indeed, the government has introduced several regulations to ensure the quality and safety of pharmaceutical products and services. This has created a climate of confidence among the population and contributed to the growth of this market. (Statista, 2024)

But this positive trend for pharmacies can also be explained by the aging of the Belgian population, which is increasing demand for healthcare services, as the author has already pointed out in her analysis of figure 2. (Statista, 2024).

But then the question arises: what about young people? The author of the thesis develops this question one the chapter named « Generation Z » at page 10.

The most popular products in pharmacies are facial products, followed by sun creams and body products (Figure 5). As shown in the figure, sales of facial products exploded between 2018 and 2019, making them the best-selling products in pharmacies by far (Herman, 2019, p.6). For this reason, Gen Z's buying habits of beauty and skincare products are presented in greater detail in the chapter developing Generation Z at page 10.

Growth within the overall pharmacy channels is absolutely impressive for the 'special facial care' category

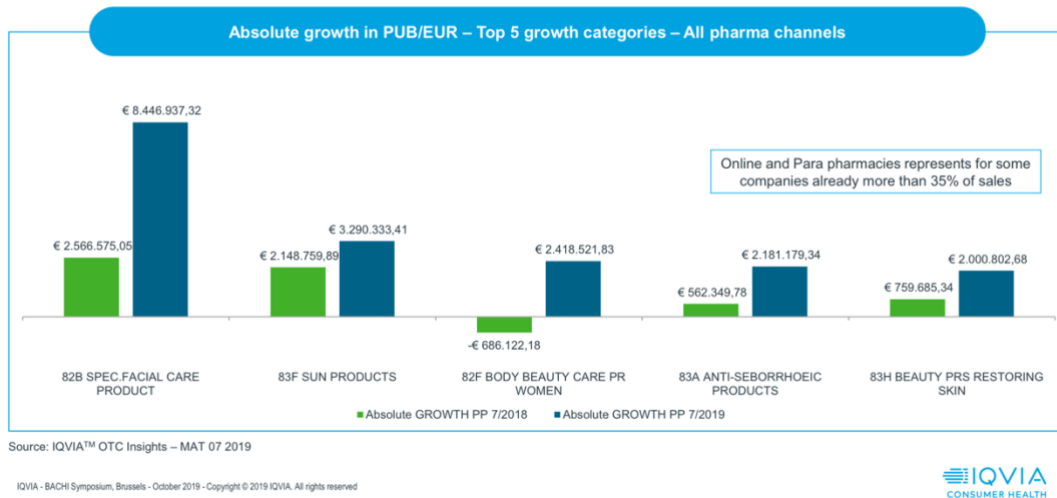


Figure 5. Absolute growth in PUB/EUR. (Herman, 2019, p.6)

4 GENERATION Z

Generation Z refers to young people born between 1997 and 2012 and represents 2,570,000 Belgians. (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2020, p.1)

According to many studies, this generation is self-aware, persistent, realist, innovative and self-reliant. It is also described as the best-educated generation, liberal-minded and open to appearing social trends. They always seek the truth, referring to all individual truths. Gen Z is also the first digital natives, that means that they use social media much more than previous generations, digital advertising impacts them much more and their mental health, well-being and ecology are of greater concern to them. Young people are also more exposed to poverty and unemployment. (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2020, pp.1-3)

This generation has a different view of healthcare, showing a certain rejection of traditional care and preferring to personalize their wellness plans.

They are looking for a holistic approach to healthcare, one that takes into account the body, mind, personal, family and professional situation, rather than simply treating isolated symptoms. (Moravek, 2023)

Generation Z young people are looking for an omnichannel experience, often using technology to find out about a product before they buy. They want to know about primary and secondary effects, compare prices and competitors' products. More often they discover new products thanks to social media (often based on influencer recommendations), their internet searches and YouTube ads. (Hamstra, 2024)

Generation Z loves skincare and beauty products and buys them mainly from specialist stores (82% of young people), amazon (75% of young people) or Sephora (74% of young people), for example. Only 55% of young people buy them from pharmacies. This is due to the product assortment offered by pharmacies. Young consumers are not always interested in the mass market brand that pharmacies are selling, they are more attracted to a wider range of brands. (Hamstra, 2024)

When it comes to buying beauty products, these consumers attach significant importance to personal recommendations. They want products that work, and they want proof that they do. To find this proof, they rely on social networks, the opinions of family and friends, micro-influencers, etc. (Hamstra, 2024)

Gen Z is more attracted by OTC products, because it is more convenient, rather than those requiring a prescription, so this includes topicals, gummies, nasal solutions, gels, and liquid or semi-solids. (Moravek, 2023)

5 MARKETING STRATEGIES

As earlier mentioned, the aim of this thesis is to find out what and how to attract the Belgian Gen Z to pharmacies. To achieve this, the most useful tool is marketing strategies.

Marketing refers to the actions taken to attract an audience but also to build brand loyalty, customer relationships and brand recognition. It is present in all stages of the business and it allows to understand the target audience, to create a product/service that fits their needs, to bring it to choose the right distribution method, the right sales method, etc. It helps to get the interest of the audience. (Forsey, 2024)

Marketing includes market research, analysis, understanding the customer's interests.

There are different kinds of marketing.

The digital marketing uses the online channels and platforms (social media, email, search engines, etc) to promote and sell the product/service.

Traditional marketing uses the offline connection with people (newspaper, telemarketing, etc)

The marketing mix analyzes four aspects of the business, called 4P's, or even 7P's if we talk about service rather than product: Product, Price, Place and Promotion, plus people, physical evidence and process for the 7P's

The sensory marketing engages a potential customer through their five senses (sight, sound, touch, smell and taste). (Chechi, 2024)

Influencer marketing is becoming an increasingly important part of marketing strategies. This type of marketing uses social networks and collaborates with

influencers to reach consumers. It is becoming increasingly crucial as new and future consumers, i.e. Generation Z and beyond, use the internet and social networks more and more. (Daniels & Daniels, 2023)

When it comes to choosing a marketing strategy, it is best not to select, but to practice omnichannel marketing. In other words, use all means of communication and all types of marketing to reach as many potential consumers as effectively as possible. (What Is Omnichannel Marketing?, 2022)

While making the marketing of a brand, the marketers must think to several aspects.

The marketing strategy is a business plan for reaching prospects and turning them into customers. It should revolve around the value proposition of the company. The aim of the marketing strategy is to communicate a competitive advantage over rival companies. To achieve this goal, marketers must understand the needs and wants of the customers. (Team, 2024)

The market segmentation and the targeting are the process of identifying potential customers.

The first step is the segmentation of the market. The principle is to group customer with similar needs together and to determine their characteristics. It can be based on location, lifestyle, demographics, behavior, buying habits, etc.

The second step is targeting. It is the selection of the segment of customers the company will focus on. The choice is based one the attractiveness of the segment, which depends on the size, profitability, intensity of competition, etc, in the segment. (Talerico, 2023)

The positioning is what will appeal to the selected customer segment. Each aspect of the company, the design, the distribution, the advertisement, etc, has to reflect this positioning. It is how the company communicate its values to the customers. (Talerico, 2023)

6 CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Consumer behavior is the study of how people make decisions when they purchase, it helps the marketers to predict how and when a consumer will make a purchase and to manipulate behavior. It also helps to identify what influences these decisions. It allows businesses to understand about their target audience and to craft products or services to influence purchase behavior. (Kornbluth, 2022)

The consumer behavior (Chapman, 2024) works in tandem with the consumer buying decision process. It refers to the stages a customer experiences throughout his customer journey. There are five steps in the customer buying process:

The stage one is the problem recognition. It is the initiation of the buying decision process. The customers identify a need or challenge that requires a solution. In other words, the customers solve a problem by buying a product or service. For example, a customer's problem is the eczema, and his solution is to buy a cream to the pharmacy.

The second stage is the research process. After finding their problem, the customers will do some online and offline research about products that will solve this problem. They will also ask to their friends and family and search for testimonies.

The stage three consists of considering alternatives. After collecting information, the customers will evaluate which product answer best to their needs before deciding where to invest. They will compare the different possibilities by taking into account factors such as the price, the product's characteristics, the availability, etc. At this stage, an effective marketing can stand out one product among the alternatives.

The stage four is the election stage. At this stage, it is the time for the customers to choose which product they are going to buy. Here, positive or negative reviews, good or poor customer onboarding, company location, reputation, etc, are all factors that can influence the consumers' decision.

And then, the stage five is the post-purchase evaluation. It is the phase where customers assess their new investment. They are evaluating its utility and how the product has fulfilled their expectations. A positive post-purchase experience can transform the customers into brand ambassadors by sharing their great experience with their friends and family.

The consumer behavior can be categorised into four types.

Routine response does not require much thought because people will purchase a brand they recognise and they tried before. The perfect example is when the consumer buys a bread.

Limited decision-making is a purchase that requires some research and a little amount of thought. In this case, a great example is when the consumer chooses a restaurant.

Extensive decision-making is a purchase decision that involves a big financial investment or personal impact. It needs an extensive amount of time researching. A good illustration is a consumer buying a house.

And impulsive buying refers to a purchase that was not planned, it is irrational and in the moment. For example, when the consumer is in the line at pay counter and buys a candy.

(Kornbluth, 2022)

The consumer behavior is affected by several external and internal factors that influence consumer buying decision process.

6.1 Psychological factors

These factors include several aspects of a person.

The personality refers to the qualities and characteristics of a person. In marketing it defines as the personal attributes such as traits, abilities, motives, values, etc, that conduct to a specific and unique behavior. (De Mooij, 2011, pp.120-121)

The attitude is the individual predisposition to evaluate something in a favorable or unfavorable manner. It is the sum of affective components like the sensations, feelings and emotions, and cognitive components like the attributes and functions of something. Sometimes, the behavior of consumers can be predicted from their attitude toward products, services and brands. If the attitude is positive, a purchase can be predicted. (De Mooij, 2011, pp. 133-134)

The perception refers to the knowledge people have of the world. The perception depends on the learning experiences, the natural and social environments teach us what to look at and how to look. So some cross-cultural differences in perception are existing. It must be considered while doing an advertising: the marketer needs to be sure that people will be able to recognize the meaning intended. (De Mooij, 2011, p. 228)

Maslow hierarchised the human needs (Figure 6): physiological needs (food, sleep, clothes, reproduction, etc) safety needs (personal security, health, employment, etc) social needs (friendship, intimacy, family, etc) esteem (respect, status, self-esteem, etc) and self-actualization (achieving one's full potential). His theory is based on the concept that people want to satisfy some needs before others. For example, safety needs take precedence over social needs. (De Mooij, 2011, p.159)



Figure 6. Maslow's hierarchy of needs. (Elodie, 2024)

The motivations of customers are the attitude, beliefs, motives, etc, that influence their purchase decisions. It is important to understand it to develop effective advertising. (De Mooij, 2011, p.157)

Barriers are all the reasons to not buy a product. Majority of people is trying to find some argument against the purchase, especially large ones. To convince a customer it is important to remove as many of those reasons as possible. Most common barriers are the lack of marketplace visibility, the lack of brand

trust, the lack of brand loyalty, a slow website, the price, the quantity of information available, etc. (Chris, 2022)

Consumer beliefs refer to the judgment that customer have. For example, customers can judge the price fairness: higher price can be attribute to profit, rather than quality or other costs. (Charm et al., 2020)

The cognitive dissonance happens when there is a psychological inconsistency between two (or more) beliefs or behaviors. People tend to reduce this dissonance by finding argument to convince themselves that they are making the right choice. This leads to several behaviors: people will collect more information after they have bought a product than before because they want to confirm their decision, people may also like more the product after than before buying it to prevent dissonance. (De Mooji, 2011, p.219)

6.2 Personal factors

Personal factors are the personal characteristics of a person such as his age, gender, financial situation, occupation, lifestyle, etc.

The age has a strong influence on the buying behavior because the needs and the wants change with age. A teenager has not the same buying habits than an adult.

The financial situation matters while people are purchasing, higher income means higher disposable income, so more opportunities to spend on products. And consumer with a lower income spend most of their money on basics needs such as groceries or clothing.

The occupation of the customer also plays a role in the purchase. People tend to buy things that are appropriate to their profession. For example, construction

workers are less likely to buy suits or business casual work clothes than an accountant.

Lifestyle reflects the attitudes and values of consumers. For example, someone with an active and healthy lifestyle will focus his purchase on healthier food alternatives.

People with different gender want different products and has different shopping approaches with different motives, perspectives and considerations.

(Albrecht et al., 2023)

6.3 Social factors

Social factors refer to a person's friends, family, community or work/school, social class, education, living conditions, location and culture, etc.

The culture varies with the location. Culture refers to the values, ideas and attitudes that are learned, mostly, in the childhood.

There are five social classes that affect the purchase. The upper class, upper-middle class, lower-middle class, working class and economically disadvantaged. People in different social classes will not focus on the same characteristics while purchasing. Some might focus primarily on price, whereas others might consider product quality and features before price.

Family also influences the purchase process; there are two types of family. First, the influence of the family of orientation (the family where people grow up): while developing his buying behavior, a child will imitate the adult members of his household and probably tend to buy like them as he grows older. Then, the family of procreation (the family formed through marriage): a partner or children influence the way adults buy because they have to take into account the partner's opinion or their children's needs.

And then, the community or the reference groups are those groups to which people would like to be associated with. Those groups serve as a role models and inspirations and influence what types of products people buy or what brand they choose. (Albrecht et al., 2023)

6.4 Store design

A strategic design of a retail store has a great impact on the sales. A strategic product placement, the ambiance, the navigation through the store, the displays, the visuals and the imagery, etc, influence profoundly the consumer behavior, the consumer experience and the consumer buying decision. (Lincoln, 2023)

The product placement needs to be strategic, for example, the high-margin items have to be placed at eye level, related products can be placed together to encourage additional sales, etc.

A comfortable ambiance in the store attracts and retains customers and improves their overall shopping experience.

An easy navigation impacts the consumer experience. By considering the navigation through the store, it is easier to keep consumer engaged while inspiring purchases. For example, studies have revealed that shopper look first left and then right when they enter a shop and prefer to move right.

Inspirational displays improve the consumers' imagination and create an emotional connection. For example, in clothing stores, mannequins are really effective.

Visuals and product imagery are also really important; 360° views and virtual reality technologies play an important role in the consumer experience, mostly amount the younger generations. It helps customers to make more informed purchasing decisions.

7 METHODOLOGY

First, the author had to find an interesting subject. To do this, she thought about the courses she already had, the ones she had enjoyed the most, the subjects she wanted to learn more about, etc. Then she thought about the questions she needed to ask to answer her main problem.

To start writing this thesis the author first did some research to get a clearer idea of what she was going to talk about. Once she had a clearer vision of the points she was going to cover, she did some further research, mainly on websites, but also in books borrowed from the school library. She was lucky in that she managed to find books that addressed exactly the themes she was looking for. Thanks to this successful research, the writer was able to develop various theoretical points such as the pharmaceutical context, consumer behavior, marketing strategies, etc. She therefore chose to use descriptive research in order to better understand the current situation that she intended to analyze. Descriptive research is a methodological approach that seeks to depict the characteristics of a phenomenon or subject under investigation. In addition, this type of research was ideal for her as, being Belgian, she already has some knowledge of the country and the market she is analyzing. (Craig & Douglas, 2000, p.26-28)

The author then decided to supplement the information already obtained with quantitative research. The aim of a quantitative research is to collect and analyze numerical data. This research enabled her to collect the opinions and views of consumers, who are the first to be concerned by the problematic of this thesis. To do this, she set up a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) using Google Form. In marketing, questionnaire refers to a questionnaire intended for self completion by the participant and to survey intended to be administrated by an interviewer. (Brace, 2018, p.2) Since the author is doing a quantitative method, she has chosen the self completion questionnaire. To make it, she read a book from the school's library that helped her a lot. First, she defined the objective of this questionnaire, which was to understand how

Gen Z behave when shopping in pharmacies, and to be able to find marketing tricks to attract them to pharmacies. After that, she defined her population, which is the Belgian Gen Z. To select his sample, the author used the volunteer non-probability sampling method. In other words, the respondents choose to answer to the questionnaire. (Craig & Douglas, 2000, pp.26-28) Then she divided her questionnaire into several themes: consumer habits, questions focusing on psychology, questions focusing on consumer behavior, demographic questions and, finally, open-ended questions (Brace, 2018, pp.182-187).

After that she published it on social networks such as Instagram and Facebook for Belgian Gen Z to respond to. Her friends and relatives also helped her spread the word to get as many responses as possible. The author took the decision to publish it in both English and French, to ensure that everyone would understand it, and that language would not be a barrier. Her goal was to reach a minimum of 50 responses, and in the end, she managed to get 59 answers. She collected this data throughout March 2025.

Then, at the end of March, she was able to analyze the responses obtained thanks to the services offered by Google Form and develop her conclusions and recommendations. Indeed, thank to Google Form, she generated graphics, percentage, cross table, etc, to compare the answers between groups, segmented by age, or sex, or location, etc. By analyzing the responses she obtained, the author was able to understand the behavior of young Belgians in pharmacies and the factors that influence it.

She then summarized her theoretical research and drew her conclusions.

Validity and reliability are crucial concepts in academic research, ensuring that a study's findings are accurate and trustworthy.

Validity refers to whether the research accurately measures what it intends to measure. In this thesis, validity is ensured by using well-defined research objectives, a structured methodology, and a questionnaire designed to capture relevant data on Belgian Gen Z's consumer behavior in pharmacies. (Mirjam, 2025)

Reliability, on the other hand, refers to the consistency and reproducibility of the results. This thesis achieves reliability by employing standardized data collection methods, using multiple sources to verify information, and applying clear analytical frameworks. (Mirjam, 2025)

In order to be as reliable as possible, the author wanted to make sure she got responses that represented the whole of Belgian Gen Z. But because of the sampling method, this was not entirely possible, since it biases the results. She did her best, however, by asking her younger brother to circulate her questionnaire among his friends to reach 15-18 year-olds, she did the same with her cousins for 25-30 year-olds, and she herself reached 20-24 year-olds. What's more, she made sure she got as many female as male responses.

By cross-referencing literature, carefully structuring the survey, and maintaining transparency in the research process in the methodology chapter. For example, the author shows representative images of the survey's answers, and she explained each choice she made, ... This study upholds both validity and reliability, ensuring that its conclusions are both meaningful and applicable.

8 RESEARCH FINDINGS

As explained above, the author set up a quantitative questionnaire (see Appendix 1) with Google Form that she distributed on various social media such as Instagram and Facebook. She also sent messages to her friends and family, asking them to spread her questionnaire as widely as possible. The author of the thesis had to decide when to stop distributing her questionnaire. This was not easy, as she found she never got enough responses. But after a while she decided to stop her questionnaire so she could move on to the next stage and continue writing her thesis. This enabled her to obtain 59 responses, which she then analyzed. She was able to analyze them individually, i.e. response by response, and as a group, i.e. question by question. These two methods enabled her to cross-reference responses and make links between them, while at the same time gaining an overview of the most popular responses. She was also able to generate graphs to better visualize and understand the responses received.

The author made sure to receive responses from all the typical Gen Z profiles. The overall sample is therefore almost equally made up of women (47.5% of respondents) and men (52.5%). However, in terms of age, there were more respondents aged 21-23 (44.1%) (Figure 7), followed by those aged 18-20 (20.3%). And finally, unfortunately, the author succeeded in obtaining responses mainly from the Walloon region and Brussels capital, while Flemish respondents were very rare.

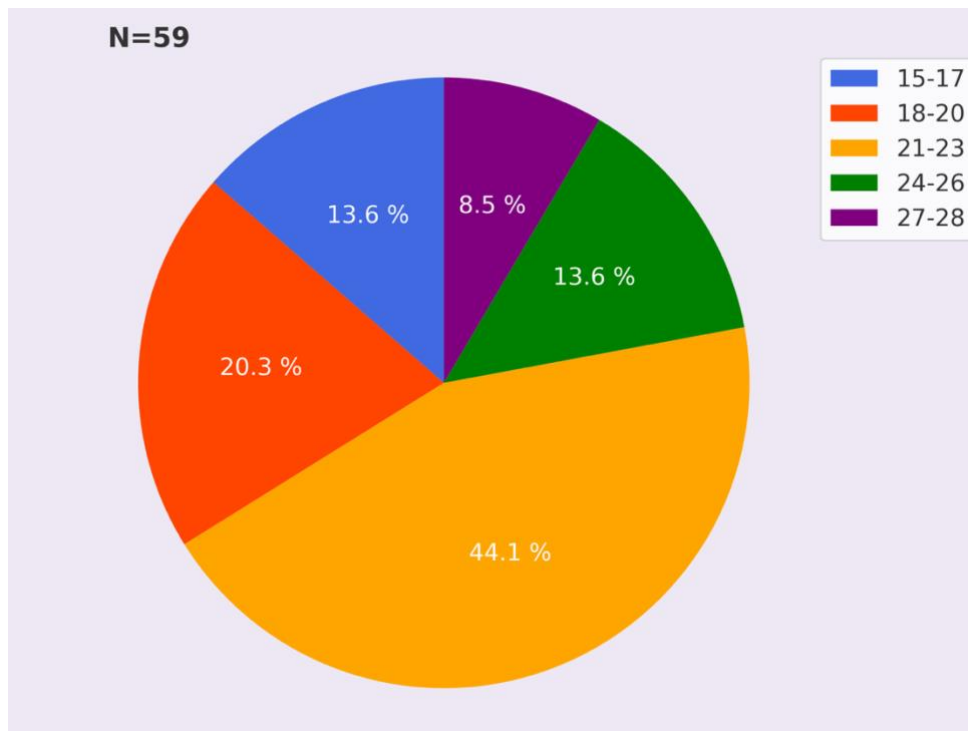


Figure 7. Question 4.1: What is your age?

The first questions aimed to understand the consumption habits of the respondents. Thanks to them, we know that the majority of young Belgians go to the pharmacy no more than once a month, and at least twice a year. (Figure 8) This is explained by the fact that the majority of young people go to the pharmacy to buy prescription drugs or over-the-counter medicines, as shown in Figure 9, where respondents could select several answers. This is in fact confirmed by the open questions asked at the end of the questionnaire, since many respondents mentioned that they would visit pharmacies more often if they were ill more often.

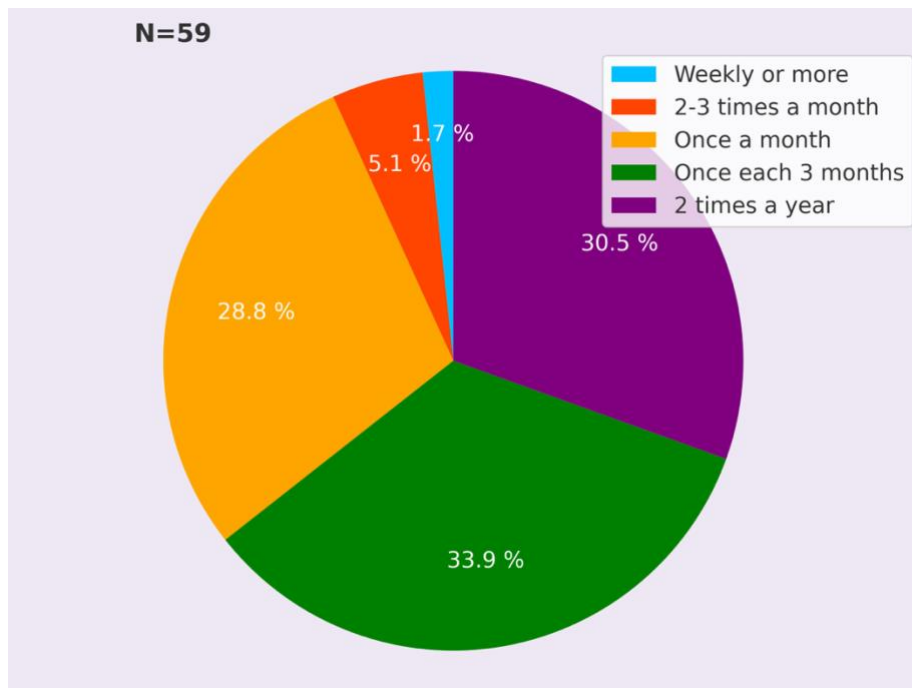


Figure 8. Question 1.1: How do you often visit a pharmacy?

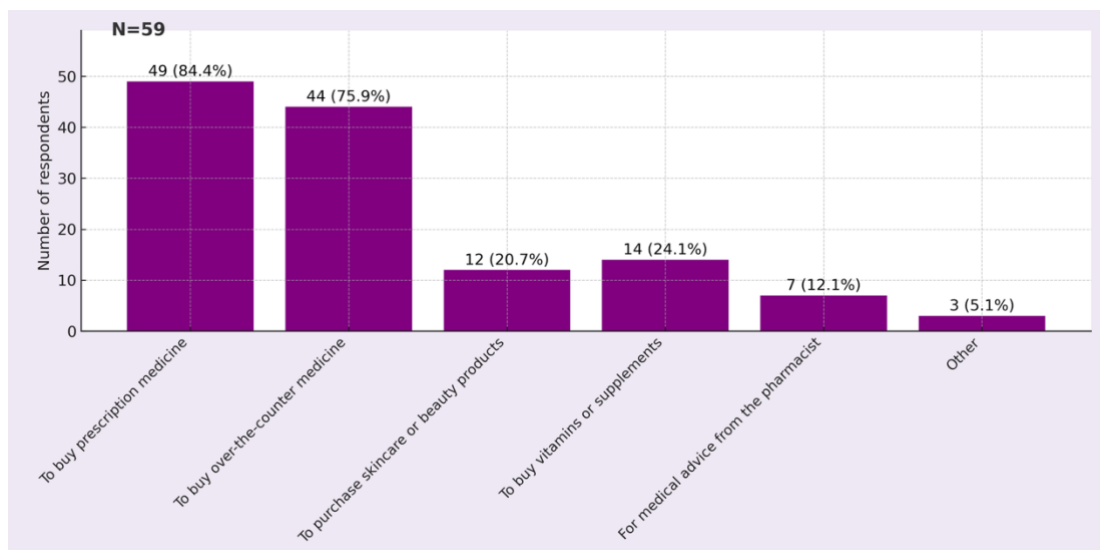


Figure 9. Question 1.2: Why do you usually visit a pharmacy?

Earlier in this thesis, the author mentioned that Gen Z buys a lot online. The main reason is that prices are lower in online pharmacies than in physical pharmacies. What's more, the number of products on offer is greater, and it's more convenient because you don't have to go anywhere.

Since the aim of this work is to analyze the behavior of Belgian Gen Z in pharmacies, with a focus on psychological factors, it is obvious that the author asked questions focused on these factors in his questionnaires. This enabled the author to understand how young Belgians choose their pharmacy. The most important factor is, unsurprisingly, the pharmacy's proximity and accessibility. The second most important factor is the cleanliness of the pharmacy. Consumers also find the quality of customer service and pharmacists' recommendations very important during their customer journey (Figure 10).

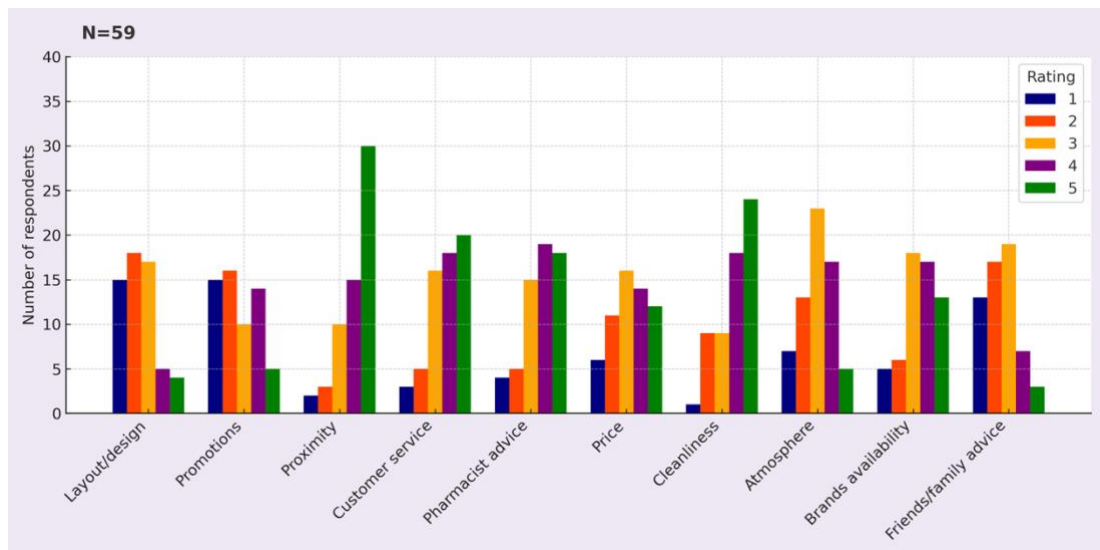


Figure 10. Question 2.1: How important are the following factors when you decide to purchase products in a pharmacy? (Rate on a scale of 1-5, where 5 = extremely important, 4 = very important, 3 = somewhat important, 2 = not very important and 1 = not at all important.)

As in all sectors, impulse buying is an integral part of a typical consumer's purchasing process in a pharmacy. They are most often influenced by pharmacists' advice, promotions and discounts, friends' and family's opinions, price and product presentation. (Figure 11)

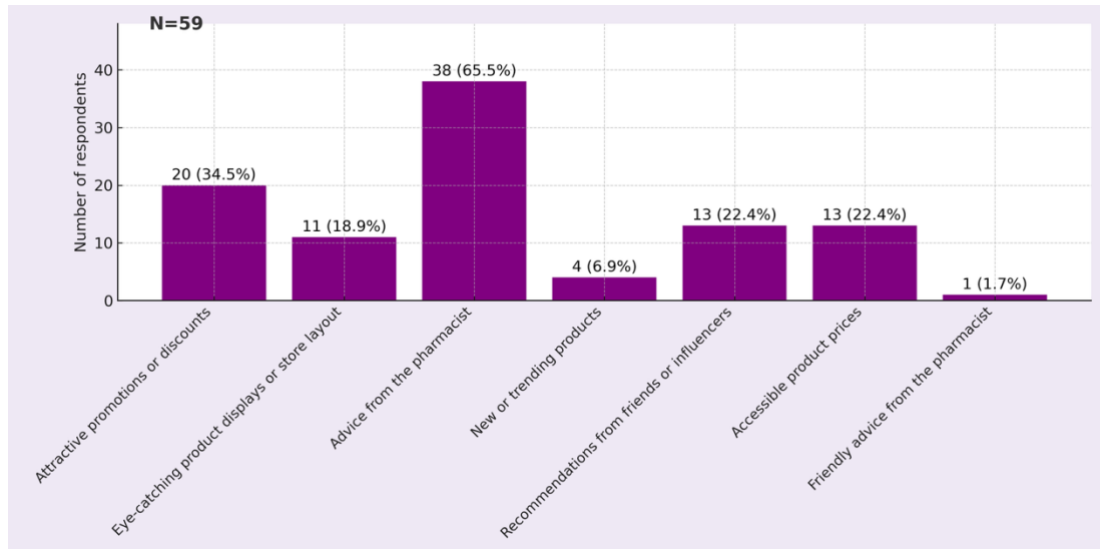


Figure 11. Question 2.2: Which of these factors influences you the most when making spontaneous (unplanned) purchases in a pharmacy?

Pharmacists play a very important role in purchasing decisions. Indeed, many of the questions in the questionnaire bear this out. As previously mentioned, they influence spontaneous purchases, and consumers take the pharmacist into account when choosing a pharmacy. This is confirmed by the fact that they very often trust what pharmacists say (Figure 12) and are therefore much more inclined to buy a product recommended by the pharmacist, as shown in Figure 13. What's more, customers feel more reassured and confident when buying a product when the pharmacist gives them further explanations about it. (Figure 14)

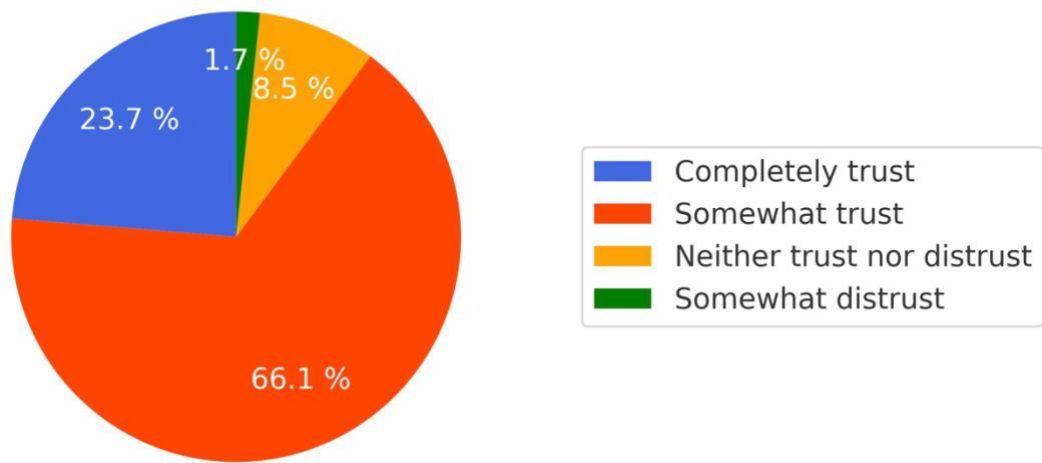
N=59

Figure 12. Question 2.3: How much do you trust the advice given by pharmacists?

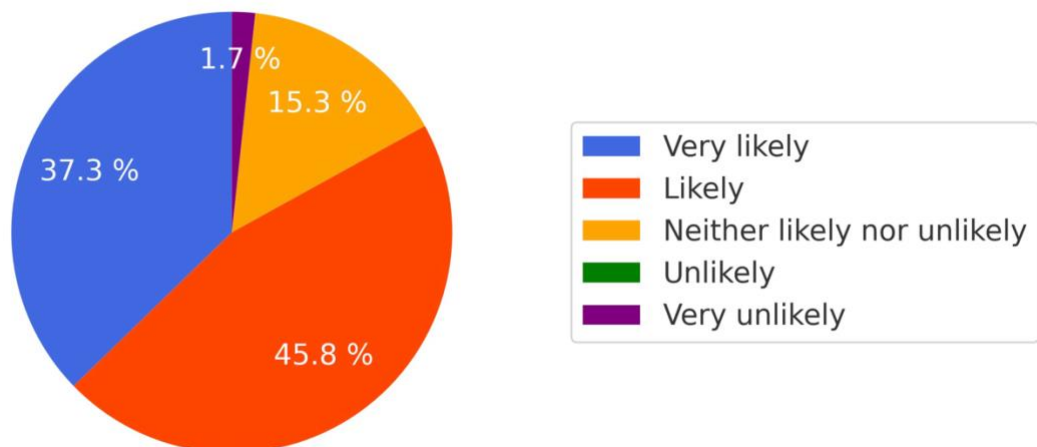
N=59

Figure 13. Question 3.1: How likely are you to purchase products that are recommended by a pharmacist?

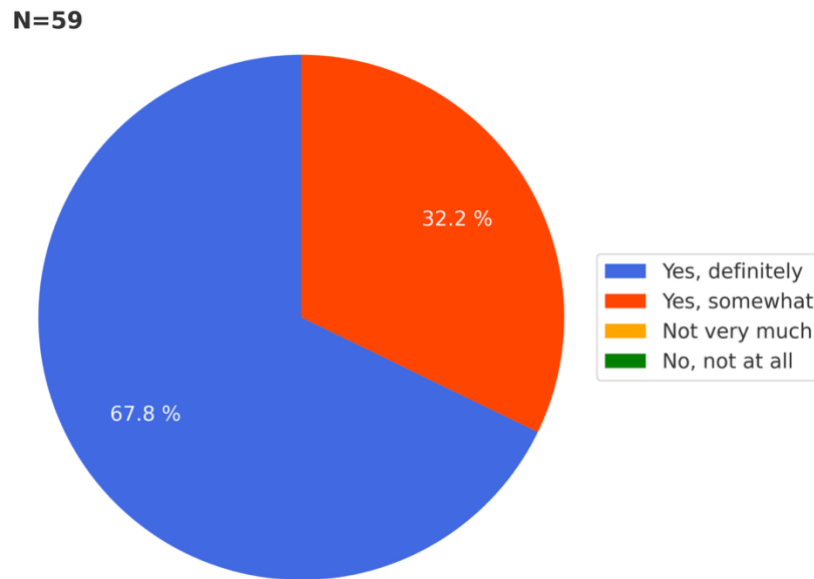


Figure 14. Question 3.2: Do you feel more comfortable purchasing products after receiving detailed explanations about them?

To close her questionnaire, the author of the thesis wanted to give respondents the opportunity to express themselves more freely and give their opinions through 4 open-ended questions. She didn't want to make them compulsory, as she knows that many people are annoyed by such questions. So, she didn't want to get forced answers that might not be one hundred percent true. This paid off, as despite the non-mandatory nature of these questions, a large majority of respondents took the time to write down an answer. The first two questions were about their personal experiences, both positive and negative, in pharmacy, and the next two allowed them to give their opinions and suggestions.

Customer experiences, whether positive or negative, are very often linked to the pharmacist. This proves, once again, the importance of the pharmacist in a pharmacy. Some pharmacists are pleasant, smiling, good listeners and give very good advice, while others are unpleasant and disdainful. Some customers feel judged or uncomfortable when their problem is explained.

By allowing respondents to make suggestions directly in the questionnaire, the author was able to gather opinions and suggestions for improvement directly from those most concerned. The responses were very varied. Some would like to see lower prices, a greater variety of products, including skincare and beauty products, or products that are more in line with their expectations, e.g. sleep aids, dietary supplements, alternative medicine, etc. Others would like to see digitalization more integrated into the pharmacy organization, e.g. an e-mail newsletter that warns of discounts could be set up, and pharmacies could keep abreast of trendy products on the networks that are therefore sought after by many people. According to respondents, the clarity of product layout could be improved. And finally, some suggested the creation of a student card, advocating acting differently when dealing with an 18-year-old and a 45-year-old, etc.

In conclusion, what emerges from this survey is that young Belgian consumers would come to the pharmacy more often if they fell ill more often, so they still see pharmacies very much as a medical place, whereas they are increasingly becoming places of well-being. This is something that Belgian Gen Z girls find easier to integrate than boys, since in the questionnaire they mention the fact that they would like to find more skin care and wellness products in pharmaceutical outlets. In addition, the staff employed must be chosen with care, as they play a decisive role in the consumer's purchasing journey. And finally, it is vital that pharmacies keep up with the times, digitize, develop newsletters, increase their visibility via social networks, keep abreast of trends (skin care, beauty products, alternative medicine, etc.) and display all this attractively in their premises.

9 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

9.1 Summary

This thesis explored the behavior of Belgian Generation Z in pharmacies, focusing on the psychological factors influencing their consumer decisions. Several theoretical elements were examined to provide a solid foundation for the research.

First, the Belgian pharmaceutical context was analyzed. It revealed a growing market driven by demographic changes, particularly an aging population. However, a clear decline in in-store visits was observed, especially among younger generations, due to the rise of online pharmacies and changing consumer habits. While pharmacies remain essential for health-related needs, they must adapt to new trends such as wellness, personalization, and digital convenience.

Next, the Generation Z profile was defined. This generation, born between 1997 and 2012, is known for being digitally native, socially conscious, and health aware. They value authenticity, personalization, and convenience. Gen Z tends to seek holistic health solutions and relies heavily on social media, online reviews, and peer influence before making purchasing decisions. Their strong interest in skincare and wellness products also shapes their expectations when visiting pharmacies.

The marketing strategies section highlighted the importance of understanding the target audience through segmentation, targeting, and positioning. Both traditional and digital marketing approaches were considered, with a focus on digital tools being particularly relevant for Gen Z. Sensory marketing, value-driven branding, and influencer marketing are effective strategies to reach and engage this generation.

The core of the conceptual framework revolved around consumer behavior, particularly the psychological, personal, and social factors that influence it. Psychological factors such as perception, motivation, needs (based on Maslow's hierarchy), attitude, and cognitive dissonance play a key role in shaping Gen Z's purchasing process. Personal factors like age, gender, lifestyle, and income also affect buying decisions. Social elements, including family, community, and culture, influence preferences and trust in products and services.

Lastly, store design was presented as a strategic tool to guide consumer behavior. A well-designed store layout, clear navigation, attractive product displays, and a pleasant ambiance can significantly enhance the customer experience and stimulate unplanned purchases.

This theoretical foundation provided the necessary context to understand how and why young Belgians engage with pharmacies and how these businesses can adapt to better meet their expectations.

9.2 Conclusions

This thesis provided clear insights into the behavior of Belgian Generation Z in pharmacies. Through detailed analysis and data interpretation, it became evident that while Gen Z does frequent pharmacies, their needs and expectations diverge significantly from those of previous generations. Unlike older consumers who tend to focus primarily on medical prescriptions and traditional health services, Gen Z approaches pharmacies with a broader perspective, seeking personalized experiences, emotional connection, and a sense of trust. Their decisions are heavily influenced by psychological factors such as perceived authenticity, tailored advice, and the overall atmosphere of the store. Elements like the role and approachability of the pharmacist, the

cleanliness and aesthetic of the space, as well as accessibility and convenience, emerged as critical determinants of their satisfaction.

The study also revealed that Generation Z shows a marked interest in wellness-related products, skincare routines, and alternative or natural remedies, indicating a shift towards holistic health management. However, many participants expressed a sense of disconnect, feeling that most pharmacies are not yet fully equipped to meet these evolving preferences. There is a growing demand for a more dynamic and interactive customer experience. A stronger digital presence, including user-friendly websites, active social media engagement, and online consultations, along with a more diverse product offering, would greatly enhance the appeal of pharmacies for this demographic. Moreover, modern and transparent communication strategies are essential to build loyalty and align with the values of younger consumers, who prioritize authenticity and social responsibility.

In conclusion, this research highlights the urgent need for pharmacies to adapt and transform. To remain relevant, they must evolve beyond their traditional role as healthcare providers and embrace a more holistic identity as trusted wellness partners. This thesis enabled the author to gain a deeper understanding of the intersection between marketing strategies, psychological drivers, and shifting consumer expectations. It underscores the importance of staying attuned to generational changes and offers valuable guidance for businesses aiming to engage with the future of healthcare and retail.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

As a reminder, the aim of this thesis is to help pharmacies attract more young Belgians into their stores. To achieve this, the author did a great deal of research into the theoretical points that frame the subject of her writing. She then interviewed a number of young Belgians belonging to Gen Z. As a result, she now has an overview of the Belgian pharmaceutical market and is able to give some recommendations to Belgian pharmacies.

10.1 Pharmacist

As the quantitative study clearly showed, pharmacists play a vital role in Gen Z's shopping experience at the pharmacy. It is therefore of the utmost importance that these staff are properly trained, so that they can best meet customers' expectations and advise them in the best possible way.

Like all good salespeople, they should also respect strict rules of good conduct. They must be smiling and welcoming to customers who come into their pharmacies. As customers may have personal and medical concerns that they might consider embarrassing, pharmacists must make it a point of honor to remain impassive and in no way judge customers' problems. Even if the customer's situation does not correspond to the pharmacist's values.

And finally, even if the aim is to make a high turnover, the pharmacist must advise the customer according to what would help him best, even if he ends up recommending a cheaper product. Consumers will appreciate this and be grateful that he does not insist on making them over-consume and spend more money than they need to.

10.2 Product range

In their responses to the questionnaire, Belgium's Gen Z expressed their desire to see the range of products on offer in pharmacies expanded. It is vital that pharmacies are able to meet customers' expectations. If customers want more of a certain product, the pharmacy must make it a point of honor to find it and offer it in its store.

Gen Z consumers pay a great deal of attention to their well-being, as theoretical research has shown (Hamstra, 2024). Pharmacies should therefore offer more wellness and skincare products.

In addition, Gen Z is one of the generations that has less faith in traditional medicine, as noted in the chapter on Generation Z on page 10. Pharmacies must therefore adapt their products to these new beliefs and train their pharmacists in alternative medicine, as well as offering products related to this medicine.

10.3 Pharmacy layout and design

The way in which the product range is presented in the pharmacy also plays a very important role.

Certain products, which can be used together, can be placed next to each other, thus increasing sales. Secondly, start-up products should be placed at eye level, so that consumers' eyes are more easily drawn to them. Alternatively, promotions could be applied to products more often.

Pharmacies also need to ensure that customers have an easy route through the store and an overview of the product range. They can consider segmenting product shelves by need or lifestyle (e.g., "Student essentials," "Stress relief," "Vegan & eco-friendly") to help Gen Z find what they relate to.

Finally, creating the right ambience will attract more customers and keep them in the pharmacy longer. Soft, soothing music could be played, along with a light, pleasant scent. Lights in the pharmacy can be made more yellow, to avoid white lights, which are more aggressive.

10.4 The digitalization

Gen Z would also like pharmacies to move with the times. As the first generation to grow up with the Internet and electronics, Gen Z is used to dealing with them all the time.

Young people would therefore like pharmacies to set up a newsletter that target young customers with updates, discounts or health advice. Pharmacies should also develop an online presence through websites and social media platforms, particularly Instagram and TikTok, to promote products, tips, and promotions. Or they should at least keep up to date with current trends on the networks.

Finally, pharmacies could Offer click-and-collect services or e-reservation systems for added convenience.

11 FINAL WORDS AND EVALUATION

This thesis has allowed the author to explore in depth a topic that is both complex and highly relevant: the behavior of Belgian Generation Z in pharmacies, with a focus on psychological factors. Reflecting on the work accomplished, the author can now evaluate the process and its outcomes more critically.

The main objective of this thesis was to understand the consumer habits of Belgian Gen Z in pharmacies and to identify the psychological factors that influence their behavior. Through a combination of theoretical research and a quantitative survey, the author believes this objective has been successfully achieved. The insights gathered allowed her to formulate relevant and actionable recommendations for pharmacy professionals.

Nonetheless, the methodology used had its limitations. The quantitative survey was insightful, but the sample size remained modest, and not all segments of Generation Z were equally represented, especially in terms of age ranges, even if the author has done her best.

Overall, the research process went smoothly, but it did take more time than initially expected. In particular, collecting responses and analyzing the open-ended questions required more effort and patience than the author had planned. Still, she found this stage enriching, as it provided qualitative insights that complemented the statistical data.

Ethically, the study met all necessary standards. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary and anonymous, and no personal or sensitive information was collected. Respondents were clearly informed of the purpose of the research, and care was taken to ensure the questions were respectful, inclusive, and non-intrusive.

The results obtained through the research can be considered reliable within the scope of the study. They were derived from a well-structured questionnaire, carefully analyzed, and interpreted with consideration of potential biases. Despite certain limitations, the consistency in the responses and the patterns observed lend credibility to the findings.

In terms of practical application, these results can be used by pharmacy owners and marketing professionals to better understand and connect with Gen Z consumers. They emphasize the importance of customer experience, digital presence, and trust in pharmacist. The findings can directly inform strategies in communication, store layout, product assortment, and digital tools that appeal to younger customers.

Looking forward, the author would recommend expanding this research with a larger and more diverse sample and including qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups. Collaborating with pharmacies to test specific recommendations in real life could also provide valuable feedback and validate the impact of proposed changes.

On a personal level, the author has learned a great deal from this project, not only about consumer psychology and marketing theory, but also about managing a long-term academic project, conducting research, and analyzing human behavior in a real-world context. If she was to do this work again, she would launch the questionnaire earlier and consider a mixed-methods approach for richer data.

In conclusion, the author is proud of this work and the results obtained. The thesis fulfils the initial objectives and offers practical contributions, both academically and professionally. It reflects the effort, curiosity, and commitment she invested throughout the research process, and it has strengthened her motivation to pursue a career related to marketing and consumer behavior in the Belgian market.

REFERENCES

Albrecht, M. G., Green, M., & Hoffman, L. (2023, January 25). 3.2 Factors that influence consumer buying behavior - Principles of Marketing | OpenStax. <https://openstax.org/books/principles-marketing/pages/3-2-factors-that-influence-consumer-buying-behavior>

Brace, I. (2018). Questionnaire design (4th ed.). KoganPage.

Chapman, L. (2024, October 28). The five steps of the consumer buying process: Explained. Product Marketing Alliance. <https://www.productmarketingalliance.com/what-are-the-5-steps-in-the-consumer-buying-process/>

Charm, T., Dhar, R., & Haas, S. (2020, July 24). Understanding and shaping consumer behavior in the next normal. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/growth-marketing-and-sales/our-insights/understanding-and-shaping-consumer-behavior-in-the-next-normal>

Cechi, H. (2024, April 2). Unlock Sensory Marketing : What it is and Why it Works. Glion. <https://www.glion.edu/magazine/what-is-sensory-marketing/>

Chris. (2022, February 3). How to Identify Barriers to Purchase (and Crush Revenue Goals!) | starlight analytics blog. <https://www.starlightanalytics.com/article/barriers-to-purchase>

Craig, C. S., & Douglas, S. P. (2000). International Marketing Research (2nd ed.). Wiley.

Daniels, C., & Daniels, C. (2023, June 16). Influencer marketing and why it's important today | University of Fairfax. University of Fairfax. <https://ufairfax.edu/influencer-marketing-and-why-its-important-today/>

De Mooij, M. (2011). Consumer Behavior and culture (2nd ed.). Sage.

Forsey, C. (2024, October 18). What is Marketing, and What's Its Purpose ? HubSpot. <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/what-is-marketing>

Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z : why you need all three in the workplace. (s. d.). Robert Walters. Retrieved January 23, 2025, from <https://www.robertwalters.be/insights/hiring-advice/blog/Gen-X-Gen-Y-and-Gen-Z-why-you-need-all-three-in-the-workplace.html>

Hamstra, M. (2024, February 23). Generation next: Capturing millennial, Gen Z shoppers. Drug Store News. <https://drugstorenews.com/generation-next-capturing-millennial-gen-z-shoppers>

Herman, L. (2019). OTC growth in Belgium: - Market trends and evolution - How the market will develop. IQVIA consumer health. Retrieved February 11, 2025, from [https://www.bachi.be/docs/events/OTC%20growth%20%20in%20Belgium%20\(IQVIA\).pdf](https://www.bachi.be/docs/events/OTC%20growth%20%20in%20Belgium%20(IQVIA).pdf)

Kornbluth, H. (2022, August 17). Consumer Behaviour Theory : How has it changed. FastPay. <https://fastpayltd.co.uk/blog/consumer-behaviour-theory-how-has-it-changed/#:~:text=Consumer%20behaviour%20theory%20is%20the,consumer%20will%20make%20a%20purchase.>

Lincoln, A. (2023, November 18). Maximizing Consumer Behavior with Effective Store Design. <https://ollengroup.com/en/insights/article/power-of-store-design-influencing-consumer-behavior>

Mirjam. (2025, January 17). Reliability and validity of your thesis - Topscriptie. Topscriptie. <https://www.topscriptie.nl/en/reliability-and-validity-of-your->

[thesis/#:~:text=Validity%20means%20that%20the%20results,up%20different%20questions%20\(indicators\).](#)

Moravek. (2023, August 21). How Gen Z is impacting the pharmaceutical industry. Moravek, Inc. <https://www.moravek.com/how-gen-z-is-impacting-the-pharmaceutical-industry/>

Next generation or lost generation? Children, young people and the pandemic (PE 659.404). (2020). Retrieved January 23, 2025, from [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/659404/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)659404_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/659404/EPRS_BRI(2020)659404_EN.pdf)

Statista. (s. d.). Pharmacies - *Belgium* | Statista market forecast. <https://www.statista.com/outlook/hmo/pharmacies/belgium#analyst-opinion>

Statista. (2025, January 14). Consumers that would shop mostly online vs. offline in Belgium 2023, by generation. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1410211/mostly-online-vs-offline-shopping-belgium-by-generation/>

Talerico, A. (2023, November 22). Market segmentation and targeting. Corporate Finance Institute. <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/management/market-segmentation-and-targeting/>

Team, I. (2024, July 26). Marketing Strategy: what it is, how it works, and how to create one. Investopedia. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/marketing-strategy.asp>

Theoretical models of consumer behaviour : a literature review. (2022). International Journal Of Education Humanities And Social Science, 5, 112. <https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2022.0368>

What is omnichannel marketing? (2022, August 17). McKinsey & Company.
<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-omnichannel-marketing>

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

Hello! Thank you for participating in this survey. This questionnaire is designed to help the author of the thesis understand your habits, preferences, and thoughts about shopping in pharmacies. The survey targets young Belgian between 15 and 28 years old and will take about 5 minutes to complete. Your responses will remain anonymous.

Elisa Tinel.

1. Current Habits

1.1. How often do you visit a pharmacy?

Weekly or more

2-3 times a month

Once a month

Once each 3 months

2 times a year

Never

1.2. Why do you usually visit a pharmacy? (Select all that apply)

To buy prescription medicine

To buy over-the-counter medicine (e.g., painkillers, cold medicine)

To purchase skincare or beauty products

To buy vitamins or supplements

For medical advice from the pharmacist

Other (please specify)

1.3. Do you use online pharmacies?

Yes, often (almost for every purchase)

Yes, sometimes (averagely the half of your purchases)

Yes, but rarely

Never

1.4. If you shop online for pharmaceutical products, what are the main reasons? (Select all that apply)

Convenience

Lower prices

More product variety

Privacy

Other (please specify)

2. Psychological Factors

2.1. How important are the following factors when you decide to purchase products in a pharmacy? (Rate on a scale of 1-5, where 5 = extremely important, 4 = very important, 3 = somewhat important, 2 = not very important and 1 = not at all important.)

The overall layout and design of the pharmacy

Promotions and discounts available

Proximity and accessibility of the pharmacy

Quality of customer service

Recommendations from pharmacists

Price of products

Cleanliness of the pharmacy

Atmosphere of the pharmacy

Availability of specific brands or products

Recommendations from friends or family

2.2. Which of these factors influences you the most when making spontaneous (unplanned) purchases in a pharmacy?

(Select up to 2)

Attractive promotions or discounts
Eye-catching product displays or store layout
Friendly advice from the pharmacist
New or trending products
Recommendations from friends or influencers
Accessible product prices

2.3. How much do you trust the advice given by pharmacists?

Completely trust
Somewhat trust
Neither trust nor distrust
Somewhat distrust
Completely distrust

3. Behavior in Pharmacies

3.1. How likely are you to purchase products that are recommended by a pharmacist?

Very likely
Likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Unlikely
Very unlikely

3.2. Do you feel more comfortable purchasing products after receiving detailed explanations about them?

Yes, definitely
Yes, somewhat

Not very much

No, not at all

3.4. How likely are you to explore and purchase non-prescription products (e.g., skincare, supplements) while waiting at the pharmacy?

Very likely

Likely

Neither likely nor unlikely

Unlikely

Very unlikely

4. Demographic

4.1 What is your age?

15-17

18-20

21-23

24-26

27-28

4.2. What is your gender?

Male

Female

Other

4.3. In which region of Belgium do you currently live?

Brussels

Flanders

Wallonia

5. Open-Ended Questions

5.1. Please describe a positive shopping experience you've had in a pharmacy and what made it stand out?

5.2. Please describe a negative shopping experience you've had in a pharmacy?

5.3. What would encourage you to visit a pharmacy more often?

5.4. Do you have any suggestions for pharmacies to better meet the needs of people your age?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback is invaluable and will help the author of the thesis better understand the preferences and psychology of the Gen Z audience in Belgium's pharmaceutical market.