



## Motivational drivers of fitness product purchase: Insights from Generation Z and Millennials

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### Abstract

The motivations driving fitness product purchases have undergone significant transformation among Generation Z and Millennials, shaped by rising health consciousness, digital social influence and evolving lifestyle aspirations. Against the backdrop of India's rapidly expanding fitness industry and Assam's emergence as a sports hub, understanding these generational dynamics is strategically important. This study aims to identify the key motivational factors influencing fitness product purchases among Generation Z and Millennials; compare purchasing behaviour across the two generational cohorts and identify emerging consumer trends likely to shape the fitness market.

Quantitative data for this study were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 396 respondents (198 from each generational cohort) engaged in regular physical activity in Guwahati, Assam, using purposive sampling. The study finds that injury prevention (68.18%), personal fitness goals (63.63%) and long-term wellness (56.81%) emerged as the dominant motivational factors across both groups. Generation Z prioritises health, safety and sustainability while Millennials are more brand-conscious and goal-driven. Sportswear dominates product preferences (81.82%) across both cohorts. Looking ahead, product quality, sustainability and technological innovation are the primary drivers of future spending. The findings reveal distinct generational profiles that carry actionable implications for fitness brands. Businesses targeting Generation Z should emphasise functionality, affordability, eco-friendliness and digital integration, while Millennials respond more strongly to premium branding and structured fitness programmes. These insights contribute to the growing body of knowledge on generational consumer behaviour in emerging fitness markets.

**Keywords:** Consumer motivation, buying behavior, fitness products, Generation Z, Millennials, Self-Determination Theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, India

### Introduction

Since ancient times, sports have played an important role in the life of mankind at individual as well as at the society level irrespective of the national boundaries. In due course of time, the sports have evolved into a formal economic sector connected with economic growth. The sports, besides contributing to economic prosperity, it would lead to build up healthier societies and natural ecosystems. India is also witnessing an encouraging trend in sports related activities. According to the Global Economy of Physical Activity report (Global Wellness Institute, 2019) <sup>[5]</sup>, India ranked thirteenth among the top twenty fitness markets worldwide, with the industry valued at USD 13.4 billion in 2018. Projections for the India Fitness Market through 2028 <sup>[7]</sup> indicate continued growth across all demographic segments, driven by increasing consumer willingness to invest in health and wellness products and services (Ken Research, n.d.). Among those propelling this shift, Generation Z (born approximately 1997–2012) and Millennials (born approximately 1981–1996) are the most actively engaged cohorts, for whom fitness has evolved from a discretionary activity into a core component of personal identity and social expression, supported by increased health awareness, growing interest in sports events at national and international level, influence of social media, changing lifestyle, promotion of sports at the level of the government, development of sports infrastructure etc.

These generational differences in values, digital presence and digital financial behaviour are consequential for marketers and researchers alike. McKinsey & Company

(2024) <sup>[9]</sup> report that younger consumers are more likely to purchase wellness products and to integrate fitness into their personal identity and digital presence. Mintel (2023) <sup>[10]</sup> similarly found that Millennials are investing substantially in wearable fitness devices and workout gear as part of a broader strategy for managing lifestyle-related health concerns. It is in this context that this growing trend of importance of fitness industry needs to be examined in the State of Assam. This is particularly important because fitness and organised sports have long been embedded in Assam's cultural fabric, with strong grassroots participation in athletics and growing public advocacy for physical education in schools and colleges (Press Information Bureau, n.d.). Government initiatives such as Khel Maharan have further institutionalised support for sports talent development (DSYW Assam, n.d.). Assam's declared ambition to become a national sports capital (Times of India, n.d.) is manifest in its increasing hosting of major tournaments and a commensurate rise in the number of fitness retail outlets, particularly in Guwahati.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the motivational drivers shaping fitness product purchases among Generation Z and Millennials in the city of Guwahati. It draws on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to structure the analysis, providing a theoretically grounded framework for understanding how physiological, safety, esteem and self-actualisation need, alongside intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, translate into consumer behaviour. The findings are intended to inform marketing strategy, product

development and policy for stakeholders in India's expanding fitness economy.

## Literature Review

### 1. Consumer Decision-Making in Sports and Fitness Markets

Research on consumer behaviour in sports and fitness contexts has consistently identified a constellation of economic, social and psychological factors that shape purchasing decisions. Wang *et al.* (2022)<sup>[15]</sup>, in a study of Chinese consumers across age groups, identified three principal categories of influence: consumer expectations and environmental context; transmission and peer support systems; and product appeal. Their findings highlight that younger consumers in their twenties demonstrate greater decision-making independence compared to older cohorts, a pattern that has significant implications for the generational comparison undertaken here. Pourzarnegar (2024)<sup>[11]</sup> similarly found that purchasers of sports equipment are not impulsive buyers; instead, their decisions are shaped by brand sensitivity, quality consciousness, price sensitivity, loyalty and fashion-orientation- a multi-dimensional profile that resists reduction to a single motivating factor.

### 2. Generational Differences and Social Influence

The role of generational identity and digital social influence has attracted growing scholarly attention. Kahawandala and Peter (2020)<sup>[6]</sup> extended the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to examine Generation Z's purchasing behaviour, finding that social identity, peer group norms and digital engagement are major determinants of product choice. As digital natives, Generation Z exhibits high confidence in online marketplaces and relies heavily on social media trends and influencer recommendations when selecting fitness products. Crucially, normative influences like societal expectations and personal moral obligations render their purchasing decisions less individualistic and more socially negotiated than those of earlier generations.

### 3. Psychological and Self-Determined Motivation

Lee *et al.* (2022)<sup>[8]</sup> investigated the role of self-determined motivation in exercise adherence among Generation Z using the SDT framework developed by Deci and Ryan (2000, 2020)<sup>[3, 13]</sup>. Their findings indicate that intrinsic motivation and identified regulation positively predict exercise commitment, whereas external regulation including social and peer pressure is negatively associated with adherence. Gender differences were also observed: women tend to exercise in response to internalised pressures such as guilt, while men are more likely to engage in fitness for personal enjoyment. These motivational patterns are directly relevant to understanding consumer spending, since sustained engagement in fitness activity is a predictor of ongoing product investment.

### 4. Financial Behaviour and Spending Patterns

Bona (2018)<sup>[1]</sup> demonstrated that financial discipline, budgeting habits and family background exert meaningful influence on consumer spending behaviour. Female consumers exhibit greater financial discipline and planned purchasing behaviour, while male consumers show a more pro-debt orientation in their purchasing decisions. These findings are particularly pertinent given that the present study's sample is predominantly male among Millennials,

potentially influencing observed differences in purchase frequency and product category preferences between the two generational groups.

### 5. Gaps in the Existing Literature

Although prior studies have examined various dimensions of fitness consumer behaviour, a significant gap remains in research that directly compares Generation Z and Millennials within the specific context of fitness product purchasing. Most existing work focuses either on general consumer behaviour (Wang *et al.*, 2022; Pourzarnegar, 2024)<sup>[11, 15]</sup> or exercise motivation (Lee *et al.*, 2022)<sup>[15]</sup>, without explicitly linking these factors to product acquisition. Furthermore, while the impact of digital engagement (Kahawandala & Peter, 2020) and financial behaviour (Bona, 2018)<sup>[1, 6]</sup> have each been examined independently, their interactive effects on generational fitness consumption remain underexplored. The present study addresses this gap through an empirical comparative analysis grounded in SDT and Maslow's framework.

### Research Questions

- What are the key motivational factors influencing the purchase of fitness products among Generation Z and Millennials?
- How does the purchasing behaviour of Generation Z differ from that of Millennials when buying fitness products?
- What are the emerging consumer trends likely to shape future demand for fitness products?

### Objectives

- To analyse the motivational factors that influence the purchase of fitness products among Generation Z and Millennials.
- To compare the purchasing behaviour of Generation Z and Millennials with regard to fitness product acquisition.
- To identify future trends in consumer behaviour relating to fitness products.

### Methodology

#### 1. Research Design

A quantitative approach was adopted for the study. A structured questionnaire was prepared to capture patterns of the selected sample. The city of Guwahati, the principal commercial and cultural centre of Assam, was selected as the study area on account of its demographically diverse population, its concentration of fitness retail outlets and its role as the primary urban market for fitness products in the region. Purposive (judgmental) sampling was employed to recruit 396 respondents who were actively engaged in sport or regular physical activity. The sample was equally divided between Generation Z (n = 198; aged 18–26) and Millennials (n = 198; aged 27–42), ensuring a balanced basis for generational comparison.

#### 2. Data Collection Instruments

The structured questionnaire comprised items assessing demographic characteristics, purchase frequency, product category preferences and the degree to which each of seven theoretically derived motivational factors (injury prevention, personal fitness goals, long-term wellness, self-image and confidence, social influence, health and well-being, and

brand and status symbolism) influenced purchasing decisions. Response options were binary (Yes/No), and positive responses were subsequently aggregated and expressed as percentages. Secondary data were sourced from published research journals, government reports, industry reports and institutional databases to contextualise primary findings.

### 3. Analytical Framework

Data analysis was guided by two complementary theoretical frameworks. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was applied to classify motivational factors along a spectrum from physiological and safety needs (e.g., injury prevention, health) through esteem needs (e.g., self-image, brand symbolism) to self-actualisation (e.g., personal fitness goals, long-term wellness). Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) [3] was used to distinguish intrinsic motivations (personal enjoyment, fitness aspirations) from extrinsic motivations (social influence, brand status), enabling a nuanced interpretation of the generational differences observed.

## Data Analysis and Results

### 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 396 respondents. The sample comprised equal numbers of Generation Z (n = 198) and Millennial (n = 198) participants. Gender distribution differed markedly between cohorts: Generation Z had a more balanced gender split (45.5% male, 54.5% female), whereas the Millennial sub-sample was predominantly male (86.4% male, 13.6% female). This asymmetry may reflect differential recruitment through fitness venues and should be borne in mind when interpreting gender-related patterns.

Occupational status varied predictably with age. The majority of Generation Z respondents were students (72.7%), reflecting the cohort's life stage, whereas Millennials were primarily employed (59.1%) or self-employed (27.3%). Unemployment was more prevalent among Generation Z (15.2%) than Millennials (9.1%), which may impose financial constraints on the former group's purchasing capacity.

**Table 1:** Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 396)

Variable	Category	Gen Z (n=198)	Millennials (n=198)	Total (n)	Total (%)
Age	18–26 (Generation Z)	198	—	198	50%
	27–42 (Millennials)	—	198	198	50%
Gender	Male	90	171	261	65.9%
	Female	108	27	135	34.09%
Occupation	Student	144	9	153	38.63%
	Employed	18	117	135	34.09%
	Self-employed	6	54	60	15.15%
	Unemployed	30	18	48	12.12%

Source: Field Study.

### 2. Objective 1: Motivational Factors Influencing Fitness Product Purchases

Table 2 presents the distribution of positive responses for each motivational factor across the full sample and disaggregated by generational cohort. The analysis reveals that injury prevention (overall: 68.18%) is the single most influential motivator, indicating that safety and risk minimisation are paramount considerations for fitness consumers. Achieving personal fitness goals (overall: 63.63%) and long-term wellness and development (overall: 56.81%) rank second and third, respectively, suggesting that instrumental and aspirational health motivations are more salient than hedonic or status-related considerations. Brand and status symbolism (overall: 27.02%) is the least influential factor overall, confirming that consumers in this sample prioritise functional over symbolic value.

Generational differences are pronounced. Generation Z records higher positive response rates than Millennials on injury prevention (77.27% vs. 59.09%), health and well-being (54.55% vs. 36.36%), long-term wellness (77.27% vs. 59.09%), and self-image and confidence (59.09% vs. 54.55%). Conversely, Millennials assign considerably greater weight to brand and status symbolism (36.36% vs. 18.18%), consistent with the established finding that older Millennials are more likely to use consumption as a vehicle for social signalling (Kahawandala & Peter, 2020) [6]. Social influence exerts a broadly comparable effect across both groups, though Generation Z (50.0%) is marginally more susceptible than Millennials (45.45%), likely reflecting the

former's greater embeddedness in digital fitness communities.

**Table 2:** Distribution of Positive Responses for Motivational Factors (%)

Motivational Factor	Gen Z (%) (out of 198)	Millennials (%) (out of 198)
Injury Prevention	77.27	59.09
Personal Fitness Goals	68.18	59.09
Long-term Wellness & Development	77.27	59.09
Self-image & Confidence	59.09	54.55
Social Influence	50.0	45.45
Health & Well-being	54.55	36.36
Brand & Status Symbolism	18.18	36.36

Source: Primary data.

### 3. Objective 2: Comparing Purchasing Behaviour

Purchase frequency data indicate that the majority of respondents across both groups (65.9%) purchase fitness products only when necessary- a pattern more pronounced among Generation Z (70.71%) than Millennials (61.11%). Notably, monthly purchasing was reported exclusively by Millennials (13.6%), and Millennials were also more likely to purchase every three to six months (20.2% vs. 12.63% for Generation Z). These patterns suggest that Millennials maintain a more consistent and planned purchasing rhythm, while Generation Z adopts a more reactive, need-driven approach, potentially constrained by their predominantly student status and associated income limitations.

Table 3 presents product category preferences. Sportswear dominates across both cohorts (81.82%), reflecting both functional necessity and the influence of athleisure culture. Beyond this shared preference, generational divergences are evident: Generation Z shows a stronger preference for smart fitness devices (19.75%), consistent with their technological

fluency, while Millennials invest more in fitness equipment (22.66%) and gym memberships (8.99%), indicating a preference for structured, facility-based fitness engagement. Nutritional supplement purchases are relatively modest overall, though Generation Z (6.27%) outpaces Millennials (2.52%).

**Table 3:** Product Category Preferences by Generation

Product Category	Gen Z (n)	Gen Z (%)	Millennials (n)	Millennials (%)	Total (n)	Total (%)
Sportswear	180	56.43	144	51.80	324	81.82
Smart Fitness Devices	63	19.75	39	14.03	102	25.76
Fitness Equipment	45	14.11	63	22.66	108	27.27
Nutritional Supplements	20	6.27	7	2.52	27	6.82
Gym Memberships	11	3.45	25	8.99	36	9.09

**Source:** Primary data.

**Note:** Percentages in the Total (%) column are calculated using the total sample size of 396 respondents. Since respondents could select more than one product category, the total percentages exceed 100 percent.

**4. Objective 3: Future Trends in Consumer Behaviour**

Physical activity preferences provide an indicative basis for forecasting product demand. Running and jogging is the most prevalent activity across the full sample (38.64%), with Generation Z (41.41%) slightly ahead of Millennials (35.9%), suggesting sustained demand for performance footwear, technical apparel and wearable fitness trackers. Home workouts are significantly more popular among Generation Z (40.91%) than Millennials (18.18%), pointing to growth in home fitness equipment, resistance training accessories and digital fitness platforms. Sports participation rates are comparable across groups (Generation Z: 28.28%; Millennials: 31.82%), while gym attendance is modestly higher among Generation Z (22.22% vs. 18.18%) - a pattern

that may sustain gym membership and supplement markets. Table 4 summarises the factors that respondents identified as likely to influence their future fitness spending. Product quality (64.89%) and sustainability and eco-friendliness (48.73%) are the leading drivers, with Generation Z recording substantially higher scores on both sustainability (65.65% vs. 31.81%) and affordability (55.55% vs. 26.26%). Advanced technology and innovation (35.6%) are also disproportionately salient for Generation Z (45.45% vs. 25.75%). Social media and influencer promotions (10.6%) exert minimal direct influence on purchasing intentions for both groups, suggesting that while digital platforms shape awareness and aspiration, they do not translate straightforwardly into purchase motivation.

**Table 4:** Factors Influencing Future Fitness Product Spending (%)

Factor Influencing Future Spending	Gen Z (%)	Millennials (%)	Total (%)
Product Quality	68.18	61.61	64.89
Sustainability & Eco-friendliness	65.65	31.81	48.73
Affordability	55.55	26.26	40.9
Advanced Technology & Innovation	45.45	25.75	35.6
Social Media & Influencer Promotions	15.15	6.06	10.6

**Source:** Primary data.

**Note:** Percentages in the Total (%) column are calculated using the total sample size of 396 respondents. Since respondents could select more than one product category, the total percentages exceed 100 percent.

**Key Findings**

**1. Motivational Factors**

- Injury prevention, personal fitness goals, and long-term wellness are the three dominant motivational factors across the sample as a whole, confirming the primacy of functional and health-oriented drivers over symbolic or status-related ones.
- Generation Z places significantly greater emphasis on injury prevention, health, long-term wellness, and self-image than Millennials, reflecting a preventive and future-oriented stance towards fitness investment.
- Millennials assign considerably greater weight to brand and status symbolism (36.36% vs. 18.18%), indicating that extrinsic and identity-based motivations are more prominent in the older cohort.
- Social influence affects both groups comparably, though Generation Z is marginally more responsive to peer recommendations and digital fitness communities.

**2. Purchasing Behaviour**

- Millennials purchase fitness products more frequently and consistently, with monthly purchasing reported exclusively within this cohort, while Generation Z tends to buy only when necessary.
- Generation Z favours technologically advanced fitness solutions (smart devices), while Millennials invest preferentially in physical equipment and gym memberships.
- Sportswear is the dominant product category for both generations, illustrating the convergence of fitness functionality and athleisure fashion.
- Financial constraints associated with student status appear to moderate Generation Z's purchasing frequency, even where motivational drivers are strong.

**3. Future Trends**

- Home-based and digital fitness solutions are likely to grow, led by Generation Z's strong preference for home workouts and smart fitness technology.

- Sustainability and eco-friendliness are emerging as critical purchase criteria, especially for Generation Z, signalling a structural shift in consumer values that fitness brands will need to accommodate.
- Affordability and quality will be decisive for Generation Z, suggesting demand for value-positioned, high-performance product lines.
- Social media influence, while important for brand awareness, has limited direct impact on purchase intent and should not be overstated as a driver of sales conversion.

## Discussion

The findings of this study broadly corroborate and extend existing theoretical frameworks. The primacy of injury prevention and personal fitness goals as motivational factors is consistent with Maslow's framework, in which safety and self-actualisation needs are foundational drivers of behaviour. The greater salience of intrinsic motivations among Generation Z (health, prevention, long-term wellness) aligns with the predictions of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2020) [3, 13]: intrinsically motivated consumers are more likely to engage in sustained, self-regulated behaviour, including the ongoing purchase of fitness-supporting products. Conversely, the stronger role of brand symbolism among Millennials is consistent with identified regulation and, to some extent, introjected regulation within the SDT framework, where external referents and social comparison play a mediating role.

The occupational and financial profile of the sample provides an important contextual lens. The higher unemployment and student status rates among Generation Z translate directly into constrained budgets, which in turn produce the reactive, need-based purchasing pattern observed. This finding has implications for pricing strategy: fitness brands targeting Generation Z must offer compelling value propositions at accessible price points, potentially through modular product lines, subscription models, or instalment payment options. Millennials, by contrast, exhibit the financial stability and discretionary income associated with consistent, planned fitness expenditure, making them receptive to premium positioning and loyalty programmes.

The observed divergence in technology adoption carries important theoretical implications. Generation Z's preference for smart fitness devices reflects not merely a generational affinity for technology but a fundamentally different conception of fitness tracking and self-quantification as integral to personal wellness management. This has product innovation implications, as the boundaries between fitness hardware, health monitoring and digital wellness platforms continue to blur. Millennials' investment in gym memberships and physical equipment, meanwhile, suggests a preference for external accountability structures—a preference that fitness brands and gym operators can leverage through community-building and structured programme offerings.

The finding that social media and influencer marketing exert minimal direct influence on purchasing decisions (10.6% overall) warrants careful interpretation. It does not imply that digital platforms are irrelevant; rather, it suggests that their role is primarily informational and aspirational rather than directly transactional. Practitioners should calibrate their digital marketing investment accordingly prioritising

awareness and community engagement over direct-response conversion campaigns.

## Conclusion

This study has mapped the motivational landscape of fitness product purchasing among Generation Z and Millennials in Guwahati, Assam, providing both theoretical contributions and practical guidance for the fitness industry. The two generational cohorts present meaningfully distinct consumer profiles that resist homogenisation. Generation Z is characterised by health-preventive motivation, technological engagement, price sensitivity and a growing commitment to sustainability. Millennials are distinguished by brand consciousness, structured fitness engagement, greater purchasing frequency and a stronger orientation towards premium products and status.

These differences carry direct implications for marketing strategy. Brands seeking to engage Generation Z should develop affordable, high-quality, eco-responsible and technologically integrated product offerings, supported by digital community experiences rather than traditional influencer campaigns. For Millennials, premium branding, structured fitness programmes and loyalty-based engagement are more likely to be effective. These are not mutually exclusive strategies, but they require deliberate segmentation and targeted execution.

The study also contributes to the theorisation of generational consumer behaviour within the context of an emerging regional fitness market. The application of Maslow's Hierarchy and SDT to fitness product purchasing in an Indian urban setting offers a replicable analytical framework for future research in comparable markets.

## Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample is geographically restricted to Guwahati and may not be representative of Generation Z and Millennial fitness consumers in other Indian cities or rural contexts. Second, the predominantly male Millennial sub-sample introduces a potential gender confound that limits the generalisability of gender-related inferences. Third, the binary (Yes/No) response format, while facilitating aggregation, does not capture the intensity or relative weighting of motivational factors. Future research should employ Likert-scale or ranking instruments, and consider longitudinal designs to track how motivational drivers evolve over time. Extending the study to other Indian metropolitan and semi-urban centres would substantially enhance the external validity of the findings. Additionally, the qualitative interview data, which was collected as part of this study, should be reported and thematically analysed to complement and deepen the quantitative findings presented here.

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