

Contextualizing Online Consumption: Situational Drivers of E-Commerce Among University Students in South Korea

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Abstract:

This study investigated the situational factors influencing online shopping behaviour among younger consumers in South Korea, with a particular focus on Daegu region. In-depth interviews were conducted with ten participants born between 1997 and 2005 to explore how situational contexts affect their channel preferences across three product categories: groceries, clothing, and furniture. Drawing on Belk's (1975) five-dimensional framework of situational factors, physical surroundings, social surroundings, temporal perspectives, task definition, and antecedent states, the study employed thematic content analysis with a systematic coding process to identify patterns in consumer decision-making. The findings of the research indicated that consumer behaviour varies significantly depending on prior experience with online shopping. Participants with extensive experience in purchasing clothing online demonstrated greater confidence and efficiency in navigating digital platforms. In contrast, individuals less familiar with online grocery and furniture shopping exhibited notable hesitation, often defaulting to offline channels due to concerns over quality, freshness, or the need for physical inspection. This contrast, between the appeal of convenience and the comfort of traditional shopping, reflects a multifaceted tension in consumer attitudes. The study highlights the importance of category-specific marketing strategies tailored to consumer familiarity and situational preferences. These insights offer practical guidance for retailers aiming to enhance engagement and drive conversion among younger online shoppers in South Korea.

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1. Introduction.

The dramatic growth of online shopping has revolutionized the retail store in the recent pass due to rapid technological improvements. Global disease like Covid-19 has accelerated the use of online shopping due to social distance policies implemented by almost all the countries around the world. South Korea is one the first few countries who were badly affected. Daegu is the fourth-largest city in South Korea was among the earliest and significantly affected by Covid-19. With the restrictions on travelling and serious concern over the spread of virus in the busy areas, people started to do shopping online for their shopping needs.

This digital transformation is well-documented by national statistics. The Korea Statistical Information Service (KOSTAT) reported a striking 30.7% increase in online retail transactions in September 2021 compared to the same period in 2020 (KOSTAT, 2021). This momentum continued, with KOSTAT noting a sustained annual growth rate of 7.7% in December 2023 (KOSTAT, 2023). These trends indicate that online shopping has evolved from a temporary crisis in response to a fundamental shift in consumer behaviour within Korean society.

The persistent expansion of digital commerce is shaped by a complex interplay of factors that extend beyond the initial pandemic-driven surge. While COVID-19 acted as a catalyst, ongoing growth is underpinned by deeper structural changes, including evolving consumer lifestyles, shifting preferences, and rapid technological innovation (Kim & Lee, 2023). Understanding these underlying motivations is essential for developing comprehensive frameworks that address both the benefits and challenges of digital commerce across a range of product categories, from everyday necessities like groceries and clothing to high involvement purchases such as furniture.

Demographic analyses reveal significant generational differences in the adoption and use of online shopping. For older consumers, the shift to online grocery shopping is primarily motivated by physical limitations and health-related concerns, such as mobility restrictions, visual impairments, and the challenges of navigating traditional retail environments (Huang et al., 2012; Hodges et al., 2023; Bixler et al., 2024). Physical obstacles like manoeuvring heavy carts, reading small labels, reaching for products on high shelves, and carrying large grocery loads—pose significant barriers for this demographic (Kohijoki, 2011; Lee et al., 2020). Kvalsvik (2022) further highlights that situational factors driving online shopping among the elderly are often rooted in health conditions, declining mobility, and proximity to retail outlets. These motivations tend to be more stable and predictable compared to the diverse factors influencing younger consumers.

College students represent a substantial portion of e-commerce traffic, with a notable increase in "impulse" buying behaviour driven by digital environments (Park, 2018). The generational divide in digital adoption reflects fundamental differences in technological socialization and media consumption. Older generations, often termed "digital immigrants," acquired digital skills later in life and tend to approach technology with a learned, rather than intuitive, perspective (Feng & Ivanov, 2023b). In contrast, Generation Z and younger cohorts—"digital natives"—have grown up immersed in digital environments, viewing technology as an integral part of daily life (Yang et al., 2015). The purpose of this study to explore the effect of situation on college students purchase behaviour online. The role of situation-driven e-commerce is significant because, unlike traditional shopping, online purchasing behaviour is often impulsive and influenced by immediate circumstances such as stress from exams, hunger during late-night studying, or social influences like group buying decisions. This distinction requires e-commerce platforms to develop strategies that enhance accessibility for older users while also engaging younger consumers, whose expectations and behaviours differ significantly.

For younger generations, online shopping is not viewed as a novel technology but as a standard purchasing method. Their comparative assessment of digital and physical re-tail channels offers valuable insights for future commercial strategies. Accordingly, this research has two primary objectives: (1) to identify and analyse the situational factors motivating young consumers to shop online across diverse product categories, and (2) to assess whether digital retail platforms can serve as viable alternatives to traditional brick-and-mortar stores. This study categorically pick sample from the college students in Daegu, South Korea as Daegu's socio-cultural factors are comparatively different than the main metropolitan cities like Seoul, Incheon or Busan.

Online Shopping Industry overview

The global e-commerce sector has experienced unprecedented growth, with forecasts indicating that retail e-commerce sales will exceed \$6.6 trillion in 2025, accounting for approximately 20.1% of all retail transactions (Cramer-Flood, 2024). Since 2019, online sales have consistently surpassed those of traditional general merchandise retailers, including department stores, warehouse clubs, and supercentres—reflecting a sustained shift in consumer purchasing behaviour (BigCommerce, 2022). The competitive landscape continues to evolve as established brands expand their digital presence and new, online-only businesses emerge.

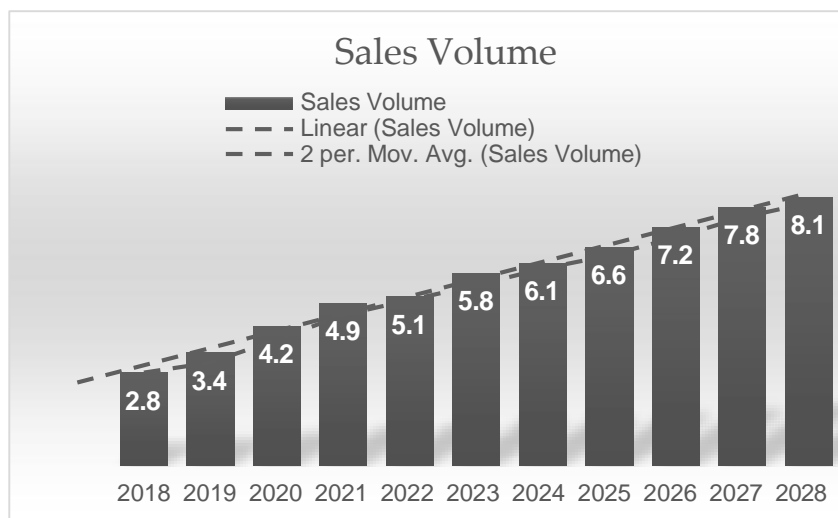


Figure 1: Historical data (2018-2024) represents actual recorded sales figures from official sources and market research firms. Future projections (2025-2028) are based on compound annual growth rate (CAGR) analysis, market trends, and econometric modeling from multiple industry sources. South Korean data has been converted from KRW to USD using annual average exchange rates for consistency.

Digital retail businesses benefit from several operational advantages: they require less capital investment, eliminate the need for extensive real estate or large workforces, and offer consumers 24/7 accessibility free from physical location or traditional business hours. Additionally, digital platforms streamline distribution and bypass intermediaries, enabling competitive pricing (Park, 2018). These efficiencies have facilitated the rise of "online-only" product lines, such as IAB Studio in fashion and Chungjungone's "ON to Home (집으로 ON)" food brand, which are distributed exclusively through digital channels. Strategic use of online platforms varies by market positioning. Some brands leverage digital channels to offer cost-effective alternatives, while others employ online exclusivity as a premium strategy to enhance brand distinctiveness and perceived value. IAB Studio, for example, uses a competitive application process for product releases, maintains strict no-exchange or refund policies, and sets high price points—yet it has built strong loyalty among young consumers (Thinknote, 2021). This loyalty reflects broader shifts in consumption culture. The proportion of consumers prioritizing "taste differentiation" (the desire to express unique preferences rather than follow mainstream trends) increased from 28.8% to 34.4% between 2019 (Neovalue, 2022). This suggests that younger consumers are willing to pay premium prices for products aligning with their values and aesthetics. IAB Studio's approach, offering limited-edition items through virtual channels, exemplifies this trend.

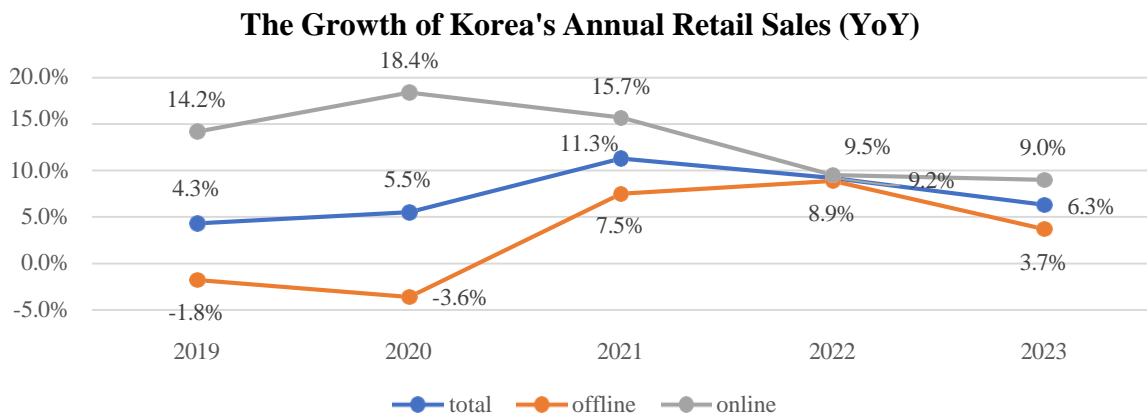


Figure 2: The Growth of Korea's Annual Retail Sales (YoY). Source: Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy (MOTIE)

However, the effectiveness of premium positioning strategies varies by product category. While exclusivity can drive success in fashion and lifestyle sectors, the grocery market presents different challenges. Kvalsvik's (2022) research on online grocery shopping highlights key situational factors—health, mobility, price sensitivity, store distance, delivery speed, and social interaction preferences. Although focused on older consumers, these findings indicate that premium strategies are less effective for grocery products in digital marketplaces.

Research Gap and Theoretical Framework

Previous research on online shopping has primarily examined the general impact of digital retail, consumer behaviour during the pandemic, generational differences, and situational factors affecting older adults. Korean studies have focused on specific circumstances influencing online shopping behaviour. While these works provide valuable insights, they often lack comprehensive analysis of how situational factors differ by product category within online environments among young generation.

This gap is significant, as understanding category-specific situational factors can inform the development of targeted marketing strategies and the optimization of online shopping experiences for various brands. Such differentiation is especially important given the diverse motivations that influence young consumers' decisions across different product types.

Background of Online Shopping Development in South Korea

Although the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated online shopping adoption, South Korea's e-commerce growth began well before this crisis (Islam, 2021). Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy (MOTIE) data shows that the gap between online and offline retail sales widened significantly in 2023, even after pandemic restrictions were lifted (MOTIE, 2023). This trend suggests that the drivers of online shopping growth in Korea are not solely pandemic related.

Several interconnected factors contribute to the ongoing rise in online shopping: widespread use of mobile commerce, advanced logistics and delivery infrastructure, secure payment systems, and the integration of social commerce features that blend shopping with social media (Korea E-commerce Assoc., 2023). Additionally, high urban density and increasingly busy lifestyles among young Koreans make the convenience and time-saving benefits of online shopping particularly attractive, increasing sales volume is one of the clear

pieces of evidence of that (Fig. 3).

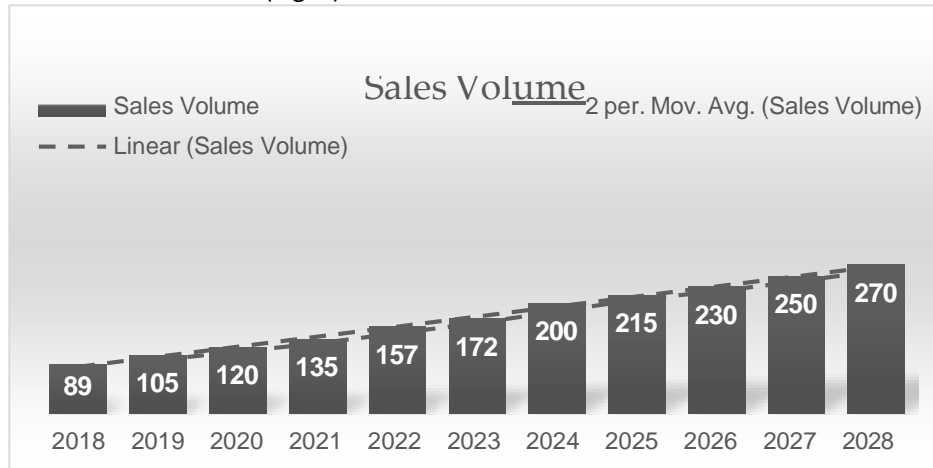


Figure 3: South Korea E-Commerce Sales (billions USD). Source: Statistics Korea (KOSTAT)

Korea's Delivery Service Competition and Innovation

Competition among Korean e-commerce platforms has led to increasingly sophisticated and consumer-oriented delivery services. Companies now offer a range of options, including early-morning and same-day delivery, as well as specialized holiday services to maintain continuity during traditional non-business periods. Industry leaders have noted a strategic shift from competing solely on speed to enhancing overall convenience (Song, 2023). Consumer expectations have evolved beyond basic fresh food delivery, with demand now encompassing more granular service options, such as pre-scheduled deliveries and greater control over the shopping experience. The importance of delivery efficiency is underscored by research showing that 24% of consumers abandon online carts due to slow de-livery (Snyder, 2024) Fast, reliable delivery is thus a key competitive advantage for digital retailers, helping them rival the immediacy of traditional in-store shopping.

Demographic Expansion: Middle-Aged Consumer Adoption

A notable trend in Korea's online shopping landscape is the increasing participation of middle-aged consumers, particularly since the pandemic (Fig. 4). Data from the Ministry of Science and ICT (MSIT) shows that online shopping usage among individuals in their 40s and 50s rose by 16.4% and 7.6%, respectively, compared to 2019 (MSIT, 2021) Further-more, young consumers adopt quickly, however due to low purchasing power as majority are either college or university students their spending is low. This demographic shift is especially valuable for online retailers, as middle-aged consumers tend to make larger, bulk purchases, resulting in higher average transaction values. According to Neovalue and Nielsen Korea, consumers in their 50s had the highest average spending per session (about 35,636 won in Q1), along with the highest year-over-year growth rate (6.3%) (Neovalue, 2022). These patterns contribute to increased profitability for online platforms.



Figure 4. Notable trend in Korea's Online shopping landscape

Theoretical Framework: Situational Factors in Consumer Behaviour

To understand how consumers make decisions in online shopping environments, this study adopts Belk's (1975) comprehensive framework of situational factors. Belk's model classifies the various environmental and contextual elements that influence consumer behaviour into five interconnected dimensions: physical surroundings, social surroundings, temporal perspectives, task definition, and antecedent states. This framework provides a systematic approach to analysing how both external circumstances and internal states shape purchasing behaviours across different shopping contexts.

Consumer decision-making is influenced by a multifaceted array of situational factors, starting with the physical surroundings, where elements such as ambient noise, lighting, temperature, and spatial arrangement dictate the level of comfort and concentration. Beyond these environmental cues, social surroundings—including the roles, relationships, and interactions of others present—significantly shape purchasing behavior. The consumer experience is further shaped by temporal perspectives, which encompass time-related constraints and scheduling that can either induce urgency or permit a more leisurely approach. Moreover, the task definition establishes the specific objectives of the activity, distinguishing between planned and spontaneous purchases or routine and hedonic goals. Finally, these external influences intersect with the consumer's antecedent states, where internal psychological and physiological conditions, such as mood, stress, and motivation, determine the individual's ultimate receptivity to marketing stimuli and decision-making processes.

This theoretical structure guides the analysis of how young consumers in South Korea navigate online shopping decisions across various product categories. For this research, snowball sampling was used to recruit participants for in-depth interviews, allowing for a detailed exploration of how these five dimensions collectively influence product selection and purchasing processes.

The demographic profile of South Korean online shoppers further supports the relevance of this framework. Young adults aged 20-30, who form a significant segment of the consumer market, exhibit high digital literacy and smartphone usage. This technologically adept demographic is well-positioned to embrace new e-commerce innovations, suggesting that Korea's online shopping growth is underpinned by structural factors likely to sustain long-term expansion (KOSTAT, 2021).

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine the situational factors influencing online shopping behaviours among young adults in Daegu, South Korea. A qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate for this study given its exploratory nature and the need to capture the rich, context-dependent meanings that participants attach to their shopping experiences (Creswell, 2014). Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative research enables the researcher to explore the “how” and “why” behind consumer decisions, which is particularly relevant when investigating situational factors that are inherently subjective and context-specific (Patton, 2015). The research process consists of an exploratory phase using in-depth interviews to identify key situational factors across different product categories. The interview questions were structured around Belk’s (1975) five situational dimensions to ensure systematic coverage of each theoretical construct, while also allowing flexibility for emergent themes. The research process consists of two main phases: an initial exploratory phase using in-depth interviews to identify key situational factors, followed by a conjoint analysis experiment to compare the relative importance of these factors across different product categories.

Participant Selection and Demographics

For the purpose of this study, “youth” is operationally defined as individuals from Generation Z, specifically those born between 1997 and 2012, who are recognized as digital natives (Dimock, 2019; McKinsey & Company, 2023). Digital natives are mostly mobile-first, expecting seamless mobile experiences and often shopping on-the-go, while baby boomers were consistently more un-sure in their response on purchasing things online (Henderson et al., 2024). Many older consumers still prefer in-person shopping for their major purchases, prioritize trust-building mechanisms, whereas younger consumers are more influenced by social engagement and peer interactions (Lissitsa & Kol, 2016). Furthermore, digital natives are good at navigating complex websites, using multiples devices simultaneously and adopting new features quickly. Older shoppers often prefer simpler and straightforward layout (Chen & Chang, 2014; Kirk et al., 2015). To ensure participants have independent economic decision-making experience, the sample was further refined to include only those born between 1997 and 2005.

A total of 10 participants were carefully selected to reflect diverse demographic characteristics, including age, gender, and geographic location. This sample size is consistent with established qualitative research guidelines. Guest et al. (2006) demonstrated that thematic saturation in homogeneous populations typically occurs within 6–12 interviews. Similarly, Morse (1994) recommends at least 6 participants for phenomenological studies, while Creswell (2014) suggests 5–25 for qualitative inquiry. Given the relatively homogeneous nature of the target population (Generation Z university students in Daegu), the sample of 10 participants was considered adequate for achieving data saturation. During the analysis, data saturation was assessed iteratively: by the eighth interview, no substantially new themes were emerging, and the final two interviews served as confirmatory cases that reinforced the established patterns (Saunders et al., 2018). The researcher maintained a saturation log documenting when each new code and theme first appeared, confirming that no new codes emerged during the final two interviews. This purposeful sampling approach ensures a comprehensive representation of the target group while maintaining feasibility for in-depth qualitative analysis.

Sampling Methodology and Recruitment Process

Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling method, beginning with a core group already connected to the research team. These initial participants referred to others, enabling the sample to expand while maintaining diversity in age, gender, living arrangements (such as living with family, alone, or in dormitories), and economic circumstances. The final sample size of 10 were used for interviews, providing rich data on young consumers' online and offline shopping behaviour.

To mitigate potential sampling bias inherent in snowball sampling, several precautions were taken. First, initial seed participants were selected from different university departments and social networks to ensure diverse entry points into the referral chain. Second, a maximum variation sampling criterion was applied, ensuring that referred participants differed in at least one key demographic characteristic (gender, living situation, or economic status) from their referrer (Patton, 2015). Third, a screening questionnaire was administered prior to interview selection to verify eligibility and demographic diversity.

Table 1 details the demographic characteristics of the interview participants, illustrating the diversity achieved through this sampling strategy and providing context for the subsequent analysis.

Table 1. Description of participants' characteristics from in-depth individual interviews

Participants	Year of birth	Gender	Living Situation	Economic Situation
Participants 1(P1)	2000	Male	With Family	Allowance & part-time job
Participants 2(P2)	2001	Female	Dorm	Allowance
Participants 3(P3)	2002	Female	Dorm	Allowance
Participants 4(P4)	2000	Female	With Family	Salary
Participants 5(P5)	2002	Male	Dorm	Allowance & part-time job
Participants 6(P6)	1999	Male	With Family	Allowance
Participants 7(P7)	1999	Female	Alone	Salary
Participants 8(P8)	2000	Female	With Family	Allowance
Participants 9(P9)	2001	Male	Alone	Allowance & part-time job
Participants 10(P10)	2000	Female	With Family	Allowance & part-time job

Data Collection Methods

The primary mode of data collection for this study was characterized by a preference for face-to-face interaction, a choice made to capture the subtle nuances of participant body language and to foster a deeper sense of rapport. However, to ensure geographical inclusivity and account for logistical constraints, remote interviews—primarily conducted via telephone or secure digital platforms—were utilized for participants residing in disparate regions. This hybrid approach ensured that the study maintained a broad demographic reach without compromising the quality of the data collected. The underlying framework for these

interactions adhered strictly to the focus group methodology established by Krueger (1994). By adopting this proven pedagogical structure, the research ensured a high degree of consistency and professional rigor across all sessions. The questioning strategy was meticulously categorized into five distinct functional phases: Opening, Introductory, Transition, Key, and Ending questions. Each phase served a specific purpose, ranging from breaking the ice to probing the core research objectives, as detailed in the accompanying Table 2.

The ethical dimension of the research was addressed through a rigorous consent process, wherein all participants provided verbal permission for their sessions to be recorded for later transcription and analysis. These recordings served as a vital tool for ensuring that no significant data points were lost to memory or misinterpretation. Throughout the data collection window, which spanned from June 4 to July 11, 2024, the researcher remained disciplined in managing the schedule, ensuring each session lasted approximately 40 minutes. This duration was deemed optimal for balancing the need for comprehensive detail with the practical limits of participant concentration. In addition to the audio recordings, the researcher maintained a practice of active notetaking, capturing immediate impressions and non-verbal cues that might not be evident in a voice recording alone. These supplemental notes acted as a secondary layer of data, enriching the final analysis with contextual depth. For a more comprehensive visual representation of how these various elements intertwined, a diagrammatic explanation of the sampling and interview methods is provided in Figure 5, offering a clear roadmap of the research journey from start to finish.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed using a directed content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), guided by Belk's (1975) five-dimensional framework of situational factors as the initial coding structure. This approach was selected because the study sought to validate and extend an existing theoretical framework within a new context (online shopping among Generation Z consumers in South Korea), rather than generating entirely new theory from the ground up. The interview recording files were listened to repeatedly, compared to the organized notes and reviewed several times. As a research method, it allows researchers to structure and extract meaning from the collected data, leading to a realistic conclusion (Bohm & Sundqvist, 2025).

The data analysis followed a systematic, multi-stage coding process. In the first stage (open coding), each interview transcript was read line by line, and initial codes were assigned to meaningful segments of text. A total of 187 initial codes were generated across all ten transcripts. In the second stage (axial coding), these initial codes were grouped into sub-categories based on conceptual similarity. For example, codes such as "prefers nearby store," "weather affects channel choice," and "store ambiance matters" were grouped under the sub-category of "physical environment influence." In the third stage (selective coding), the sub-categories were mapped onto Belk's five situational dimensions, while also allowing for the identification of emergent themes that did not fit neatly within the predefined framework, such as "digital familiarity threshold" and "category-specific trust barriers."

It should be noted that while the initial research design proposed a conjoint analysis experiment as a follow-up phase, this component was ultimately implemented as a set of structured trade-off questions embedded within the interview protocol (see Appendix A, Key Questions 2). These questions presented participants with paired comparison scenarios

(e.g., online same-day delivery vs. nearby offline store) to elicit preferences across product categories. The responses were analysed qualitatively as part of the thematic framework rather than through formal conjoint statistical modelling. This decision was made because the small sample size (n=10) would not yield statistically reliable conjoint utilities, and the qualitative analysis of trade-off reasoning provided richer insights into the situational logic behind participants' channel preferences.

Table 2. Type of the interview questions

Type	
Opening Questions	This is a brief (10-20 seconds) factual question asked at the start of the focus group to identify common characteristics among participants
Introductory Questions	These questions introduce the main topic and encourage participants to reflect on past experiences, fostering conversation and interaction without being critical to the analysis. <i>i.e. Do you usually enjoy shopping?</i>
Transition Questions	These questions help the participants envision a research topic before approaching the key questions of this study. <i>i.e. Which items do you enjoy buying online?</i>
Key Questions	These questions drive the study. It's time to allow participants to fully state their thoughts or experiences <i>i.e. By item, how far from home are frequent offline stores located?</i>
Ending Questions	These questions bring closure to the discussion, enable researchers to summary and reflect on previous comments, and are critical to analysis. <i>i.e. Do you think my summary was appropriate?</i>

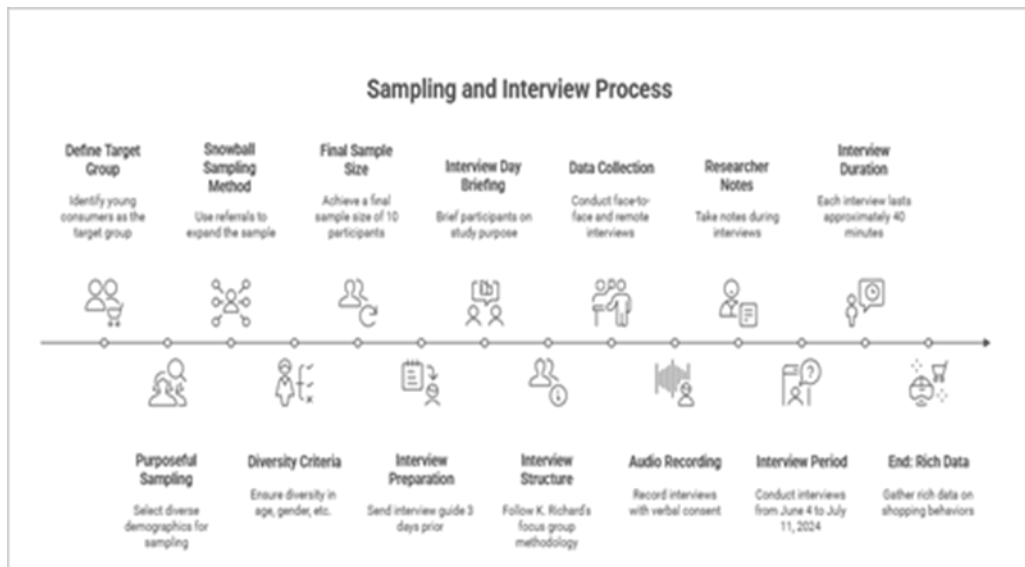


Figure 5: Visual understanding of sampling method and recruitment process

3. Results and Discussions

Category 1: Physical surroundings

Physical surroundings encompass the geographical and institutional context, store decor, ambient sounds, weather, and the visible arrangement of merchandise (Belk, 1975). Several questions explored how these factors influenced respondents' online and offline shopping experiences.

The first question asked, "How far are the offline stores you frequently visit for each item from your home?" Grocery stores were typically within a short walking distance less than 10 minutes for all respondents, with the shortest being two minutes. In contrast, most clothing stores require public transportation, averaging about 20 minutes away. Only one respondent had a department store within a 15-minute walk. For furniture, respondents rarely visited offline stores, though two mentioned visiting IKEA branches more than 40 minutes away, drawn by the store's display and reasonable prices.

These findings reveal a critical interaction between Belk's (1975) physical surroundings dimension and product category. The geographical proximity of retail options operates as a differential threshold: for groceries, the ubiquity of nearby stores diminishes the perceived advantage of online channels, whereas for clothing and especially furniture, greater physical distance lowers the entry barrier for online alternatives. This pattern aligns with Kvalsvik's (2022) observation that store distance is a key situational driver but extends it by showing that the same factor operates differently across product categories for young consumers—not merely as a convenience calculation, but as a category-dependent evaluation of effort versus perceived risk.

Two additional questions further explored preferences. When asked, "Do you prefer shopping online with early-morning deliveries or at offline stores 10 minutes away?" most preferred offline shopping for groceries, valuing the ability to inspect products firsthand. Those who favoured online shopping cited convenience, though some lacked experience with early-morning delivery services. Notably, even those who preferred offline grocery shopping often chose to buy clothing online, especially in non-urgent situations. For high-value items like furniture, most preferred offline shopping to personally inspect products and avoid the inconvenience of returns.

Regarding weather, almost all respondents chose online shopping during inclement weather, while some expressed a preference for offline clothing shopping when the weather was pleasant.

Sample responses:

"I want to see and select for myself what I eat. I've never tried early-morning deliveries, so it feels unfamiliar." (P2). "Honestly, I dislike early-morning delivery. It feels like unnecessary labour. I don't see the need for it." (P8) "Furniture is a long-term purchase, so I need to check it in person. Refunds are inconvenient, and I don't really see the benefit of early-morning delivery. (P1)

Another question asked, "Would you rather shop at an online mall with 100 brands or an offline store with 50 brands?" For groceries, most respondents felt brand variety was unnecessary, but for clothing, greater diversity was valued. Some noted that even with many brands available offline, physical limitations made it hard to experience them all, making online shopping more attractive for browsing. Sample response: "It doesn't matter if there

are 100 grocery brands. But for clothing, the difference between 50 and 100 brands is huge. Online, I can see everything easily." (P6)

When asked about the impact of store elements like music, display, and temperature, most respondents did not link these directly to store visits, though many appreciated cool environments during summer. Regarding online factors like web design, copywriting, and sales rankings, respondents had mixed views. Popular sales rankings influenced grocery and furniture purchases positively, but for clothing, many disliked them due to concerns about buying the same items as others. Promotions like Black Friday often prompted additional browsing.

Sample responses: "The temperature is very important. I want to stay longer in a cool store." (P5). "I'm influenced by grocery sales rankings. There's a reason people buy certain products." (P3). "When buying furniture, I refer to popular sales rankings because I don't have much knowledge." (P7)

Category 2: Social surroundings

Social surroundings are related to other people. It provides social interactions and potentially relevant information (Belk, 1975). The question to analyse the situational factors according to the social surroundings is "Who do you shop with by items?" When shopping online, all respondents answered that they shop alone. For groceries, everyone except for participants who live alone answered that they often go with one of their family members. All offline clothing shopping was with a various people such as mom, lover, and friends. They also mentioned that they include shopping as part of their plans when they have an appointment in common. However, in the case of furniture, respondents typically shopped with others but often did so when they specifically intended to purchase furniture.

An additional question was asked of the respondents regarding their communication with the staff. It was "What do you prefer, online shopping with real-time chat counselling or offline stores with in-person counselling?" Most chose the method they usually use, so no significant impact was confirmed, but their answers were meaningful. Those who did not have difficulties facing the staff chose offline channels, and they wanted more accurate and professional opinions.

"Even though the chat is real-time, I can only get the answer what I asked. But there's a lot of additional information I can get offline." (P3)

"I have a short temper. I prefer conversations more than chatting. I think nonverbal communication, like intonation, voice or eye contact, is important. (P8)

"I think store staff look more professional than staff beyond the computer." (P9)

"For grocery shopping, I think there are many problems that are hard to explain in writing. Also, there is a high possibility that the text will not be conveyed to the intended purpose. But in the case of clothing, I think we just need to send the problem with a photo. Unlike grocery shopping, even if I go offline store to exchange it, I may not be able to do it if they don't have it in stock." (P10)

Category 3: Temporal perspective

Temporal perspective refers to the aspect of situations defined by time, ranging from the time of day to the season, and can also be measured relative to past or future events

(Belk, 1975). This allows situational factors such as free time, time constraints or delivery time. It can be observed that offline shopping often depends on the schedules of companions. Additionally, shoppers tend to change their shopping channels based on the amount of time they have available. To understand these behaviours, the following questions were posed: "What day and time of the week do you usually shop for specific items? Why do you think you choose offline and online shopping differently by item?"

When purchasing groceries offline, respondents living with their families tend to follow the schedules of family members who go shopping with them. Online, some respondents typically bought items immediately when they thought of something they wanted to have, without a specific time frame. Respondents living alone showed a preference for a specific time frame for grocery shopping, favouring the evening hours when there were fewer shoppers offline and closing sales were held. Online, they answered placing orders in advance on Tuesday or Wednesday, considering delivery time constraints.

Regarding clothing, it was found that respondents enjoyed offline shopping on weekends. They often chose to shop for clothing during times when they had leisure time, as trying on clothes can be time-consuming. They also include clothing shopping in their plans with friends or acquaintances. Online shopping for clothing is usually done in the afternoon or early morning hours, with respondents turning to online clothing platforms to relieve the stress they experienced during the day.

When shopping for furniture in offline stores, most respondents indicated that they spent more than half a day buying furniture. However, many interviewees were reluctant to buy furniture offline, as they perceived offline furniture to be generally more expensive. Four respondents revealed that they preferred not to spend much time purchasing furniture, opting to acquire it as soon as the need arises.

"I usually shop for ingredients on Coupang (one of the most popular online shopping platforms) on Tuesday or Wednesday. I do it in advance because even if I want to cook something good on the weekend, I need to account for delivery time. Generally, I am too tired to shop after work. If I have to shop in person, I usually do offline shopping on Friday evenings. This is because I enjoy going for a walk after dinner and shopping at a leisurely pace." (P7)

"I think the best time for me to buy clothes online is in the evening or at dawn. I lie down and open my shopping app before I go to bed. For me, on stressful days, my likelihood of buying increases. I choose items that I added to my bag previously." (P9)

"I prefer to buy furniture online. I want to take a closer look online because I can focus on the features. When I buy furniture offline, I leave my whole weekend or half a day free for shopping. That's because I want to see everything at once when I go out." (P1)

Category4: Task definition

Task definition involves the intent or needs to select, shop for, or obtain information about a purchase. It can be shopping for a small appliance as a wedding gift or birthday present for friends (Belk, 1975). Through interviews, it was confirmed that the choice of shopping channel varied based on whether the purchase was for personal use or as a gift for friends, family, or acquaintances. In choosing a channel, the type of items (grocery, clothing, and furniture) was not a significant factor. Instead, considerations of urgency and weight pre-dominantly influenced their choice. For items needed immediately, participants

preferred shopping offline due to the typically longer delivery times associated with online purchases. Nevertheless, most respondents, excluding those who maintained their existing shopping habits, expressed a preference for buying personal items online. This preference was driven by the inconvenience of carrying heavy items and the ease of ordering frequently needed items using previously saved purchase data.

When it came to shopping for gifts, respondents favoured offline shopping over online alternatives. The reasons cited included "entertainment," "packaging," and "certainty." Those who enjoyed the process of selecting gifts wanted to receive the attractive gift-wrapping services available in stores, and desired to ensure the success of their gift-giving without any mishaps, tended to make different choices specifically for "gifts." Respondents who purchase gifts online presented them for physical distance or convenience from their friends. They tend to give mobile gift cards when they are not close friends. It is to take advantage of the convenience of online shopping.

"If it is needed for me, online shopping would be better. For items like shocks or white T-shirts, I have a previous record of buying them, so I tend to order them right away. (P5)

"For me, if I need something immediately, I prefer to buy it offline. But if I want to take my time to think about it, I want to buy it online. Online shopping offers a lot of options, and I don't have to buy it right away. Offline stores often lead to impulsive purchases, but I like it because it gives me enough time to consider my options." (P10)

"Why? It's fun to shop offline. First, I tend to try shopping offline and look online if I can't find a good present." (P5)

"I use offline stores when I give gifts to someone. My concern is that there are a lot of fake products online. It's also good that I can put in an exchange card if I buy it offline." (P8)

Category 5: Antecedent states

Antecedent states are temporary moods (e.g., acute anxiety, pleasantness, hostility, excitement) or conditions (e.g., cash on hand, fatigue, illness) that characterize a situation, distinguishing them from long-term individual traits (Belk, 1975). In previous conversations, respondents expressed reluctance to engage in offline shopping after work, citing increased fatigue as the primary reason. To explore whether daily stress leads to shopping, they were asked, "Do you tend to relieve stress by spending when it builds up? In that case, do you usually choose online or offline shopping?" All but two respondents acknowledged such experiences, and they predominantly shop online for food and clothing. A common keyword in their responses was 'ease.' They choose accessible online channels because they want to relieve their stress immediately. They tend to order clothes that are part of their daily routine or foods they have refrained from buying frequently due to increased purchases.

"I usually buy online. I prefer it because I can do it lying in bed." (P1)

"For me, online. It's convenient to order. When I'm stressed out, I want to eat delicious food, so I order a list of my saved food. (P10)

Discussion

The study revealed that grocery shopping behaviour varied significantly based on living arrangements. Participants living alone preferred online grocery shopping due to convenience and timesaving, whereas those living with families often considered grocery

shopping a shared activity or a form of leisure, preferring offline experiences. Online grocery shopping faced higher entry barriers compared to other product categories. While individuals who had tried it reported positive experiences, non-users exhibited a strong attachment to existing offline habits. Concerns about product freshness and expiration dates emerged as universal issues, affecting both current and potential online shoppers. Most participants purchased non-perishable items like cereals and household goods through online platforms. This finding parallels Kvalsvik's (2022) identification of freshness concerns as a barrier to online grocery adoption among elderly consumers, but importantly, the present study shows that this barrier persists among digitally native young consumers as well, suggesting that product-specific risk perceptions transcend generational digital literacy. The living-arrangement effect also aligns with research on household consumption patterns showing that shared living environments create social norms around shopping practices (Häggmark & Olofsson, 2023).

An effective strategy to encourage online grocery adoption is to guarantee freshness for perishable goods by clearly communicating shelf life and delivery timelines. Emphasizing quality control and transparency in the supply chain can enhance trust. Similar to tactics employed by services like Uber Eats, offering coupons or trial dis-counts can reduce consumer hesitancy and foster long-term loyalty (Uber Eats, n.d.).

Clothing was the most frequently purchased item online among the younger demographic. Generation Z participants, in particular, demonstrated a dual preference: enjoying offline shopping during leisure time while actively engaging in online browsing for price comparisons and trend tracking (Choudhary, 2024). Their purchasing process was described as lengthy and deliberate, despite occasional impulsive buys driven by stress from academic or personal pressures. Notifications sent during evening hours, especially regarding promotions or personalized recommendations (e.g., shocks or everyday essentials), were identified as effective in increasing online purchase rates. This finding supports and extends the work of Park and Kim (2020), who identified emotional motivations as drivers of online apparel purchases, by specifying the temporal conditions under which such motivations are most activated—namely, evening hours when academic stress accumulates. The dual-channel engagement pattern observed here also resonates with Lissitsa and Kol's (2016) finding that younger consumers adopt a more fluid, channel-agnostic approach to shopping, treating online and offline as complementary rather than competing modalities.

Emotional motivations—such as retail therapy—and the availability of reviews contributed to spontaneous purchases, a finding consistent with earlier studies on digital consumer behaviour (Park & Kim, 2020; Jiang et al., 2023; Verhagen & Bloemers, 2018).

Furniture shopping was generally perceived as burdensome. High costs and uncertainty regarding product quality discouraged online purchases. Participants preferred in-person visits to assess items firsthand, especially for expensive purchases. However, platforms like O!House, which combine community feedback and commerce, mitigated these concerns by allowing users to view real-life applications of furniture through photos and user reviews. Young consumers often lacked purchasing experience in this category and perceived furniture as less enjoyable or rewarding compared to groceries or clothing. Price sensitivity was high, and brand names or material quality were less important than affordability and user reviews. Encouraging detailed reviews and rewarding contributions can play a key role in building trust and influencing purchase decisions (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006).

This study identified cognitive factors, preferences, deterrents, and areas for improvement across product categories. The findings suggest that to thrive in a competitive online environment, brands must go beyond offering discounts. They must analyse consumer characteristics, market trends, and specific product-category dynamics to craft tailored, differentiated marketing strategies. Young consumers, though comfortable with online platforms, demonstrate rational and cautious shopping behaviours, furthermore social media platform also influence consumer significantly (Islam, M., & Sheikh, S. A. ,2024). Their attitudes are shaped by factors such as family influence, financial constraints, and a growing preference for ethical and practical consumption (Hägemark & Olofsson, 2023). This aligns with research showing that digital natives are less driven by trends and more by value and transparency (Feng & Ivanov, 2023a).

In conclusion, brands aiming to expand their online presence should understand situational and psychological drivers of consumer behaviour across product types. A distinct strategy that addresses consumer concerns, leverages convenience, and builds emotional and practical value will help sustainable growth and consumer loyalty in the digital marketplace.

Like other papers, this study also has several limitations. Data for this research was collected solely in the Daegu area, the fourth-largest city in South Korea; however, only 10 participants were interviewed, which is relatively low and may not fully represent the diversity of perspectives across the country. Consequently, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the entire South Korean population. This limited sample size increases the risk of sampling bias, which can affect the validity and reliability of the conclusions drawn (Creswell, 2014; Etikan et al., 2016). Additionally, regional cultural, economic, and social differences may significantly influence the phenomena being studied, and failing to account for these variations could limit the scope of the research (Patton, 2015). Future studies should consider a broader geographical sampling strategy that includes both urban and rural areas across various provinces to enhance the generalizability of the findings (Bryman, 2016). Moreover, longitudinal re-search or mixed-method approaches could also help provide a more nuanced understanding of situational and contextual influences (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Expanding both the sample size and geographic coverage would not only improve the external validity of the study but also allow for comparative analysis among different regions of South Korea.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

1: Introductory questions

1. Who do you currently live with?

2. What is the average amount you spend per shopping session by category (grocery, clothing, furniture)? (to compare with average expenditure price of 4050 people)

3. Do you usually enjoy shopping? (How often do you go shopping?)

4. What kind of shopping do you do often? (Online or Offline)

2: Transition questions (all questions are asked separately by category)

1. What items do you enjoy purchasing in offline shopping?

2. What are the most important factors to consider in offline shopping?

3. What items do you enjoy purchasing online?

4. What are the most important factors to consider in online shopping?

3: Key Questions 1-Questions about situational factors

Physical environment

1. How far from home are frequent physical stores located by category (grocery, clothing, furniture)?

2. Are the songs, display methods, temperatures (cooling/heating) in offline stores affected by the visit?

3. Are website designs, copywriting, popular product rankings, etc. affected by usage in online shopping?

Social surroundings

1. Who do you usually go shopping by category (grocery, clothing, furniture) with? (Alone/friend/family/partner, etc.)

Temporal perspective

1. What day and time zone do you usually shop by category (grocery, clothing, furniture)?

2. Do you choose offline and online shopping by category (Grocery, clothing, furniture) differently depending on time? If so, why?

Task definition

1. Which do you prefer, online or offline, when you need to buy something you need for yourself, rather than something extra? Why? (By category)

2. Which do you prefer, online or offline, to buy presents to friends, acquaintances, family, or others (e.g., birthday presents)? Why?

Antecedent states

1. Do you relieve stress by shopping when you feel stressed? If so, do you prefer online or offline shopping?

2. Have you ever made a purchase due to a compliment from an offline store employee or an unexpected pleasant experience? Can you provide a specific example?

3. When the weather is bad, do you prefer online or offline shopping?

4. (If you chose offline in Q3) Do you have any experience choosing offline shopping because the weather is nice?

4: Key questions2-Conjoint experimental questions (all questions are asked separately by category)

1. (Convenience) Compared to online shopping with same-day delivery within 1 hour and buying from an offline store 10 minutes away, which do you prefer?

2. (Product Diversity) Would you prefer an online shopping mall where you can browse 100 different brands or an offline store with 50 products available for in-person inspection?

3. (Service) Which do you prefer compared to online shopping with live chat support and offline stores with in-person consultation?

4. (Product Experience) When buying a new item, do you prefer online shopping with various reviews or offline stores where you can try the product yourself?

5. (Returns and exchanges) When you think you're likely to need to return your purchased goods, which do you prefer, online shopping or offline shopping with immediate return and exchange in store?

6. When you think you're likely to have to return your purchased item, which do you prefer, online shopping with free return service or offline shopping with immediate return and exchange in store?

7. (Urgent) When you need to buy clothes urgently for an important meeting, which do you prefer, online same-day shipping that you can get or nearby offline store that you can buy immediately?

8. (Specific product category) When you need to purchase fresh ingredients, which do you prefer, online shopping with fast delivery to ensure freshness or offline stores where you can check freshness?

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