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Shiena Mae A. Velasco (a), Airah S. Alcantara (b), Mikko D. Hidalgo (c),  
Ma. Anna Corina G. Kagaoan (d)\*

\*Corresponding author

- (a) College of Business and Accountancy, Lyceum of the Philippines University- Laguna, Philippines, smavelasco@lpulaguna.edu.ph
- (b) College of Business and Accountancy, Lyceum of the Philippines University- Laguna, Philippines, asalcantara@lpulaguna.edu.ph
- (c) College of Business and Accountancy, Lyceum of the Philippines University- Laguna, Philippines, mdhidalgo@lpulaguna.edu.ph
- (d) College of Business and Accountancy, Lyceum of the Philippines University- Laguna, Philippines, anna.kagaoan@lpulaguna.edu.ph

**Abstract**

Today, there is rapid advancement of technologies people continuously accept and adapt to innovations. Even though there are already numerous previous studies and research about electronic commerce, this study focused on the lived experiences of Gen Z college students to find out their motivation, experiences, and how do they navigate through the challenges in online shopping. This qualitative study employed transcendental phenomenological research where the researchers used the structural and textual themes to describe how and what the participants experienced in the composite textural-structural descriptions from data gathered from ten participants. In conclusion, Gen Z is heavily influenced by their environment, significant others like family, friends, partners, and influencers, and their need for convenience on using e-commerce. Also, whether Gen Z experience issues on their online shopping or not, they will still use e-commerce and just find their way to not experience those issues again. Amidst challenges, they believe that e-commerce in the Philippines will still grow and improve. However, this study has limitations and cannot be used to generalize all Gen Z consumers. The researchers recommend conducting further studies such as exploration on the state of online sellers, their experiences, and problems to have a more holistic understanding of the entire e-commerce industry and how it can be improved. Examining other areas with a quantitative approach is recommended as different environmental experiences and generations may result in different perspectives and research findings.

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## 1. Introduction

The pandemic has brought both opportunities and disruption to the lives of people. For some, it allowed them to venture on many things such as exploring their hobbies, start a business, or even just spend time with loved ones. As the pandemic led individuals to know more about themselves, it also made businesses adapt to the changes of the environment. Naturally, more individuals come online, as the Internet becomes easier to access and it became almost a “definite” need for the lifestyle of many. As businesses on the Internet increases, and as consumers become more educated and comfortable on doing online, more people have been in the digital space.

E-commerce or electronic commerce is the buying and selling of goods or services on the Internet, encompassing a wide variety of data, systems and tools for online buyers and sellers, such as mobile shopping and online payment encryption. According to Cramer (2022), global retail e-commerce sales will surpass \$5 trillion for the first time in 2022, accounting for more than a fifth of overall retail sales. With continuous changes in technology and global circumstances, e-commerce will continue to grow and there are no signs for stopping. In fact, according to the International Trade Administration (2021), there has been an estimate of 76.2 million active social media users from the Philippines. From this, 72.5 million are on Facebook; 8.9 million on Twitter, and 4 million are LinkedIn users. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased demand for e-commerce in the Philippines.

The country remains as a fast-growing retail e-commerce market and the most popular e-commerce platforms include Lazada, Shopee, Zalora, eBay, and Kimstore. Although, there are still a lot of concerns in terms of security such numerous incidents of hacking and weak cybersecurity efforts. The Philippines had passed adequate legislation to promote e-commerce such as eCommerce Law, Cybercrime, and Data Privacy Laws. However, the Department of Justice and Philippine National Police and the local courts or the enforcement agencies are not yet adept or skillful at handling cases involving electronic transactions. (International Trade Administration, 2021)

With that, the researchers intend to know the views and insights of electronic commerce from the perspective of the customers born between 1997 and 2012, also known as Generation Z or Gen Z (Kantar Millward Brown, 2017). Gen Z’s behavior reflects values and influence of an increasingly digital world, as their pragmatism leads them to explore and evaluate a range of options before settling on a product. In addition, they are more likely to be swayed by the recommendations of real-life users than by celebrity endorsements. (Moscrip, 2019) Even though there are already numerous previous studies and research about e-commerce especially on apprehending its advantages and impact to the advancing community, having this study focusing on Gen Z will provide more updated information towards e-commerce. The researchers seek to comprehend the lived experiences of the participants on electronic commerce and develop a conceptual model according to the results of this study.

## 2. Methods

This presents the method that researchers used in this study which includes research design and participants of the study.

## 2.1. Research Design

This qualitative study employed a transcendental phenomenological research design to encapsulate Gen Z's experiences on electronic commerce. For Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenology, it is focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants. Researchers should set aside their experience and must take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon based on the description of the participants. The term "transcendental" means "in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time." Although, this state is seldom perfectly achieved but the researcher must be aware of the need for bracketing and concentrate as much as possible on the participant's description. (Rao, 2019)

In this research design, it started from identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketed out one's experiences, and collected data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon. Then, the researchers analyzed the data to identify significant statements or quotes and combines the statements into themes. The researchers provided a list of various experiences of the respondents, structural descriptions of their experiences like how they experienced it in terms of the conditions, situations, or context, and description that explained the overall essence of the experience (Sheehan, 2014).

## 2.2. Participants of the Study

All participants were selected through purposive sampling. According to Palinkas et al. (2015), this involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest. Researchers recruited participants who provided in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation which is e-commerce.

**Table 1.** Summary of Socio-demographic and Online Shopping Characteristics of the Participants

Socio- demographic characteristics				Online Shopping Characteristics	
Participant	Age	Sex	Province	Years of Online Shopping	Preferred E-commerce Platform
Participant 1	20	Female	Laguna	3 years	Shopee, Tiktok Shop
Participant 2	19	Female	Laguna	2 years	Shopee, Lazada, Tiktok Shop
Participant 3	19	Female	Laguna	4 years	Shopee, Lazada, Tiktok Shop,
Participant 4	22	Female	Laguna	3 years	Shopee, Tiktok Shop
Participant 5	20	Female	Laguna	4 years	Shopee, Lazada, Tiktok Shop, Carousell
Participant 6	21	Female	Laguna	3 years	Shopee
Participant 7	21	Female	Quezon	4 years	Shopee, Lazada
Participant 8	21	Female	Quezon	8 years	Shopee, Lazada
Participant 9	18	Male	Batangas	3 years	Shopee, Lazada, Tiktok Shop
Participant 10	22	Male	Laguna	2 years	Shopee, Lazada, AliExpress

The ten participants of the study as reflected in Table 1 were individuals who are born between 1997 and 2012, corresponding to the age range for Generation Z (Kantar Millward Brown, 2017). Each participant is a student in the college level to provide more elaborate information towards the

phenomenon of interest. As this study is centered on electronic commerce, participants were experienced shoppers from the leading e-commerce platforms in the Philippines which are Shopee, Lazada, and Zalora (Statista, 2021) There was no definite number of participants for each stated e-commerce platform as this information will be anonymous along with the personal identity of the participants of the study. The participants were expected to be very familiar and versed with online shopping so that they can freely communicate their experiences for this study.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

This presents the results, discussion, experience, and personal insights that researchers have gathered through the process of conducting the study on the lived experiences of Gen Z on e-commerce. It is divided into 3 sections: (1) Reasons of using e-commerce (2) Online shopping experience (3) Responding to challenges of e-commerce. As discussed in the methodology, the data gathered from participants were transcribed from verbal answers to written words. Interpretation of the participant's answers were carefully done by the researchers to not leave out important opinions and ideas of each.

The researchers used the structural and textual themes to describe how and what the participants experienced in the following composite textural-structural description, which includes direct quotations that best illustrate the theme. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, their names will not be stated in the entirety of the study.

#### **3.1. Structural Theme 1: Reasons of Using E-commerce**

This section answers the first research question of the study that focuses on finding out the motivational factors of Gen Z college students on using e-commerce. The themes emerged as to how they discovered e-commerce from the narratives of the Gen Z participants are: influence of online environment, influence of significant others, and their need for convenience.

##### **3.1.1. Textural Theme 1a: Influence of Online Environment**

There are various reasons for how and where people discovered e-commerce. The earliest among the participants would be Participant 7 from Quezon as she stated *"It emerged noong 2010s. Hindi ko siya ginagamit dati kasi hindi accessible sa lugar namin. Nag-start lang talaga ako gamitin siya, around 2018, 2019."* (Online shopping emerged during 2010s although I was not able to use it since it is not accessible to our place. I started really using it at around 2019 or 2019).

Although, most participants discovered e-commerce through social media or the Internet especially during the start of the COVID- 19 pandemic. According to Participants 1, 2, and 6 from Laguna, the reason they started their e-commerce journey is because they got curious since it became a trend on social media during the lockdown. Participant 4 also shared that online shopping became a part of her leisure time since *"Nalaman ko po siya lalo na ngayong pandemic kasi lagi tayong nakababad sa phone. Na-discover ko 'yung mga Shopee and nag-try din ako kung paano siya gamitin."* (I discovered e-commerce during the pandemic since we are using more of our phones now. I discovered Shopee and tried it myself.) Trends do really affect daily activities and may be even discovering hobbies or something

that people can enjoy. For some, online shopping became their set alternative if the products they want to purchase are not on physical stores. Due to the limitations of physical stores during the peak of the pandemic, most opted to e-commerce to resolve some personal shopping problem. Participant 10, a male interviewee from Laguna, shared “*So, may console kasi ako at nasira ‘yung controller nung pandemic so limited lang ‘yung bukas na physical stores so tinry ko ‘yung Shopee.’*” (So, I have a game console where the controller broke during the pandemic. Since physical stores were limited during that time, I tried using Shopee). From then on, he stated that online shopping became his set alternative.

In difference with Participant 8 from Quezon, she shared how she started her online shopping journey, “*Instagram online shop dati kasi nagpakilala sa akin sa e-commerce. Mga nakikita ko online na binibili nila ganon. Tas kini-click ko lang mga link kung saan nila nabibili. Na-discover ko na may mga online shopping sites pala kahit internationally.*” (I was fond of buying from Instagram online shops before and I was introduced to e-commerce more since the Internet users display links where they purchase their products even internationally). Also, in this age of influencers, other participants discovered e-commerce from TikTok. Participants 1, 2, 5, 7, and 8 shared how TikTok heavily influenced their online shopping decisions. As Participant 7 said “*Through social media kasi ang dami ko nakikita na post. Maganda ‘yung ganyan, ganito. Diba meron pa silang mga trends like mga Shopee or Lazada Find. I often see those so chine-check ko and nae-encourage ako bumili.*” (I see so many great posts related to online shopping in social media. There are contents like Shopee or Lazada Finds and I often see those and that encourages me to also buy those products.) With overwhelming content from many social media platforms, Participant 8 from Quezon shared her realization:

*“Grabe ‘yung influence ng TikTok sa e-commerce lalo na ngayon, sobra. Kasi tayo nga, generation tayo nung paunti nang paunti ‘yung attention span and ‘yung maiikling TikTok na yun, alam na nila ‘yung formula eh- how to sell products through TikTok. So, ang tendency natin, bibili at bibili tayo. Sa malala pa, kung ano ‘yung ni-like mo, something related to that ‘yung lalabas. Nakakapagod. Like pinupush nila ‘yung narrative na magiging successful ka if you have these things, these materials.”* (Tiktok really gave a huge influence on e-commerce especially in our generation where our attention span is getting shorter. On Tiktok, creators already knew the formula on creating content that sells which leads to us, consumers, persuaded to continuously buy online. It is tiring. It feels like they are pushing a narrative that you will be successful if you have these things, these materials.)

Other participants shared similar sentiments as even though they find reviews and recommendations helpful, the continuous cycle for online shopping seem not to end. According to Kastenholtz (2021), 97% of Gen Z consumers use social media as their top source of shopping inspiration. In TikTok, a popular platform for product recommendations, the hashtag #tiktokmademebuyit has upwards of 30.5 billion views on TikTok, #shopeefinds has more than 5.3 billion views, and #lazadafinds has more than 521.8 million views. Indeed, the environment especially the online world can easily bring influence on a person.

### 3.1.2. Textural Theme 1b: Influence of Family, Friends, and Significant Others

There are people who will influence others to use something just especially the closest loved ones such as family, friends, classmates, and partner, as long as they have enough background or expertise on what they want to recommend or influence. According to Moscrip (2019), Gen Z's behavior as consumers reflects their values and the influence of an increasingly digital world. Their pragmatism leads them to explore and evaluate a range of options before settling on a product. In addition, they are more likely to be swayed by the recommendations of real-life users than by celebrity endorsement. In this study, Participant 5 from Laguna, shared that *“Noong bata pa po kasi ako, ‘yung nanay ko ay mahilig po talaga mag-browse and mag-search sa internet. I was introduced, first pa lang dati early 2000 or 2010’s pa sa OLX tsaka nauso din po ‘yung pagpo-post sa Facebook ng product.”* (When I was younger, my mother is fond of browsing the internet so during the early 2000 or 2010s, I am already family with online shopping such as platforms like OLX. Posting products on Facebook also became a trend.) Similar to other participants, they continue to shop online since family and friends diligently share advantages of e-commerce. Their recommendation also plays a huge part on what their purchases will be and where will they get it.

### 3.1.3. Textural Theme 1c: Need for Convenience

When it comes to online shopping, it is almost synonymous with convenience for most Gen Z. As participants are online shoppers, they are knowledgeable about e-commerce and how advantageous it is. The convenience and affordability of products online are such great help for most consumers. There is lesser hassle for shopping unlike going into physical stores as compared by most participants.

As Participant 7 from Quezon said, *“When it comes to buying like gadgets kagaya ng earphones, speakers, hindi ako nabili sa Shopee. Para kasing belief ko, mas reliable ang Lazada pagdating sa mga technological stuff. Sa mga stuff like clothes, nabili ako sa Shopee. Though, I never buy shoes. Never ako nabili sa e-commerce because I feel like sala lagi ‘yung sukat na binibigay nila. Wala akong tiwala sa refund system nila.”* (When it comes to buying gadgets like earphones or speakers, I don't consider buying through Shopee since I have this belief that Lazada is more reliable when it comes to technological stuff. Though, I buy clothes in Shopee. For shoes, I never buy it online since I have this belief that they only provide the wrong size. I also don't trust the refund system in e-commerce.) The experience of the said participant relates to Landiza, C. (2016), as how she changed her first impression of online shopping when she experienced buying a laptop with Lazada Philippines. She began trusting the platform after having her second purchase as her every expectation was met. For her, the convenience which Lazada Philippines have has made purchasing never been better.

Also, Participant 10 from Laguna shared how he only purchase on LazMall or Shopee Mall since he believes that their products are legitimate. According to the Villafuerte, R. (2022), Shopee has Shopee Mall, whereas Lazada has LazMall, which lists products from well-known brands and stores. Lazada appears to have a greater number of accredited big-brand stores and suppliers, whereas Shopee appears to have a greater number of small suppliers and home-based sellers. In addition, Shopee offers several pre-

owned or secondhand goods than Lazada. Convenience does not only mean easier shopping but shopping good, quality items for consumers

### 3.2. Structural Theme 2: Online Shopping Experience

For this section, the themes are simply divided into three: (1) E-commerce as a source of instant gratification, (2) E-commerce as a form of stress reliever, (3) Struggles in online shopping.

#### 3.2.1. Textural Theme 2a: E-commerce as a Source of Instant Gratification

When shopping in e-commerce platforms, sometimes there are risks taken because buying through a device, what one can only see but not touch, there are both positive and negative effect. Half of the ten participants shared that becoming an online shopper is fun because it is easy to buy things that they want anytime, anywhere. That convenience is such a huge help for most consumers. As for Participant 6 from Laguna, she finds the joy of buying during payday sale where most items are very affordable. Although, as affordability and convenience go hand in hand e-commerce, for Participant 7 from Quezon, she admits that sometimes online shopping is just for quick gratification. She shared:

*“Usually, masaya. Pero there are times na pag dumating na, or nagamit ko na for a few times at makikita ko ‘yung laman ng wallet ko, nanghihina ako. Kasi bakit ko yun binili, for the quick gratification lang and then after that, “Ah dapat inipon ko na lang”. Or ang pinakamalala pa is, pag pupunta ako sa mall or sa bayan then I see something similar and mas mura, nanghihinayang ako. Kaya usually naghehesitate ako, pwera na lang kung more than two weeks na nasa isip ko ‘yung item na gustong gusto ko na i-check out. Iche-check out ko, no matter what.” (Usually, online shopping is fun but there are times that when my order arrived or after using the item I ordered few times, I get disheartened after checking my wallet. It often led me think about the reasons why I ordered those and just realized that its only for quick gratification, thinking “I should have just saved the money”. Worst, if I see similar items on stores or malls and those were sold in a lower price, I get more disheartened that is why I often hesitate to order not unless if the item stays on my mind for more than two weeks. That is usually what I do to know if I really want the item and order no matter what.)*

*As stated by Hartmuth (2019), most people now place a high value on the ability to buy quickly and easily, and they are becoming increasingly impatient when it comes to waiting for orders to be delivered and new goods to arrive in stores. They claim that waiting three days for delivery is no longer acceptable. Upon unexplained cancellation of order from the seller, Participant 4 from Laguna shared, “Sa kanina na na-cancel, short- tempered ako. Mabilis ako mairita. Mabilis akong mapikon. So, pag ganon ang nangyayari, kinakausap ko ‘yung napag-orderan ko. So pag di sila nag-reply, hindi na ko nag-oorder sa kanila. Parang, ay okay. Hindi ganun kaganda ‘tong shop na ‘to, ‘wag na lang.” (To that cancelled order, I admit I am short- tempered. I get frustrated easily and mad. So, when that kind of situation happened, I really talk to the seller. If they don’t reply, I will not order from that shop anymore. I am like okay. This shop is not nice.). She also comments how since she is a bit impatient, she hopes that the delivery process is faster since with Amazon, they already have a one- day delivery. Today’s consumers expect instant gratification, creating a new standard for superior customer service. This*

*appeals to Millennials and Gen Z audiences as they crave immediacy even when ordering online and have become early adopters of click and collect. (Hartmuth, 2019)*

### **3.2.2. Textural Theme 2b: E-commerce as a Form of Stress Reliever**

*Online shopping may bring that quick gratification for Participant 7 from Quezon, but she also shared how it helps her relieve her stress and just the act of scrolling through shops and adding to cart calms her especially during exam weeks. Receiving orders felt like a treat to herself after a lot of stressful nights. This may be slightly negative habit, but online shopping has become a reflection of what a person does in accordance with the participant. This relates to how Moscrip (2019) said on how Gen Z use social media to curate their own personal brand as they look at their purchasing decisions as an expression of their values and identity.*

### **3.2.3. Textural Theme 2c: Struggles in Online Shopping**

The participants identified various issues and challenges related to their online shopping experiences. These include the following: setting expectations, damaged items, unresponsive sellers, scams, and dealing with dissatisfaction.

#### **3.2.3.1. Setting Expectations**

Not being able to physically try out and touch a product is probably one of the biggest cons of online shopping. Disappointments with the products we buy through online can't be avoided, so sometimes getting frustrated with the sellers because the product is wrong, defective, or etc. is valid. As Participant 3 from Laguna said on negative online shopping experiences, *"May epekto siya sakin, pero parang human mistake naman so acceptable naman siya. I think maging careful na lang ako sa evaluate ng online shop."* (Those problems do affect my views on online shopping though I accept it since those were human mistakes. I think I should have just to be careful in evaluating online shops.) Those problems make online shoppers more diligent in reading the reviews and really think about what to buy online, a similar statement from Participant 2, 4, and 5 from Laguna.

According to Wunderman Thompson Commerce (2022), Gen Z have a well- defined set of expectations when it comes to retail where these have been shaped by experiences growing up which are quite distinctive from other generations. A prominent issue from online shopping according to participants of this study would be expectations of products are not often met. As customers, they can't help but set expectations on their orders especially if products are shown with great quality in e-commerce platforms. Although, for some like how Participant 5 from Laguna shared, *"Minsan nakakatanggap ako ng products na underwhelming at hindi sapat sa satisfaction ko. Nagkaron ng problema siguro kasi di naso-showcase nang mabuti ng seller 'yung products."* (Sometimes, I received underwhelming products that I became dissatisfied. That becomes a problem since sellers do not showcase their products properly.)



### 3.2.3.2. Damaged Items

Moreover, according to Vakulenko et al. (2019), customer experience has changed and developed a new set of features whereas an online store can be evaluated according to a range of widely used variables such as platform's ease of use, personalization, product range, clarity of product information, prices in relation to other online merchants, variety of shipping options, clarity of pricing, availability of the desired product, order tracking, on-time delivery, product meeting expectations, customer support features, overall look and design of site, and customer retention which comprises the different types of customer value and serve as a baseline for the customer e-retail or e-commerce experience. As defective and missing items are also experienced by online shoppers and as time passed, they develop how will they navigate through those issues. Even with those issues, most participants in this study believe that sellers are not fully at fault as they said how there can be lots of orders so they may not fully check and organize the items properly. Participant 6 from Laguna also said that handling of items can be not fully taken care of once orders are on the delivery companies. Participants have developed their own customer satisfaction mechanisms amidst this change in the retail setting.

### 3.2.3.3. Unresponsive Sellers

As the Philippines exhibits slow growth of e-commerce, merchants or sellers are faced with challenges related to the risks for fraud associated with the cash-on-delivery payment method. At the same time, the potential for cancellation of orders or delivery refusals is also a cause for concern according to Statista (2021). As a cancellation issue is experienced by Participant 4 from Laguna, she narrated, *"Malapit na dumating 'yung isang order ko tas biglang pina-cancel ng seller. Syempre, sobrang excited mo na tas maka-cancel lang 'yung inorder mo so disappointed ka ganon. Ni hindi ko alam kung bakit pina-cancel."* (There is one time where my order is soon to arrive, yet the seller cancelled the shipping. Of course, I was excited to receive that order then it suddenly get canceled without clear explanations from the seller.) She shared how frustrating it is since when it comes to that platform, if there are more than three canceled orders, the Cash on Delivery payment method will not be available to the customer. There may be slow growth for e-commerce in the Philippines but communicating with the consumers are given when handling a business. Participant 10 from Laguna also shared his experience where:

*"Ito 'yung lagi kong problema. For example po, kapag bibili ka po ng subscription. ang instruction po ay bibili ka ng subscription then icha-chat mo 'yung seller, so may mga times po na matagal sila mag-reply, hindi na sila nagre- reply ganun."* (This has always been my problem. For example, when it comes to buying online subscriptions, the instruction is to send a message to the seller. Sometimes, they take time to reply, and some do not reply at all)

He said that even after payment of the ordered online subscription, he did not receive a response from the seller at all. Aside from online products, this also happens to orders as sellers some take time to ship orders, so Participant 8 from Quezon just tend to cancel the order as she also realizes that she really did not want the product.

#### 3.2.3.4. Scams

According to Forbes, with the prevalence of online scams, preventive measures may be taken. There are a lot of ways discussed like checking the shop details, contact information and more (Rowan, 2022). Although, with the experience of Participant 8, there is almost nothing to check as she shared:

*“Nung pandemic, na-scam ako. May tumawag sakin. Nanalo daw ako ng relo sa raffle. Ang kailangan ko lang daw bayaran is ‘yung shipping fee na 500. So, nagulat ako kasi walang ganun na shipping fee. So, parang first time ko na manalo ng something online. Pero, inisip ko wala naman akong pinapasukan na mga entries ganon. Inisip ko na lang na baka sa Shopee, pag bumili ka ng product, may entry ka na. Ayun na lang iniisip ko and dahil first time ko manalo online, tinanggap ko na lang, nag-yes na lang ako. Nung dumating na ‘yung product, relo sya na mukhang makikita lang sa bangketa sa tabi-tabi? Naka-box naman sya. Tapos nung binuksan ko sya, pagkakita ko pa lang, hindi ko pa nahahawakan ‘yung relo, alam ko na na-scam ako. (During the pandemic, I got scammed where I first got a call saying that I won a watch in a raffle, and I only need to pay for the shipping fee that costs Php 500. Since it was my first time winning in a raffle, I got overwhelmed, and did not cross my mind that I did not even join a raffle in anything. With that, I agreed to pay the shipping fee to the caller and once I received the parcel, I realized that it was a scam due to the packaging and the item itself.)*

From that experience, the participant did not want to answer calls from random numbers anymore. If there is an order, delivery riders just send her a text message. She moved on and became more careful to not get scammed again.

#### 3.2.3.5. Dealing with Dissatisfaction

As common issues in online shopping were discussed, participants have their own beliefs for e-commerce. As for Participant 1, “Minsan ayoko na din bumili sa online kasi mas gusto ko na sa mismong store na para kita ko kung fit ba talaga sa akin lalo na kung may parties kang pupuntahan or events.” (Sometimes, I do not want to buy online and just opt to go to physical stores so that I can see the fit [of clothes] especially if there are parties or events to attend to. In contrary, other participants still uses online shopping amidst their negative experiences and they just tend to find ways on how to deal with those issues. Most became more diligent on reading through the reviews of other consumers and ask questions to sellers. Participant 9 from Batangas learned how to refund an item when he received a wrong color of his ordered shirt. In a study of Rahman et al. (2018), consumer attitudes toward online shopping are stated to usually has been determined by two factors; one is trust, and another is perceived benefits There may be issues but the ease of use, convenience, affordability that e-commerce brings defeat those negative experiences.

### 3.3. Structural Theme 3: Responding to Challenges of E-commerce

Finally, this section investigates Gen Z’s navigation on dealing with challenges in e-commerce. Two textual themes emerged from their narratives: (1) Strategies in dealing with challenges and (2) Suggestions for better online shopping experience.

### 3.3.1. Textural Theme 3a: Strategies in dealing with challenges

To create a seamless customer experience, e-commerce platforms should help customers with everything from making decisions about purchases to resolving concerns. (Moore, 2022). Although Gen Z college students have identified their own ways to deal with challenges in e-commerce. Being an informed consumer is important as Participant 8 from Quezon said, *“Dapat aware ka sa mga possible drawbacks ng online shopping kasi hindi naman computer ‘yung nagse-sell, tao pa rin yan so nagkakamali rin sila.”* (You have to be aware of the possible drawbacks of online shopping since the people behind it are also human, they are not computers.) She also emphasized how it is important to be aware if you want to shop online especially if you are engaging with international shops. Becoming aware of what sellers are claiming is important.

Asking recommendations from friends, family, and relatives before ordering is very helpful to make a deliberate purchase. Other participants also mentioned to avoid shops that do not display or offer enough information about their shop and product. If there are questions about the product, communicating with the sellers appropriately is the first step. According to Participant 5 from Laguna, *“Para makatulong sa mga future customers para sa shop na ‘yon, naglalagay na lang din ako ng reviews. Maging honest sa reviews. Lesson na lang din sa’kin na maging much better buyer sa next order.”* (To help future customers, I put my experience with the shop and what they offer. It is important to be honest with the reviews and be a much better buyer in the next order.) Other participants also said the same strategy where even the whole shopping experience can be stated in the reviews so that other consumers can be aware of the service of the shops. When it comes to damaged items, two participants said that they just try to fix it on their own so that they can still use product while three participants shared that they try to refund or exchange the damaged item.

### 3.3.2. Textural Theme 3b: Suggestions for better online shopping experience

As stated by Ghori et al. (2022), marketing changed as renowned brands and businesses started to shift their respective platforms. The digital market is quite different from the traditional market and sales generally depend upon the buyer’s mood, attitude, and behaviors which comprises trust, purchase intent, and motivational factors. As most enjoy e-commerce, there are still improvements that consumers want. The participants of this study have different takes on how to improve e-commerce platforms. Half of the participants said that platforms should be active on concerns of the customers. Every customer is different, so it is important to understand and meet their individual requirements by creating conversation and asking the right questions so that they will be guided to the perfect product that fit their needs. (Okoli, 2019)

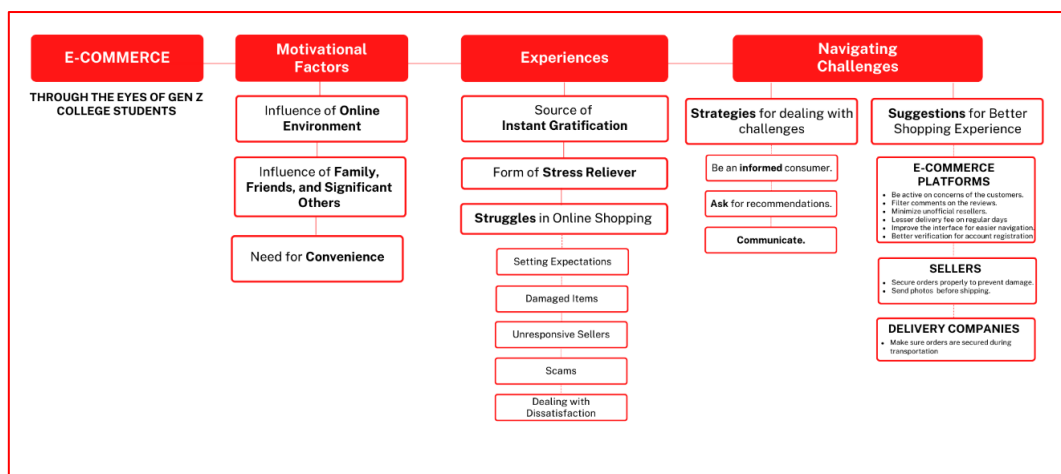
Specifically, the suggestion from Participant 9 from Batangas is lesser delivery fee on regular days. This means that even though there are no events or sale, delivery fees should be decreased. He added that platforms should also make sure that photos of products are really the ones being received by consumers. Sellers should make sure that orders will be delivered properly without getting damaged. Also, four participants from Laguna mentioned that sending photos of the ordered items before shipping is recommended.

Another suggestion is filtering of comments and sellers. As from three participants, they wish that e-commerce platforms should monitor if there are scammers, fake sellers, or those who sells dangerous products since there are products being sold who are not even approved by those who provide quality check like FDA. The government should also monitor the products being sold online, as said by two participants from Quezon.

Aside from sellers, reviews should also be written well. Participant 7 from Quezon shared his frustration on irrelevant reviews since some focuses on reviewing the packaging and getting the free coins if you provide photos, videos, and lengthy statements. She added that e-commerce platforms should minimize unofficial resellers since they tend to buy all particulars items in the main shop and sell the products on a higher a price on their account which she finds unfair especially to official stores or shop owners. Upon ordering, sellers are not the only one accountable but also delivery companies and riders according to three participants. They believe delivery companies should also make sure that orders will be secured during transportation.

E-commerce platforms play a huge role on a better online shopping experience so improving the interface of the platform where shoppers can easily navigate through the application is helpful according to Participant 2 from Laguna. At a similar point, Participant 5 suggested that platforms should have better verification for account registration since there are fake orders. Most participants in this study believes that e-commerce in the Philippines will immensely grow in the future so platforms should consider looking into further developments. According to Okoli (2019), an effortless and intuitive navigation not only reduces shopper frustration, but it is also a great confidence builder. As attention span of online shoppers get shorter especially for Gen Z, creating rich, enjoyable adventures that resonate with today's impatient shoppers is recommended by most participants in the study.

#### 4. Conceptual Model



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model

This phenomenological study aimed to comprehend electronic commerce from the lived experiences of Gen Z college students in this current generation where advancement of technologies is rapid, and people continuously accept and adapt to innovations. Figure 1 shows that conceptual model

developed according to the findings of this study. To briefly explain the model by the researchers, e-commerce is the phenomenon discussed in this phenomenological study. To start, Gen Z college students have their reasons for using e-commerce. The themes created from the narrative of the participants are Gen Z college students uses e-commerce from the influence of their online environment, family, friends, significant others, and their need for convenience. From continuous use of e-commerce platforms, participants have both positive and negative experiences. With that, the themes created from the participants were e-commerce is a source of instant gratification and a form of stress reliever. Gen Z college students find online shopping a way to relieve stress and have become a part of their daily life. Although, they deal with issues in online shopping such as not meeting their expectations on their ordered items, getting damaged items, dealing with unresponsive sellers, getting scammed, and being dissatisfied on products and service they received. However, participants have navigated through the challenges they experienced in e-commerce. The strategies for dealing with those as from Gen Z college students are being an informed consumer, asking for recommendations, and communicating. Also, there are suggestions for a better online shopping experience whereas the researchers sectioned the suggestions according to e-commerce platforms, sellers, and delivery companies.

Furthermore, this qualitative study focused mainly on the Gen Z's experiences on electronic commerce whereas a theoretical framework was discussed. To relate from those theories, both are closely related to the findings and conceptual model developed. As from Source Credibility Theory are centered on the importance of credibility of the source, this can be related to how the participants in the study also emphasized asking for recommendations from trusted sources. With Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing, it is focused on how trust and commitment overpower all other contextual issues together with the exchange partner power which can be used to determine relationship success. In relation to the conceptual model, this theory is not that applicable since the Gen Z participants did not fully acknowledge trust and commitment on e-commerce. It only somewhat related in the context of how participants suggested in improving their shopping experience especially with regards to establishing relationships with sellers.

## **5. Conclusion**

This research is centered on the following objectives: (1) Determining the motivational factors in using electronic commerce, (2) Description of experiences towards online shopping, and (3) Identification of ways to navigate through the challenges of electronic commerce. The researchers used phenomenology by Moustakas as the primary method of analysis where the study presented the recurrent themes drawn from the narratives of selected ten Gen Z online shoppers. In total, there are three structural themes that emerged from the narratives of the participants: (1) Reasons of using e-commerce, (2) Online shopping experience, and (3) Responding to challenges of e-commerce.

The first structural theme focuses on the determining motivational factors of using e-commerce. The first motivational factor is influence of environment where they based their purchasing decisions on what surrounds them. Due to trends online especially during the pandemic that blooms into curiosity on e-commerce, Gen Z tried to shop online. Second motivational factor is influence of family, relatives, friends, and significant others as recommendations from other customers especially the closest contact is

trustworthy for Gen Z. Last motivational factor is the need for convenience where Gen Z continuously shop online as e-commerce provides convenience and affordability.

The second structural theme, on the other hand, delves into the online shopping experiences of Gen Z in using e-commerce. Based on their narratives, they find online shopping fun and relieves stress. However, there are still struggles such as scams, unresponsive sellers, damaged items, and underwhelming products. Although their expectations are not met, Gen Z shoppers still shop online but becomes more understanding and diligent on their purchasing decisions.

The third and last structural theme discusses the variety of strategies identified by the participants to deal with the problems they encountered and suggestions for better online shopping experience. For dealing with challenges, being an informed consumer is important. It is also helpful to just be aware of the possible drawbacks as even the transactions are online, the people behind online shopping are humans and not computers. Although, there is always room for improvement especially with the platforms, sellers, and delivery companies to offer a better shopping experience. They should look into how they can prevent the negative experiences of consumers and not leave the coping mechanisms to the consumers.

In conclusion, the core essence of the phenomenon in this study based on the lived experiences of Gen Z online shoppers can be summed in three statements. First, Gen Z is heavily influenced by their environment, significant others like family, friends, partners, and influencers, and their need for convenience on using e-commerce. Second, whether Gen Z experience issues on their online shopping or not, they will still use e-commerce and just find their way to not experience those issues again. Lastly, amidst challenges and predicaments, they believe that e-commerce in the Philippines will still grow and improve if platforms, sellers, and delivery companies look into developing the best online shopping experience.

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