

## Gen Z, millennials overtake boomers as airport's biggest spenders in UAE

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**Dhaka: Airport shopping is undergoing a generational shift, with Gen Z and millennials emerging as the biggest spenders, overtaking Gen X and boomers, according to a new Airports Council International (ACI) Asia-Pacific & Middle East study released in Dubai.**

The study examined 36 major airports across 21 countries, drawing on insights from a survey of 4,000 passengers, said a media report on Wednesday, February 4. It finds that when indexed against Boomers, Gen Z and Millennials now spend 3.5 times more at airports, reshaping how duty-free and travel retail businesses operate.

In the retail category-wise per-passenger spend by generation, Millennials (378) are the single highest-spending cohort, followed closely by Gen Z (312), driven by strong interest in luxury goods,

perfumes, cosmetics, and electronics.

“Younger generations are much more tuned to the airport’s commercial value proposition than older travellers,” said Stefano Baronci, Director General of ACI Asia-Pacific and Middle East, during a roundtable.

### **Luxury goods drive Gen Z and Millennials' purchases**

Unlike Boomers, who remain price-sensitive and focused on familiar categories, Gen Z and Millennials show a stronger preference for authentic products, store engagement, and culturally relevant offerings. Gen Z travellers are four times more likely than Boomers to buy electronics and 2.5 times more likely to purchase luxury items, the study found.

### **They turn away from alcohol, tobacco**

In contrast, Boomers continue to dominate traditional categories such as alcohol and confectionery, reflecting more conservative and routine purchasing habits. They are 2.5 times more likely than Gen Z to buy alcohol, while younger travelers show far less interest in tobacco and liquor overall.

### **Younger travelers blend work, leisure trips**

The generational shift is also changing travel patterns. While 73 percent of Boomers travel primarily for leisure, Gen Z and Millennials increasingly blend business and leisure travel, a trend that increases time spent at airports and exposure to retail environments. Millennials (25 percent) and Gen Z (22 percent) are significantly more likely to combine work and leisure trips than Gen X (15 percent) or Boomers (4 percent).

### **Impulse buying still dominates shopping**

Despite being digitally savvy, younger travelers still make most purchases in-store. Around 70 percent of airport purchases remain impulse-driven, with digital channels currently influencing only a small share of final buying decisions.

For airports across the Middle East—where international traffic dominates—the rise of young, high-spending travelers is proving critical. Luxury goods, perfumes, and electronics now form the backbone of

airport retail performance, underscoring a fundamental shift in who is driving airport revenues.

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