



DECODING GEN



FOR BRAND GROWTH

ASSEMBLY

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A vibrant, close-up photograph of a diverse group of young people. In the foreground, a Black man with a mustache and a bright orange beanie looks directly at the camera, his hand near his face. Behind him, a young woman with blonde hair smiles, and another woman with dark hair and large hoop earrings looks on. To the right, a young man with a nose ring and a young woman with long dark hair are also visible, all appearing to be part of a close-knit group. The background is a clear blue sky.

DECODING GEN Z



GEN Z DECODED

Gen Z. A generation born in the late nineties and the early noughties. The first digitally native generation. The most diverse generation and the biggest.



Is there a more 🔥 topic for marketers everywhere right now than Gen Z? With the press holding a microscopic lens to the lives of Zs, they've been dissected, analysed, and picked apart from every angle. But, who are they really? And, are they that different from their Millennial counterparts?



Assembly has been on a mission to decode the research that's out there, conduct our own proprietary research, – through custom surveys powered by Appinio – and analyse our own data and learnings to identify what the most important factors and findings are.

To decode Gen Z for brand growth.

As a digitally native team of experts, we've outlined

8 KEY PRINCIPLES

to follow to deliver positive brand growth with Gen Z, along with the characteristics that define Zs and the corresponding implications and opportunities for brands.



But this isn't all you'll hear from us, and it won't stop here.

Our team of trend scouts are experts in Gen Z and will continue to follow new trends and emerging behaviours as this generation evolves.

For now, dig into our latest.



KRISTIE NAHA-BISWAS

Head of Insights & Connections, Europe, Assembly

Gen Z have an estimated
disposable income of
\$360bn

in the US. We believe now is the time
for brands to deepen their exploration
of Gen Z, the next force of spending
and brand loyalty.

2x

this is already
double the
estimate from
three years ago





THE JOURNEY OF GEN Z

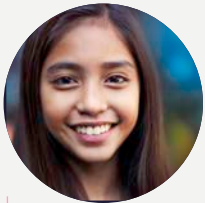
WHAT ARE THE LIFE
EXPERIENCES OF GEN Z
WHICH HAVE SHAPED
THEIR BEHAVIORS SO FAR,
AND INTO THE FUTURE?

Gen Z is a Journey, Not an Audience



Born between 1997-2009, Gen Z are a generation going through the journey of the formative years of life. Through these stages, they are finding themselves and experiencing life firsts, providing opportunities for brands to engage with them for the first time during these major life moments.

But the Gen Z journey also occurs within themselves at each of these life stages, as Gen Z are a fluid, flexible, and everchanging generation. Their collective identity is in their differences.



13-16

LIFE STAGE:

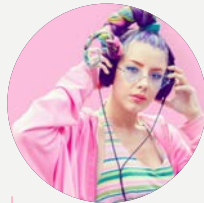
Living at home and completing education

SPENDING POWER:

Influences on household purchases and pocket money spending

PURCHASE SEGMENTS:

Fashion, Beauty, Music, Gaming



16-18

LIFE STAGE:

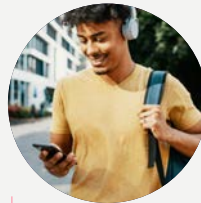
Finishing school and gaining independence as they become young adults

SPENDING POWER:

Still mainly reliant on parents but with opportunity for part-time work for personal spending

PURCHASE SEGMENTS:

Fashion, Beauty, Music, Gaming



18-21

LIFE STAGE:

Entering legal adulthood and next stage of their lives through further education or entering the workplace

SPENDING POWER:

Start of financial independence and freedom from parents

PURCHASE SEGMENTS:

Grocery, Major Electronics



21-25

LIFE STAGE:

Living independently from parents and away from home, but still exploring the world

SPENDING POWER:

Many are in full-time employment and therefore have their own disposable income to spend how they see best

PURCHASE SEGMENTS:

Homeware, Major Electronics

PRINCIPLE 1

DON'T TARGET "GEN Z"

Gen Z are not a singular audience. At each of their life stages, they hold distinct behaviours, experiences, and needs. Therefore, the most meaningful way to connect with these consumers is to be relevant to their current needs.

The first rule to targeting Gen Z: don't target Gen Z. Brands must find the most meaningful ways to connect with young, emerging consumers by being relevant to individual life stages, and how their experiences change across those unique moments in their lives. This is the key to growing alongside Gen Z throughout their journeys.

Gen Z Have Been Brought Up In a Time of Rapid Change and Tumultuous Events, Shaping Who They Have Become Today

These experiences are not unique to Gen Z, with the global population living through them too, but this is the only world that this generation knows and therefore has shaped their response to it.



2001:
9/11

2006:
An Inconvenient Truth Published

2007:
First iPhone Released, Facebook Goes Mainstream,
Netflix Starts Streaming

2008:
The Great Recession, Spotify Launched

2010:
BP Oil Spill

2011:
Osama bin Laden Killed

2013:
Black Lives Matter Movement Starts

2015:
Gay Marriage Legalised in the US

2016:
Donald Trump Becomes President,
TikTok Platform Launches

2018:
Greta Thunderberg Starts Protesting

2020:
Covid Pandemic



2022: Cost of Living Crisis

41%

of young people
are not able to
live independently
without support
from their family

49%

of Gen Z believe
they will never
earn enough to
support a family

AND THE GLOBAL EVENTS ARE STILL COMING, AS GEN Z ARE DISPROPORTIONALLY AFFECTED BY THE CURRENT COST OF LIVING CRISIS

This event will impact this generation's path in life, as their financial situation will become a roadblock to progress in the next stage of adulthood and keep them younger for longer.

PRINCIPLE 2

READ THE ROOM

Global events up until now have had lasting effects on Gen Z, impacting how they interact and socialise, their life priorities, and their outlook on the future.

Brands should not be blinkered by global events and need to consider what the impact on Gen Z behaviour, consumption, and demand will be in this landscape in the coming years. Brands may need to adapt their strategy in marketing and media in the short-term, but also consider the long-term changes in product propositions and marketing, to remain empathetic and relevant to Gen Z's realities.

To Look Forward, Gen Z Look to the Past



Gen Z are “**nowstalgic**”. With their lives defined by rapid change, uncertainty, crisis, and continuous newness, they long for a time when things were more steady and simple.

This generation, therefore, feels connected to a time before the hyper digitisation of the modern world they have lived through, with a particular affinity for the early years of their life in the '90s and '00s. This has influenced their fashion, media, entertainment, and technology tastes. Y2K fashion has dominated trends over the past years, seeing a +625% increase in search volume from 2019 to 2022. The iconic Motorola Razr phone was redesigned and relaunched in 2020, selling out in just 2 minutes.

Gen Z break the definition of nostalgia in their desire for the past, as they have been inspired by times unknown to them, romanticised by their portrayals in the media. The popularity of Netflix's *Stranger Things* is an example of this. Set in the '80s, the show captured the hearts of Gen Z - 48% of them watched the show. This has influenced their culture, as they embrace the trends, music, and media the show presents.

Beyond influencing trends, nostalgia is a source of comfort for Gen Z. During the COVID pandemic, it became a key crutch for the way people sustained themselves during lockdown. Spotify saw a +54% increase in nostalgia-themed playlists at the start of the pandemic, and 90's sitcom *FRIENDS* saw a +30% yearly increase in minutes viewed in 2020.

Nostalgia doesn't only provide a source of comfort during times of crisis, but also comfort for the future. Being too young to take action, Gen Z have simply been witnesses to the global events of their lifetime. **This generation is therefore determined to learn from the mistakes of previous generations and do things differently** as they reach adulthood themselves. Reimagining the past through these current trends is just the first step in this process.



75% of British Gen Zs enjoy consuming media from earlier decades because it reminds them of when things were simpler

71% of 16-25 year olds believe that the future is frightening

IMPLICATION FOR BRANDS:

To guide success in the present day, look to your brand history and heritage.

Like Gen Z, consider how you can bring your brand history, culture, and product and reimagine it to the current day. But be aware, as Gen Z are famously fleeting with their cultural choices, therefore ensure that it can connect to something bigger so it does not only live in the now but can continue to resonate in the future.



WHO ARE GEN Z?

WHAT ARE THE DEFINING
CHARACTERISTICS AND VALUES THAT
MAKE THIS GENERATION DISTINCT?

Gen Z Are Not Unique In Their Values, But They Are Distinct.

Gen Z is often seen as different and unknown compared to other populations, as brands and other generations try to connect with them. But reading between the lines of Gen Z's slang and their 'sus' exterior, what they value is not that dissimilar to the generations before them. What does differentiate Gen Z is their response and activity in relation to these values.

Brands must look beyond a traditional pen portrait view of an audience and understand the motivations and values of their consumers to find unique connections that build lasting growth.

6 DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF GEN Z

We've defined 6 distinct characteristics for Gen Z, which help define who they are and what's important to them, and therefore, the influence they have on their purchasing patterns and attitudes towards brands.

PASSIONATE DISRUPTORS:

ambitions to change the world

GLOBALLY CONNECTED:

connectivity to communities like no other generation before them

SHAPESHIFTERS:

actively experimenting and distinctly hybrid

ENTREPRENEURS:

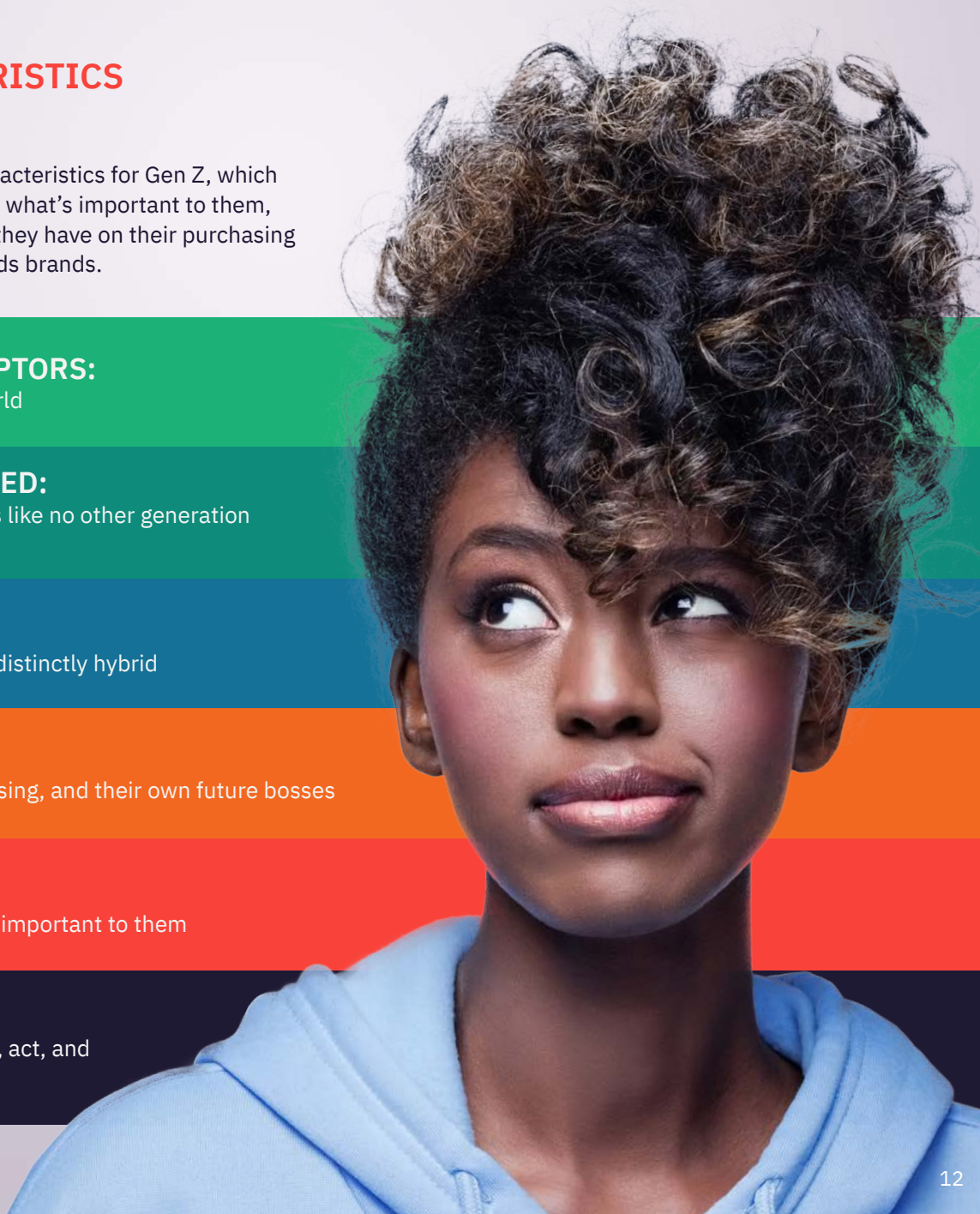
ambitious, never-compromising, and their own future bosses

PURPOSEFUL:

alignment with what's most important to them

VULNERABLE:

increasing pressure to think, act, and behave a certain way



1. Passionate Disruptors

Gen Z care. Living through a period of time when Climate Change has been at the forefront of the global conversation, they are worried about its lasting impacts on themselves, their family, and the generations after them. They are also living through times of radical change when it comes to recognition and equality; during their lifetime, 22 countries have legalised same-sex marriage. But there is still room for growth, and Gen Z recognise this and want to fix it.

While they are not the first generation with **grand ambitions to change the world**, they are the generation that has been armed with the Internet to help them do so. The power of the web closes the gap between brand and legal stakeholders, and allows Gen Z to lay pressure on those who can actually make the change.

83% of young voters believe that young people have the power to change their country

70% of Gen Z believe they can take part in a social movement through social media

2. Globally Connected

As a generation, Gen Z have been born into a truly diverse and globalised community. Spread across the world, but always together, **Gen Z have experienced connectivity unlike any other generation before.** With the oldest Gen Z still children at the launch of the first iPhone, they don't remember a time without the immediacy and mobility of the internet, allowing them to be connected to anyone, anywhere, and at any time.

This in turn has shaped Gen Z to be connected into a global community, blurring the lines between geographical borders and allowing this generation to connect, access, and experience communities and interests that they would previously struggle to access. In recent years, we can see that this has resulted in a shift in influence between the East and West. The US is now the second biggest consumer of anime outside of Japan, watched by 72% of the population. Similarly, 42% of viewers of the 2021 hit Korean show Squid Game were between the ages of 18-29.

77% of Gen Z say they have never met an online friend in person

20% more likely to use the internet to make new connections

3. Shape Shifters

Actively experimenting and distinctly hybrid, Gen Z's identity is in a constant state of evolution. They throw out the existing rule book when it comes to identity, breaking existing norms and instigating a paradigm shift for society and the future. This is particularly apparent in the representation of identity, as Gen Z are throwing out labels. In fact, 78% of them believe that people should be able to define their own identity instead of being labelled by society. But this isn't simply a case of mixing and matching styles; instead this generation are masters at connecting how they feel internally to how they present this externally. This is particularly prominent in their representation of gender. In the US, 1 in 4 LGBTQ youth identified themselves as non-binary. Therefore, this makes Gen Z a group of distinct individuals.

However, when it comes to style, Gen Z also have contrasting attitudes. 28% of this generation likes to stand out in the crowd but 37% of them also value being accepted by others, with both of these values being higher than any other generation. As this group navigates early adulthood, their ambition to throw out the rule book does not leave them immune to the peer pressures experienced by all teens at some point in their lives.

75% of Gen Z say their race, gender or sexuality cannot be categorised

25% of Gen Z expect their gender identification to change throughout their lifetime

42% of Gen Z feel pressured with a need to be perfect

4. Entrepreneurs

By 2025, Gen Z will make up 27% of the workforce, and they are ambitious about it. 63% of them value being successful, and they are 20% more likely to describe themselves as ambitious. But, in typical Gen Z style, they are not satisfied with the way the workplace currently exists, and are therefore looking to change it. This generation values ethics in the companies they work for as much as their personal values, and are not willing to compromise on them in the face of money. They are also seeking passion from the work that they do, and will not stick around if they are not satisfied with a role anymore.

At the same time, money is the pinnacle of ambition for Gen Z, with 31% of them describing themselves as money-driven. This has largely taken form in the shape of the side hustle culture; 42% of Gen Z have a side hustle, and in their quests to turn their passion into their careers, a third of these side hustlers want to take it full-time. This further exemplifies how Gen Z will disrupt the way jobs work in the future, with many of them envisioning themselves being their own **bosses in the future**.

75% of Gen Z are willing to switch career paths entirely when looking for new jobs

42% of Gen Z would rather be at a company with a purpose than one that pays more

32% of Gen Z choose their place of work due to work/life balance

5. Purposeful

In a world full of infinite choices, Gen Z are questioning where they spend their time. 36% of them state they worry about the amount of time they spend on social media, and this increases to 39% who worry about the amount of time they spend on their smartphone. Therefore, they are choosing to reduce the amount of time they spend online and also choosing to **align their time with what is important to them**.

These media spaces lean towards spaces of positivity and fulfilment, as more commonplace social media sites have become less safe spaces, with the presence of internet “trolls”. As a result, Gen Z is the only generation that started to see a decrease in social media usage in 2021. This can also take them away from spaces with a heavy brand presence, with **Assembly research finding that 27% of Gen Z spend their time on platforms with less paid ads**. Looking for fulfilling spaces can also encourage this generation to seek opportunities to expand on their interests and expertise.

57% of young consumers are making a point to choose content that makes them feel fulfilled

55% of 18-25 year olds are experiencing social-media fatigue

6. Vulnerable

With their values pulling them in many directions, Gen Z are not always as tenacious as they first appear. The values they hold also have the disadvantage of increasing the **pressure this generation puts on themselves** to act and feel a certain way. This has led to a widespread feeling of anxiousness among Gen Z, and in turn, mental health support has also become a priority.

Even though they are the most connected generation in history, Gen Z still feel incredibly isolated, and 79% of them actually feel lonely. Despite the widespread acceptance of the importance of mental health, loneliness still holds a stigma within this generation, with 58% of Gen Z saying they feel too embarrassed to admit they feel lonely. This loneliness is, at times, greatly heightened by digital connectedness, as Gen Z are surrounded by others' presentations of their lives. Even among Gen Z, no one wants to use social media to show the negative elements of their lives.

40% of Gen Z report feeling persistently sad or hopeless

53% of young people found their mental health the biggest challenge during the pandemic

PRINCIPLE 3

MAP YOUR VALUES

There are many core values that shape Gen Z collectively and individually. Brands looking to connect with this audience need to understand how their will impact their interactions with the world, with each other, and more importantly with brands. This will result in a more authentic and relatable message to these young consumers as they navigate their individual journeys.



Considered In Life, Considered In Shopping

Assembly's bespoke data analysis shows Gen Z behaviours that point to this generation being carefully considered in nature.

This more considered approach translates to a longer consumer journey. When we analysed Assembly purchase data, we saw 28% lower CVR vs Millennials, suggesting more extensive browsing behaviour and more considered purchases.

We've also found that 69% of Gen Zs would rather save up for something they really want, and 34% require brands to be trendy, again showing consideration for how purchases reflect who they are and their unique identity vs. impulse buys or bargains that don't align with the desire for quality.

+31%

more words
used in research
responses vs.
Gen Y

69%

would rather
save up for
items they value

+40%

say quality
and price are
most important
purchase factors

34%

need a brand
to be
trendy



PRINCIPLE 4

TACKLE THE 'MESSY' MIDDLE

This greater 'browsing behaviour' and more considered journey means that brands must shift away from a siloed approach to performance and brand. Because consumers are engaging with your media, visiting, and browsing your range, capturing this activity requires a different approach to media, messaging, creativity, and KPIs than both the traditionally focused BRAND activity or PERFORMANCE media.

It requires brands to consider how consumers connect and engage with their brand and category and put more effort into connecting the experience and driving consideration that will lead to purchase.

CASE STUDY:

CROCS

Embracing self-expression and collaboration.

Crocs identified that they didn't need to drive awareness, rather they needed to drive relevance that would be key to future success. They placed self-expression at the heart of their brand and, "learned the power of collaboration by creating a variety of authentic global partnerships."

Senior Marketing Director Yann Le Bozec said that Crocs', "focused on digital and created a global brand playbook." They recognised the potential of their classic and iconic clog and focused on it.

"We deepened our consumer connection by listening to our fans, engaging with youth culture, and positioning Crocs as a canvas for self expression."

Collaborations with unexpected brands and partnerships with mass celebrities were key to driving relevance for their growth and propelling Crocs towards becoming a favoured Gen Z brand.

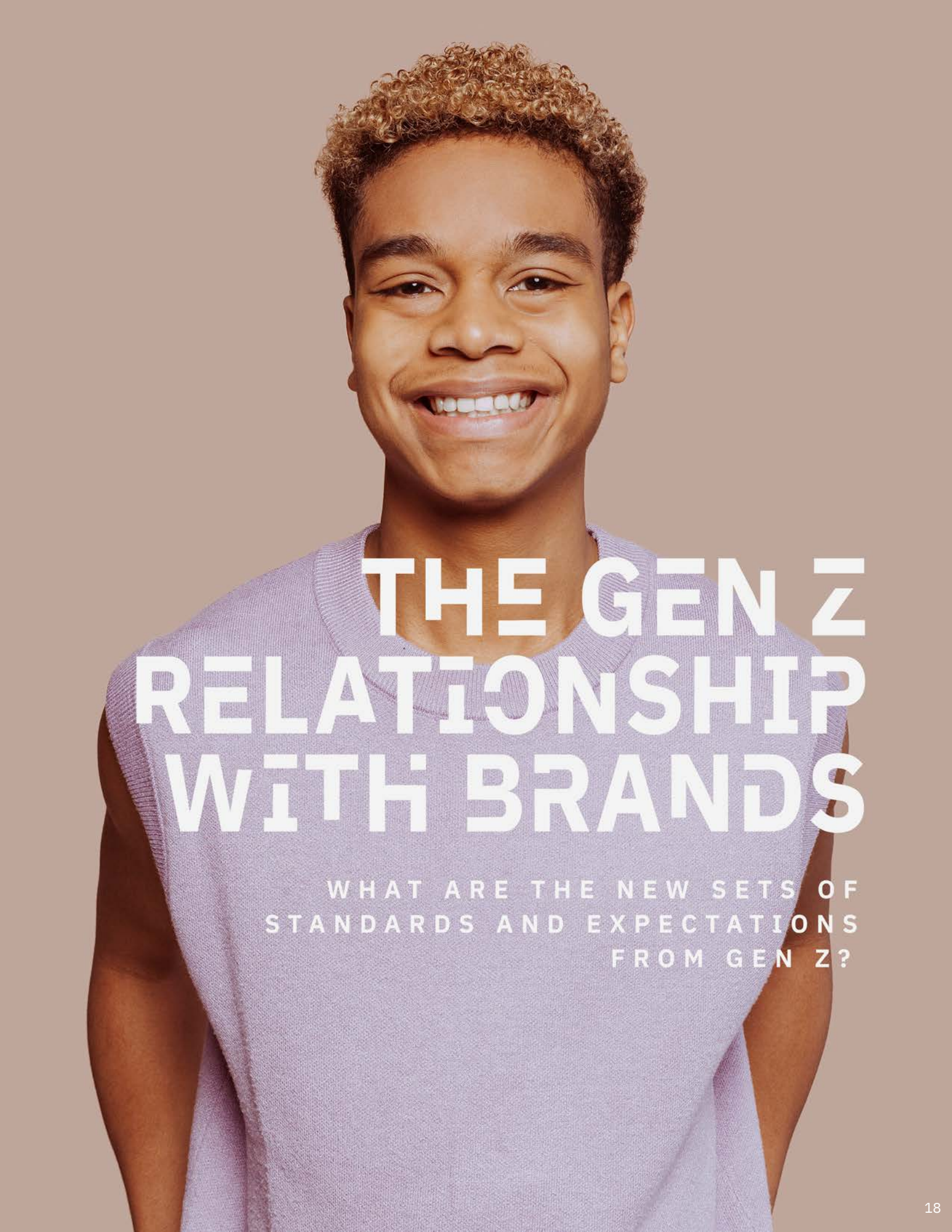
"We are a brand that listens to our fans." For Crocs, building brand resonance goes beyond how to wear the clog, it's about connection.

"It's a connection to consumers as individuals. So we set out to be a brand that authentically connects with fans, and fans are always right."

+87%

global revenue
between 2019 &
2021



A young man with curly, light brown hair is smiling broadly, showing his teeth. He is wearing a light purple, textured sweater. The background is a solid, muted orange-brown color.

THE GEN Z RELATIONSHIP WITH BRANDS

WHAT ARE THE NEW SETS OF
STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS
FROM GEN Z?



High Standards For Brands

Gen Z's tendency to have a fluid identity is also extended to their relationship with brands, as they aren't as loyal to brands as previous generations.

In fact, overall, our survey showed us that 55% of Gen Z aren't loyal to any brands. And their loyalty and affinity to brands are driven by how these brands align with their own values and identities.

In fashion, **45% of Gen Z consider the brand** in their choice compared to 56% of Millennials.

Gen Z have high expectations of brands and want brands to empower them, stand up for the marginalised, and be beacons of positive influence. Social media has been a driving factor. Millennials have changed their behaviours as a result of Social media, including how they can connect and engage with brands. For Gen Z, it is all they have ever known, and has fundamentally changed the expectations of brands in terms of values and transparency.

71%

of Gen Z are more likely to buy a product if its ad mentions mental health advocacy

78%

of Gen Z respondents told Fuse Media that they see a brand as empowering when they provide a platform for marginalised groups to tell their authentic story



PRINCIPLE 5

COLLABORATE

Brands can build loyalty with Gen Z, but need to be open and transparent, and enable consumers to co-create, participate, and be involved with their brand. It doesn't mean it's all about UGC, but rather about enabling open and transparent communications with your audience. Broadcasting messages (whether in digital or linear channels) is not enough to connect with Gen Z. You need to show up when it's important and be social. Enable, empower, and celebrate your consumer.

CASE STUDY: CONVERSE

Community powers a new brand platform, where consumer and brand values intersect.

Driving co-collaboration with creators and uplifting community voices allowed Converse to successfully connect with their audience through shared values.

Assembly planned and executed Converse's Create Next campaign, which focused on nurturing a new generation of Black filmmakers in London under the mentorship of film star, John Boyega. The campaign drove a reach of 34.5M, 12% search uplift, and helped build real brand equity with Gen Z in a key market.

Despite being viewed as expensive, (our research showed only 29% of UK Gen Z find Converse affordable) 51% would still buy from the brand, showing that this generation sees the value in the product and that building brand love through approaches like this campaign can reduce price sensitivity for the long term.

51%

of UK Zs would buy despite cost

9%

uplift in brand attitudes post Create Next





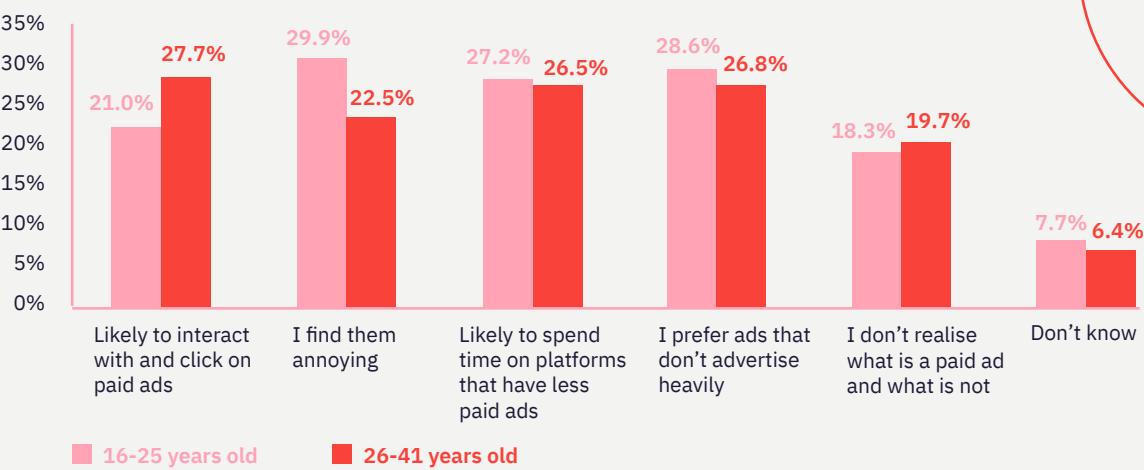
A Distaste for Advertising

The challenge for brands does not stop with the high expectations from Gen Z. This generation is swiftly rejecting ads and wants something more from media.

Research conducted by Assembly across 6 markets has found that Gen Z has a much greater dislike of advertising overall than Millennials. But there are marked differences across the globe, in France, for example, consumers find it difficult to distinguish what a paid ad is vs. other comms, Chinese Gen Z are turning to platforms where there is little advertising and US and UK prefer brands that don't advertise heavily but are also the countries most likely to interact with paid ads.

Whilst this research is based on claimed behaviour, we match this with our Assembly anonymised data norms and we can see that Gen Z audiences across Meta, YouTube, and Google have the lowest response to advertising. In fact, on Meta alone, our global client benchmarks have Gen Z CTR 36% lower than Millennials.

29%
of 16-25 year olds
prefer brands that
don't advertise
heavily



PRINCIPLE 6

CONTENT IS STILL KING

Brands need to work harder to make advertising appealing, funny, emotional and relevant to have distinct and lasting impact. Content is King is no new concept, and brands need to ensure that all comms (paid, owned and earned) has content that is going to be relevant and connect with their audience.

CASE STUDY:

Supercuts

Dynamic, custom partnership and alignment with popular film franchise supercharges brand perception.

Value hair salon, Supercuts, needed to counter increased competition and close the gap between awareness and conversion, while levelling up their brand perception. So, Assembly used our communications strategy process to uncover the insight required to develop a fresh brand platform and the comms framework to deliver it.

Key to our approach was identifying a content gap vs. Supercuts' competitors that was extremely high affinity to our key audience segments: entertainment. We partnered with Fandom to generate custom content based around hotly anticipated Marvel film releases and ran these extensively across the Fandom site with 25% SOV as well as pre roll on upcoming Marvel release trailers on YouTube.

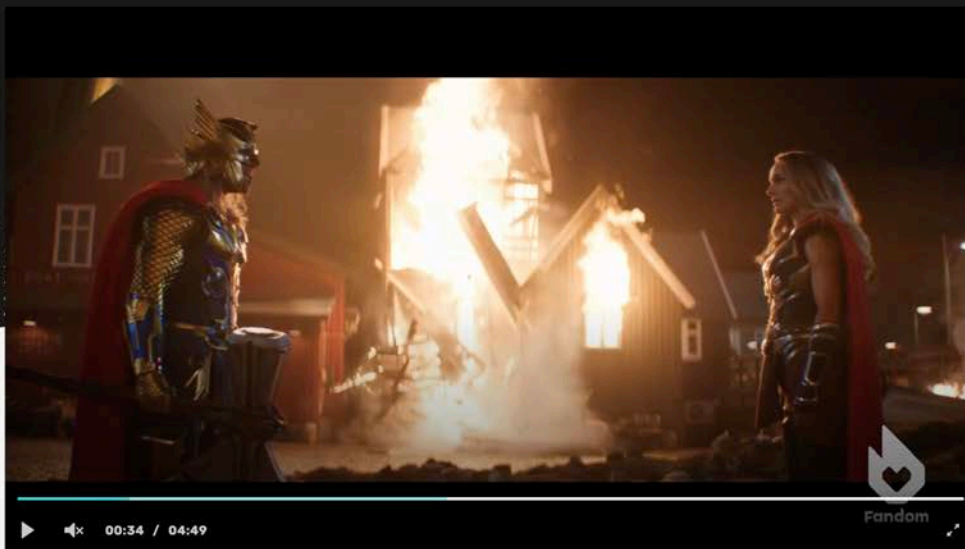
The content partnership resulted in a **64% lift in unaided brand awareness** and a **7% lift in Opinion** for Supercuts and allowed us to find the competitive white space that gave Supercuts some newfound cool factor.

64%

lift in unaided brand awareness

7%







lift in Opinion



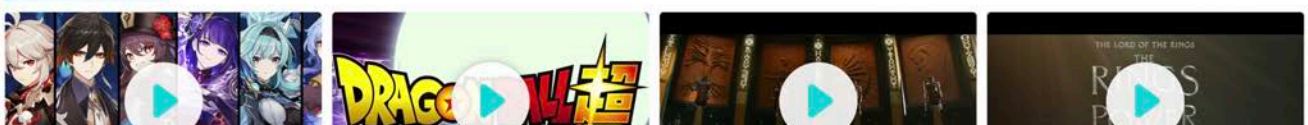
Natalie Portman on Wielding Thor's Hammer and Returning to the MCU

Jun 29

UP NEXT

-  'Andor' Shows Cassian and Mon Mothma's Different Paths
Sep 19
-  Spoiler Alert - The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild
Sep 14
-  The Perils of Legacy in The Rings of Power's Númenor
Sep 13
-  Fanalytics | Vampire Academy
Sep 13
-  Spoiler Alert - Final Fantasy VII
Sep 7
-  By The Numbers | Tom Cruise
Aug 31

FANALYTICS



THE SOCIAL BEDROCK

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA
IN GEN Z'S LIVES, COMPARED TO
THEIR MILLENNIAL COUNTERPARTS?





Social Leads in Shopping Influence

“Content is King” could not be more true when we talk about Social. Whether you love it or hate it, Social Media is critical for most brands to reach all audiences, but especially Gen Z experiences.

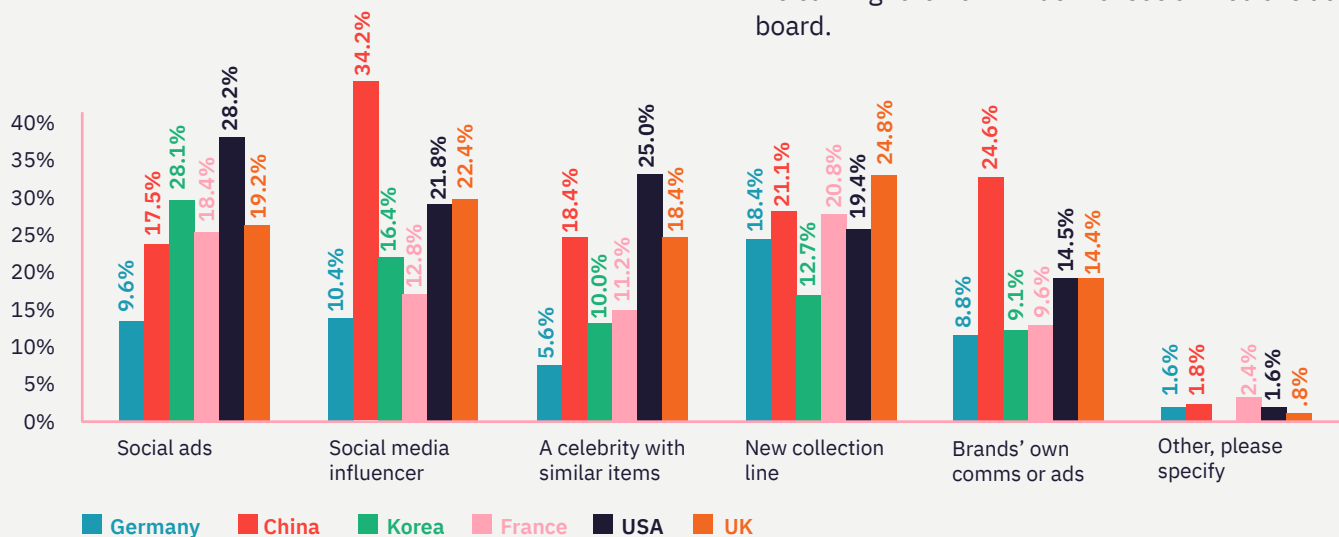
Assembly research found that Gen Z claim a brand’s advertising to be one of the least influential factors in their most recent fashion purchase, with social-led factors being more influential including friends, influencers, and social ads.

In fact, social media influencers are the third most influential factor behind style and friends/family. There is extremely positive sentiment (90%) expressed about influencer marketing and 70% of brands are increasing their spend to collaborate with creators and influencers on other formats, like livestreaming and shoppable media – and this is happening globally.

Results from Assembly campaigns have found that using creator-led content on TikTok was more than 3 times more effective than using the standard brand creative.

“Influencer-led, native creative is proven to be 3 times more effective than standard ads on TikTok.”
– Michaela Parmar, Strategy Account Director, Assembly

There are market nuances – research showed Chinese Gen Z shoppers confirm Social Media influencers as the most influential factor in their shopping, whilst we see the reverse in Germany and France. As global marketers, this reminds us that there is no one silver bullet, however, we can’t ignore how influential social media is across the board.



PRINCIPLE 7

SOCIAL FIT FOR YOUR BRAND

There is no one size fits all. Social media platforms can offer different routes to connect with your consumers and drive business performance. Market nuances mean a tailored approach is required, using the right levers fit for your audience and fit for your brand.



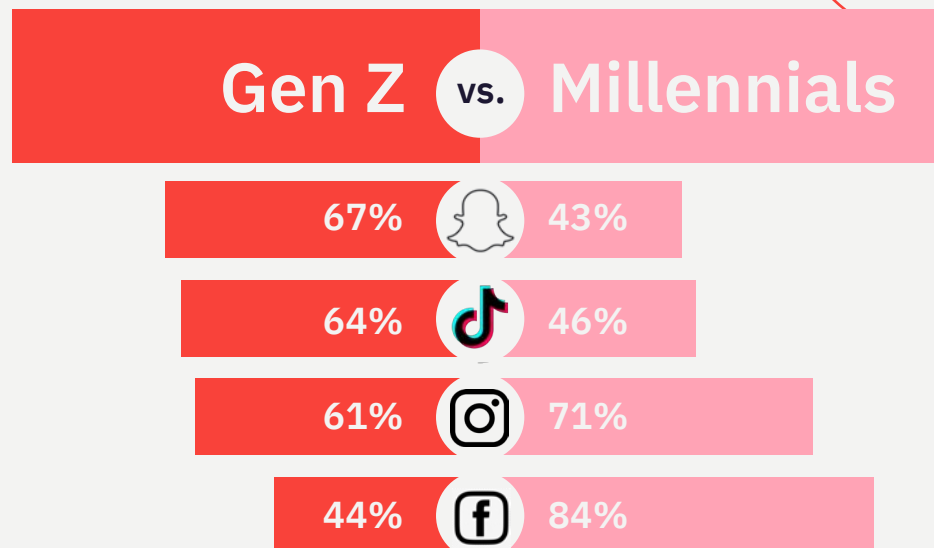
Social Media is Entertainment, Research & Expression

When we look at platform usage, there are marked differences between platforms used. Yet, it is not just about platform preferences, but also the behaviors.

Gen Z engage with social media differently than Millennials. The latter stay connected with personal and professional connections and find and buy new products on social media. On the other hand, Gen Z opt for video-centered platforms, like Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and TikTok.

45%

of Gen Z in APAC research products on social (vs 42% on search engines)



Social Media has become so central to Gen Z's lives, that they are also using it as their first place of discovery and research. They are less likely than Millennials to discover new brands on search engines, as social media is overtaking search engines as the number 1 place for researching products.

"The hashtag **#tiktokmademebuyit** has more than 2.3 billion views on TikTok."

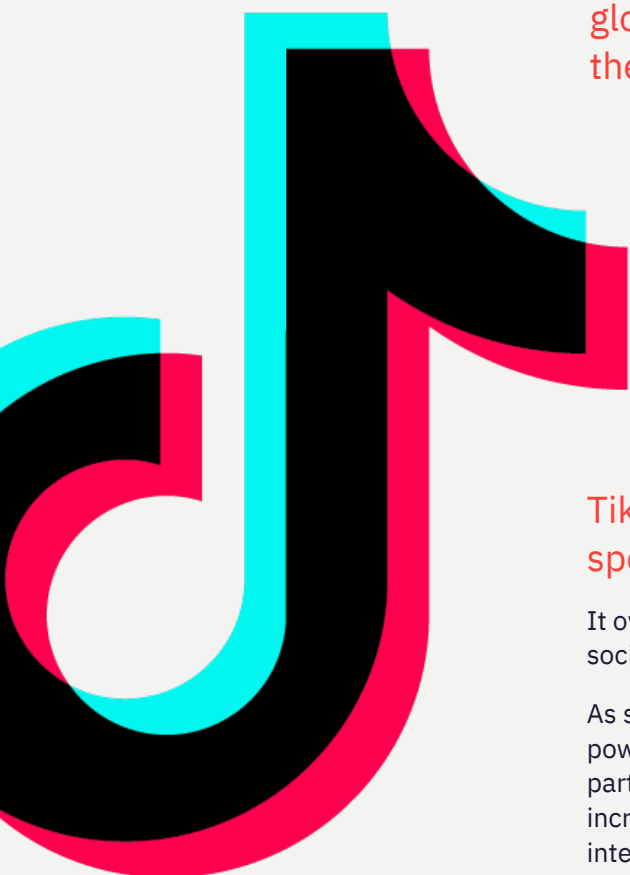
IMPLICATION FOR BRANDS:

The rise and dominance of multiple social media platforms has an impact, not just on how a brand uses social, but also how social platforms fit into the wider media mix. There is a need for brands to have a deep and 'real time' understanding of how their audiences are using platforms and the impact that all comms – whether it's performance or earned media – will have on their brand and business goals.



TikTok: Building Community

TikTok says it is “building a global community” on its app, and this strong sense of social connection is what appeals to the Gen Z audience. Brainlabs report that globally, 59% of users feel a sense of community when they are on the platform.



3rd
biggest
platform
globally

2nd
most used
by Gen Z

Highest
average time
spent in a day

TikTok has risen incredibly fast and is dominating time spent by Gen z.

It overtook Snapchat and Pinterest in 2017 and took its place in the top 4 social platforms in 2019, closely following Instagram.

As such, what started as a Gen Z platform has since developed into a powerhouse spanning all age demographics, becoming a particularly vital part of the platform mix for reaching Gen Z and Millennials. These audiences increasingly turn to the platform to uncover and partake in the latest trends, interacting with and discovering brands.

Consumers are nowadays overexposed to ads, with the average consumer seeing more than 4,000 ads in a day, so capturing their attention is vital. TikTok is already defying the “digital can’t build brand” narrative, as TikTok ads are more memorable, due to the creativity, authenticity, and co-creation involved. The emotional dimension of its videos and the fact that this lends itself to audio being enabled are the driving forces behind the power of TikTok.

IMPLICATION FOR BRANDS:

Authentic content is very important on TikTok, as is ensuring the content feels native to the platform and messaging is relevant to the audience, whether it’s through brand-owned or creator/collaborator content.

CASE STUDY:

DIESEL

An embrace of TikTok and other creator-led and video content brings newfound fire to the Diesel brand.

Diesel has been on a mission to connect with a younger, fashion-conscious audience, reclaiming itself as the world's most premium and desired denim brand on the planet.

Diesel's brand heat has exploded this year, entering Lyst's global top 10 hottest fashion brands for the first time. Social media, influencers, and video have been fundamental to delivering attention, reach, and scale to key campaign bursts.

TikTok has been an essential platform in the mix. Native, entertaining, creator-led content is king, delivering 2.4 times higher VCR than other types of content on the platform. Diesel's TikTok following has increased 44% in the last year, with Fashion Show paid teasers delivering the highest views to date. TikTok has been a key driver for reach and overall video views for campaigns, delivering 80-90% of total video views and the most efficient CPMs.

#9

in Lyst's hottest fashion brands

2.4x

higher VCR from creator-led content

+6pts

uplift in favorability amongst UK Gen Z females



TONI BRAXTON IS PART OF THE

DIESEL LIBRARY

YOUR FUNDAMENTAL DENIM PIECES
OUR JOURNEY TO SUSTAINABILITY

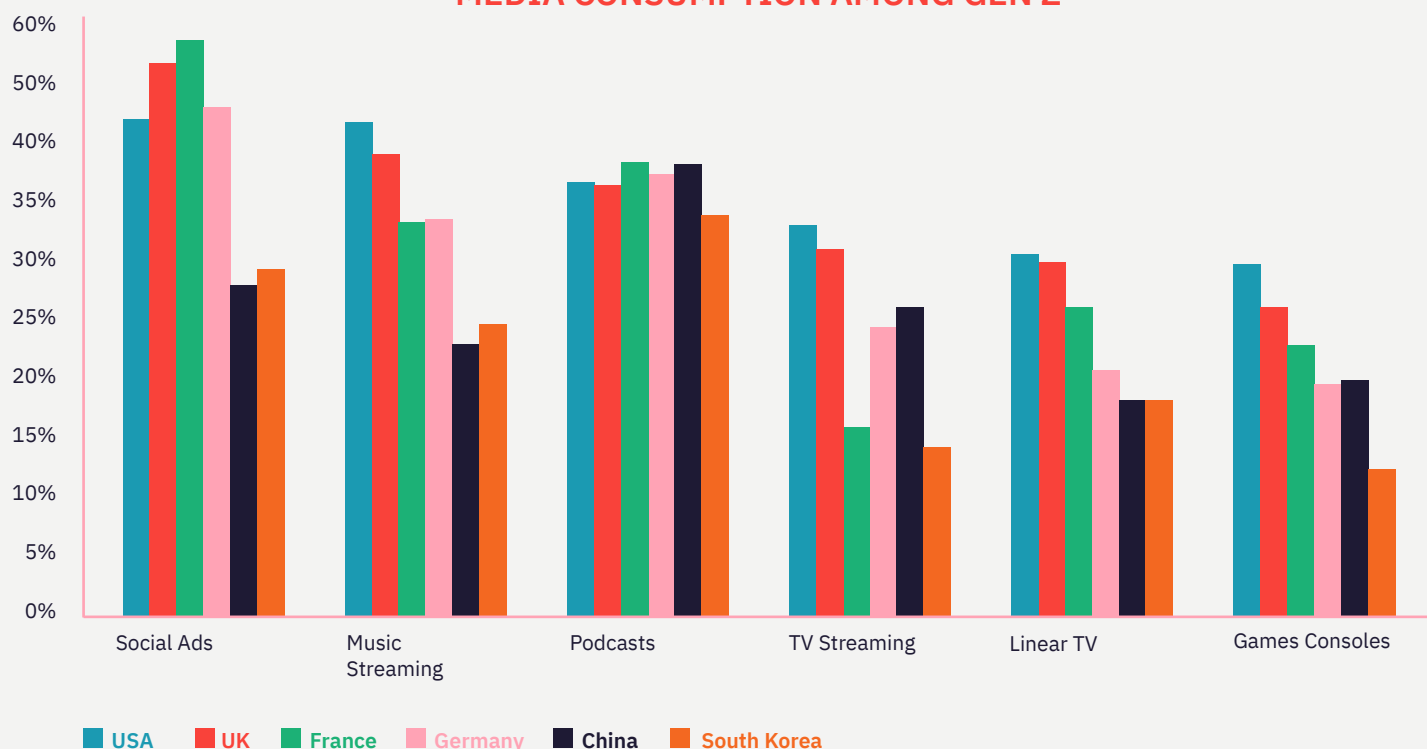


MORE TO MEDIA THAN SOCIAL

WHAT ARE GEN Z'S MEDIA PATTERNS
AND HOW ARE THEY DIFFERENT (OR
THE SAME)?

Social Media Dominates, But Other Channels Matter

MEDIA CONSUMPTION AMONG GEN Z



Media consumption varies per market, with some key differences to consider when planning budget splits or deciding where to invest the most. As expected, social media dominates in the US, UK, France, and Germany. Music streaming is very high in popularity across the US and European markets, and it's just as popular as social media in the US, specifically.

The most popular music genre in 2021 was Hip Hop/ Rap which has also grown the most in popularity since 2019 (+62% uplift). TV streaming has slightly overtaken linear TV in the US and UK, but linear TV remains more likely consumed for more than 4 hours in France.

IMPLICATION FOR BRANDS:

A market-specific approach is important to ensure you reach and engage with Gen Z where they're most likely to spend their time and on channels/ platforms that have high affinity.



Gen Z And Millennial Media Consumption Is Not All That Different

As the first completely digitally native generation, 93% of Gen Z consume media on mobile, and they are 1.3 times more likely to do so for more than 4 hours a day than Millennials. Growing up with social media, it is no surprise that Gen Z are consuming more than their Millennial counterparts, but other media is not too dissimilar. Gaming and podcast consumption is relatively similar, while Gen Z are slightly more likely to stream music and TV, whereas a higher percentage of Millennials watch linear TV.

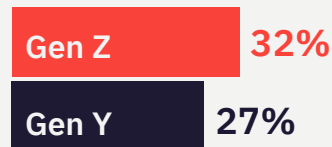
SOCIAL MEDIA

% spending 2+ hours a DAY



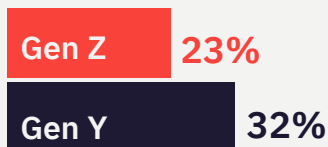
STREAMED MUSIC

% spending 2+ hours a DAY



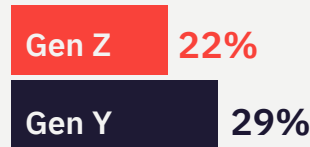
LINEAR TV

% spending 2+ hours a DAY



CINEMA

% of regulars and semi-regulars



STREAMED TV

% spending 2+ hours a DAY



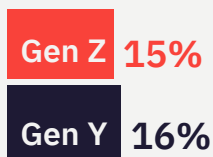
INFLUENCERS

% following celebrities & influencers



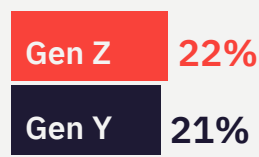
PODCAST

% spending 2+ hours a DAY



GAMING

% spending 2+ hours a DAY



40%

of our surveyed Gen Z audience claim they have engaged in gaming over the last week

66%

of Gen Z in China have engaged in gaming over the last week

Our custom consumer survey suggests Gen Z are more likely than Millennials to be engaged in Twitch, but both generations are active followers of influencers and users of online forums and YouTube, while online magazines are less used by Gen Z.



Audio And TV Remain Core To Gen Z

From Linear dominance to the digital world of today, Audio and Visual brand messaging remain the most effective channels for brands and are still dominant media consumed in the day in the life of a Gen Z.

Gen Z consumers are driving music streaming growth and Spotify remains their preferred choice. Despite growth in premium subscribers over the years, 57% of users are non-subscribers, providing a great opportunity for brands to reach Gen Z. There are multiple benefits of advertising on music streaming services, and yet in-stream audio advertising is often under-utilised. Unlike radio, in-stream audio ads can target certain demographics and communities, with opportunities for creative alignment to music genres, time of day and context to drive greater impact.

Music streaming may make up a large portion of Gen Z audience listening time, but TV is not quite dead either

However, it certainly cannot be planned in the traditional TV model of the 90s and 00s. Gen Z audiences do tune in to linear TV, with live viewing moments providing the opportunity for a shared experience and garnering large scale audiences. 20% of all 16–24 year-olds in the UK tuned into the first episode of Love Island, making this an obvious choice for great reach and engagement.

In addition to live viewing moments, streaming of video on-demand services is their channel of choice. According to BARB, 85% of 16–34 year-olds now have access to SVOD, with 70% of those having a Netflix subscription. Both Netflix and Disney are preparing for ad-supported streaming which is predicted to be skewed to a Gen Z audience.

The shift to VOD has not just led to a shift in audience behaviour, but also to ownership and creation of content. Netflix, Amazon, and Apple have large budgets to invest in programming that may not have been made with the old broadcaster model. This has led to the emergence of culture-defining content, like Stranger Things.

32%

streaming music
more than 2
hours a day

47%

watching video
via linear TV

IMPLICATION FOR BRANDS:

Audio and Visual should be considered core for any major brand campaign. Monitor trends and influence of new content releases to identify the potential impact on consumer behaviour, which can help capitalise on these moments and highlight an opportunity to connect with community through these shared moments.



Media Behaviours And Consumption Don't Stand Still

If there is one thing we have learnt from the rise of Netflix, Disney+ and TikTok, it is that new platforms are constantly emerging and changing the landscape.

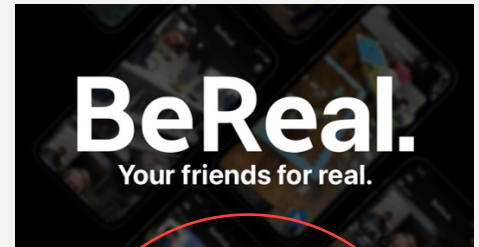
In 2022 alone, we have seen the emergence of new BVOD platforms and social media players aiming to disrupt the market.

Be Real, a new social media platform launched in 2019, now has 2.93 million daily active users globally. Whilst launching 3 years ago, 75% of its downloads happened in 2022. The platform focuses on realness, which appeals to Gen Z's search for authenticity and genuine connections. The platform's setup seems to deter advertising, but this is a great opportunity to post organic, behind-the-scene content and engage with Gen Z in a more unpolished way.

Locals.org is another new platform, still in its infancy and born out of the Pandemic. It's designed to connect people in real life, have fun and do good, all at the same time.

Despite the Meta rebrand, there is a very clear distinction between Facebook and Instagram's features and hence, there is no denying the falling popularity of Facebook with Gen Z. Instagram is still one of the top social media choices for youngsters, however, Kylie Jenner (the queen of Instagram herself) recently hit back at the platform for "copying TikTok".

No single platform alone will be fit for Gen Z. Diversify and continue to test and learn. Start with organic content and focus on creative and messaging that fits the vibe of the given platform. This will build your followers and will prepare you for when audiences scale and brand opportunities emerge on platforms. And don't forget organic and influencer content have great engagement so ensure this is part of your marketing strategy.



2.93m

daily active BeReal users globally



PRINCIPLE 8

EXPERIENCES NOT CHANNELS

Gen Z are not that different in their media consumption, but they are nuanced, and platforms used are different to those of Millennials. It is important to plan for the experiences you want to create for Gen Z that will deliver the communication challenge for the brand and then identify which channels and platforms are a must-have to deliver this.

A young woman with voluminous curly hair is smiling and looking slightly to the side. She is in a clothing store, with various garments and a rack of clothes visible in the background. The lighting is warm and focused on her.

BETTER IN REAL LIFE

ARE IN-STORE EXPERIENCES LOST
ON GEN Z? WE THINK NOT...

Gen Z on The Streets

After the 5 previous sections of this report talking predominantly about the digital life of Gen Z, you might be thinking the rumours are true! This audience are glued to their phones, living life through social media, and tweeting about Stranger Things... and that's that.

But through all our research, one thing we have learned is that Gen Z are actively seeking real life experiences and connections and are more likely to buy in-store than Millennials. Whilst the 'Mall Rats' generation may have been a phenomenon of the 90s, shopping remains a favourite pastime. But, expectations are different.

Gen Z expect a seamless shopping experience, with 91% claiming a seamless shopping experience between online and offline is very or somewhat important to them. According to Vogue Business, 37% say it's important to be able to quickly and conveniently navigate the store – brands can use technology to enable consumers to easily find items in-store, or scan items to get more information online while in-store. 16% of surveyed Gen Z say they want personalised offers sent to mobile devices when in-store. A similar experience can be provided through brand apps, which can gather valuable first-party data, while also providing personalised offers and rewards to be used in-store.

93% of Gen Z surveyed in the UK state they are interested in using AR for shopping. AR also enables brands to connect with Gen Z, increasing the personalisation of visual content. Brands can make clever use of Snapchat lenses, which we generally see delivering strong results.

32%

would buy exclusively in store (compared to 23% of Millennials)

93%

of Gen Z surveyed in the UK state they are interested in using AR for shopping



IMPLICATION FOR BRANDS:

Making a seamless experience whether in-store or online is essential to capturing consumers in-market and converting them.

MORE TO GROWTH THAN GEN Z

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM GEN Z
BEHAVIOR AND CONSUMPTION THAT
GUIDE THE RIGHT KIND OF
ENGAGEMENT WITH MILLENNIALS
AND OTHER GENERATIONS?



Finding The Common Traits And Communities Across Generations Without Alienating Your Existing Customers

While we have focused a lot on what makes Gen Z “Zs”, it is also important that we don’t disregard other generations and overhaul a strategy solely for Gen Z.

What is clear is that values are core to Gen Z and these values, as well as their concerns, shape their relationships with brands, their media consumption, and their overall journeys. However, from our own research, we’ve consistently seen that Ys and Zs are more alike than they are different, both in terms of their shared values, their media consumption, and their communities.

BRANDS CONNECTING AUDIENCES ACROSS GENERATIONS



Nike takes a stand against racial injustice with their “Dream Crazy” winning an Emmy as well as building brand equity across multiple generations



Snoop Dogg remixes Just Eat jingle to connect with a younger audience triggering nostalgia for older audiences



Dove’s Real Beauty Sketches tackles the beauty standards felt across multiple generations of women and amasses 164M views on YouTube globally

IMPLICATION FOR BRANDS:

While there are key distinctions between Ys and Zs, the similarities mean that you can reach both generations without a complete overhaul of your marketing strategy. This is another reason nostalgia resonates so broadly, as this approach can reach all generations, particularly in turbulent times.



8 KEY PRINCIPLES:

DECODING GEN Z FOR BRAND GROWTH

#1 DON'T TARGET "GEN Z"

The first rule to targeting Gen Z: don't target Gen Z. Brands must find the audience where your greatest growth is going to come from in the short and long-term and identify the communications needed to unlock that growth.

#2 READ THE ROOM

Monitor the impact of global events on attitudes and behaviours, adapt to short-term sentiment, and plan for long-term lasting impact on consumption and consumer needs.

#3 MAP YOUR VALUES

Understand how Gen Z values and behaviours impact how your brand behaves. Find the shared values and use this as a springboard to create an authentic and relevant connection.

#4 TACKLE THE "MESSY" MIDDLE

This greater 'browsing behaviour' and more considered journey means that brands must shift away from a siloed approach to performance and brand. Because consumers are engaging with your media, visiting, browsing your range and this is influential in the purchase process, capturing this activity requires a different approach to media, messaging, creative and KPIs than both the traditionally focused BRAND activity or PERFORMANCE media.

It requires brands to consider how consumers connect and engage with their brand and category and put more effort into connecting the experience and driving consideration that will lead to purchase.



#5 COLLABORATE

Broadcasting messages (whether in digital or linear channels) is not enough to connect with Gen Z, you need to turn up when it's important and be social. Enable, empower and celebrate your consumer.

#6 CONTENT IS STILL KING

Brands need to work harder to make advertising appealing, funny, emotional and relevant, to have distinct and lasting impact. Content is King is no new concept, and brands need to ensure all comms (paid, owned and earned) has content that is going to be relevant and connect with their audience.

#7 SOCIAL FIT FOR YOUR BRAND

Tailor your use of social media platforms based on objectives, markets, using the right levers fit for your audience, fit for your brand.

#8 EXPERIENCES NOT CHANNELS

Gen Z are not that different in their media consumption, but they are nuanced, and platforms used are different to those of Millennials. It is important to plan for the experiences you want to create for Gen Z that will deliver the communication challenge for the brand and then identify which channels and platforms are a must-have to deliver this.

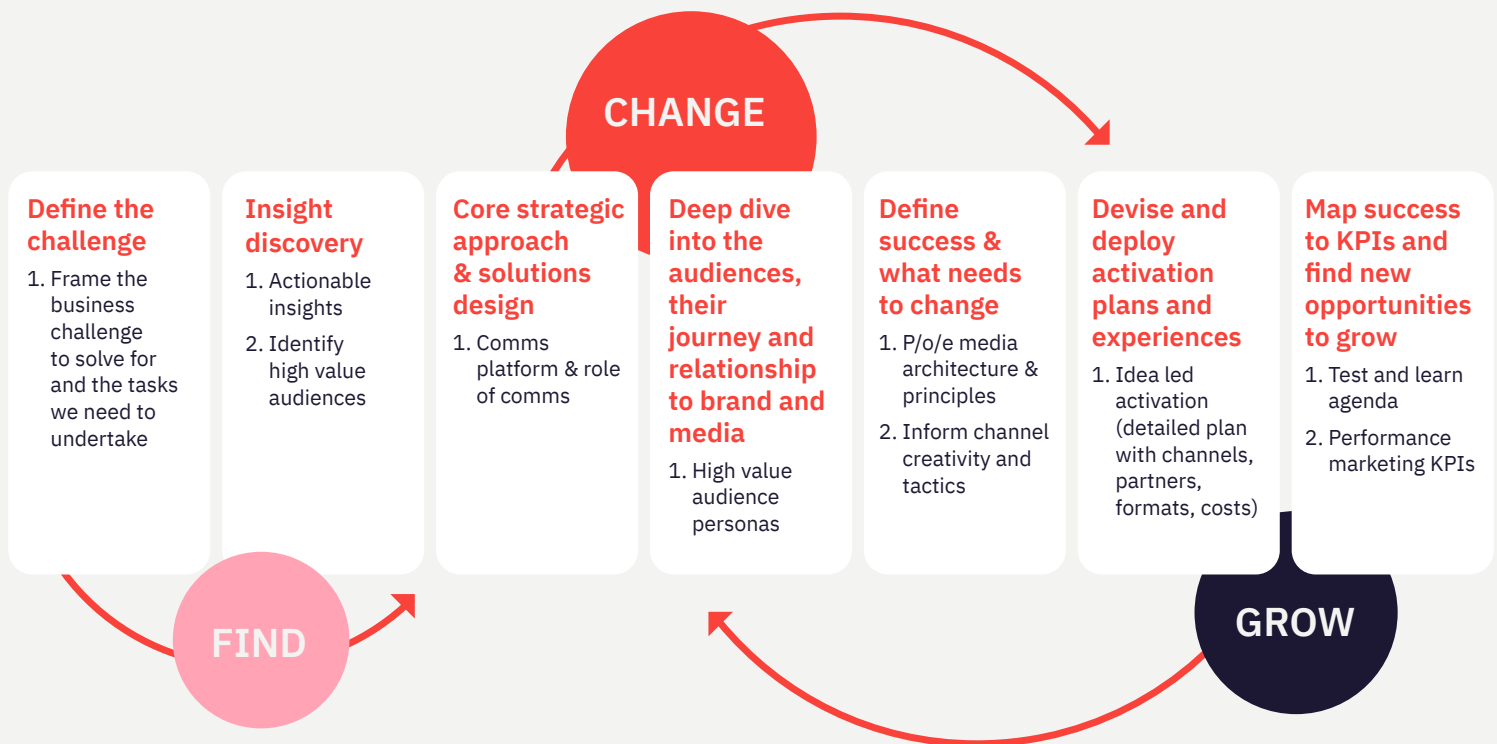


BUILDING YOUR GEN Z PLAN



Building Your Plan to Grow with a Gen Z Audience

Delivering on the key principles to drive brand growth with Gen Z doesn't happen overnight, and it doesn't have to be daunting. At Assembly, we can decode this challenge with you to find the greatest opportunity. With our bespoke services, we can support our clients across the entire comms planning process.



Audience Growth Mapping

Assembly will undertake analysis to identify the audience growth opportunity

Audience Culture Workshops

Assembly Trend Scouts research and work with Gen Z communities to identify opportunities for authentic cultural connection with Gen Z

Consumer Journey Mapping

Analysis of performance, search and market data to identify barrier to brands, task for media, messaging priority and experience opportunity

Ideation & Innovation Workshops

Brainstorm sessions with client, Assembly & Gen Z experts to uncover opportunities to create authentic experiences and collaborations with Gen Z audiences

Measure, Test, Scale, Measure

Pairing Trend Scouts, analysts and our tech to build a comprehensive measurement & test and learn programme for Gen Z audiences



ABOUT THIS REPORT

Gen Z Decoded for Brand Growth is the culmination of research and real-life experience, looking at the evolution of Gen Z behavior over the past year. This large-scale report is part of a series of thought leadership, roundtables, and research insights about Gen Z, coming exclusively from global media agency, Assembly.

Assembly Custom Research Powered by Appinio:

Appinio is a global market research platform that enables companies worldwide to get thousands of opinions from specific target groups in just a few minutes. Assembly surveyed a Gen Z audience size of 1,500 across the UK, US, France, Germany, China, and Korea.



ABOUT + \ ASSEMBLY

Assembly is the modern global omnichannel media agency, bringing data, talent, and technology together to find the change that fuels growth for the best brands on the planet. Our approach connects big, bold brand stories with integrated, global media capabilities that deliver performance and drive large-scale business growth. Our work is powered by our proprietary, in-house technology solution, STAGE, and led by our global talent base of over 1,600 people around the world. We're purpose-driven at our core and pioneers in social and environmental impact in the agency world.

Assembly is a proud member of Stagwell, the challenger network built to transform marketing.

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