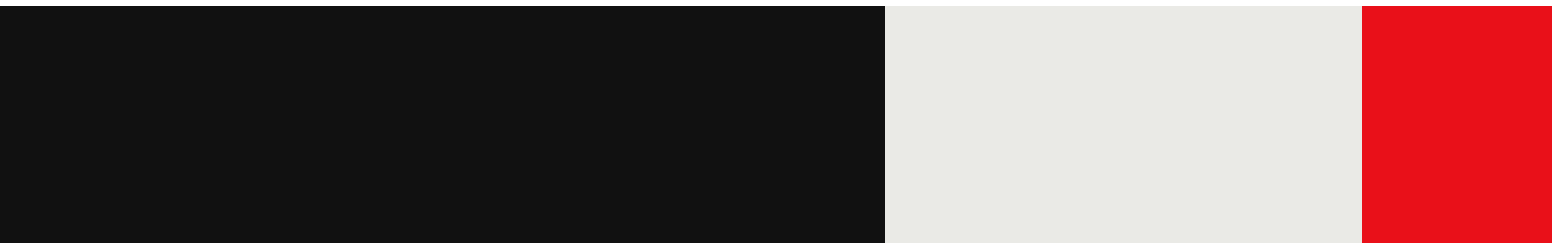


Marketers are challenging Gen Z assumptions with new research

Article



In its new study “Gen Z and the American Dream,” social and advertising agency Adolescent Content was surprised to draw similarities between [Gen Z](#) and Boomers—two generations often perceived as being at odds.

- 65% aim for home ownership, and 77% prioritize escaping paycheck-to-paycheck living.

- Only 2% dream of being full-time content creators.
- 94% place equal value on virtual and physical connections.

“There’s this assumption that [Gen Z] is lazy and careless, and that their decisions aren’t for any particular reason other than just being young and shooting from the hip,” said Raven Baker, social and community lead at Adolescent Content. “I think that they’re most like Boomers in that there is this deep care for self-preservation and convenience.”

When brands base their consumer research solely on age, they risk overlooking valuable audiences, —especially when generational findings are often in flux. Striking a balance between capturing nuance and producing clear, actionable insights can be a challenging balance for [marketers](#), said Ramaa Mosley, CCO and co-founder of Adolescent Content.

“The problem when you’re marketing is when you think you know and you don’t continue to inquire, but you also have to come up with assumptions in order to proceed,” she said.

Considering generational cohorts

A recent study from Day One Agency and USC Center for Public Relations splits Gen Z into three distinct groups: “Neo-Traditionalists,” “Fluid Pragmatists,” and “Internet-Age Explorers.”

- Similar to the Adolescent Content study, the report honed in on generational aspirations and values. While 74% of Neo-Traditionalists favor stable, full-time employment and 64% are more interested in making money than pursuing a creative passion, 49% of Internet-Age Explorers prioritize pursuing their passions over a high salary.

The report argues that while brands chase [TikTok](#) terminology and fleeting [social media](#) trends, they neglect a holistic approach to reaching Gen Z.

“You can be inspired by your personal experience or what you see out in the world, but you have to be extremely curious,” said Baker. “I think it’s always great for marketers to reflect on the makeup of their mind when they were younger, and what they wish adults would stop saying or what they wish they’d understand.”

Chasing interest alignment over brand loyalty

Marketers often focus on younger generations to build lifelong relationships, but this may no longer be an effective method.

- Gen Z shoppers are 33.9% more likely to have abandoned at least one brand or business over 12 months, according to a Capital One Shopping survey.
- 81% of Gen Z and [millennial](#) consumers have switched brands in the past year, compared to 74% of Gen X and 63% of Baby Boomers, according to December 2024 data from Salesforce.

Instead of launching blanket campaigns that rely on generational assumptions, brands can benefit from a hobby or interest-centric approach. Horizon Media's 2024 Subcultures Field Guide studied niche consumer groups that spanned from "Extreme Paw-rents," or those who spend a lot of time and money taking care of their pets, to "Dark Tourists" who travel in search of ghost towns and haunted spaces.

- 85% of U.S. adults gravitate toward hobbies and passions that transcend age, according to Horizon Media.
- 69% of adults are more influenced to buy a new product from someone who shares the same interests versus someone of the same age, according to the study.

"Brands can't be everything to everyone, so understanding subcultures and niches is extremely important," said Baker.

As marketers push back against pigeonholing Gen Z, Mosley stressed the value of constantly questioning research.

"I wouldn't tell a client to just rely on our report, so that they're never assuming, but always checking in and adjusting," she said. "What we served up is potentially a good roadmap, but you need to go deeper in how it relates to your particular brand."

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