

# 3 insights into Gen Z social media usage—and how marketers can capitalize

Article

Marketers looking to reach US Gen Zers may want to be careful of overindexing on Instagram.

With 50 million **Gen Z** users, Instagram is only slightly ahead of Snapchat (49.6 million) and TikTok (49.1 million), and has a long way to go to close the gap with YouTube (61.8 million), according to our forecast.

Yet, ad spend paints a very different picture. This year, we expect US marketers to spend over nearly three and a half times more on Instagram (\$30.14 billion) than YouTube (\$8.17 billion) and TikTok (\$8.66 billion) and more than 14 times Snapchat (\$2.09 billion).

To understand, we need to look at how Gen Zers use the platforms.

## 1. Instagram dominates direct messaging (DMs)

“Messaging is becoming a really big part of social media as we post less in general and as people gravitate toward more private forms of communication,” said our analyst Minda Smiley on an episode of our **“Behind the Numbers”** podcast.

- Nearly three-quarters (72.2%) of those who have sent DMs in the past month have done so through Instagram, per our July 2023 US Gen Z Social Media survey.
- Some 35.7% prefer Instagram as a go-to platform for DMs, compared to only 3.7% who say the same for TikTok.

**The opportunity:** Although there are no ad placements within the messaging environment on Instagram, brands can still build an organic presence by engaging with customers or providing customer service through DMs.

## 2. YouTube takes the lead on long-form and livestreamed video

“YouTube is the most popular platform for **livestreams** among this generation,” Smiley said.

- Among US Gen Z social media users who watched long-form videos in the past month, 76.8% used YouTube and 49.9% used TikTok, according to our survey.
- 67.8% of Gen Zers say YouTube is their go-to platform for long-form video.
- More than half (51.8%) of Gen Z social media users watched livestreams on YouTube and 47.3% on TikTok in the past month.

**The opportunity:** Marketers looking to reach Gen Zers may want to explore livestream shopping because they are more receptive to the content than any other generation, per data from [Bizrate Insights](#).

### 3. TikTok keeps its stronghold with short-form video

“TikTok is Gen Z's undisputed go-to for short-form video,” Smiley said. But the majority of Gen Zers have used copycat features, including Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, within the past month. “So it's a feature that TikTok owns, but has certainly found success on other platforms.”

- More than half of Gen Zers (55.7%) who watch short-form videos say TikTok is their go-to platform. YouTube Shorts comes in second with 18.9% of Gen Z viewers calling it their go-to, per our survey.

**The opportunity:** Marketers shouldn't discount the mass audience on YouTube Shorts or Instagram Reels. Short- and long-form videos can work in tandem for brands. Long-form videos can be cut into more digestible pieces on TikTok, for example, while short-form videos can be used to tease the full-length versions on YouTube.

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