

There isn't a clear go-to platform for social search among Gen Z

Article

TikTok often gets all the attention, with headlines trumpeting it as Gen Z's new search engine. But the reality is more nuanced.

- **YouTube was the most popular destination for social searches among this generation.** Nearly 60% of Gen Zers who used social search had searched on YouTube in the preceding

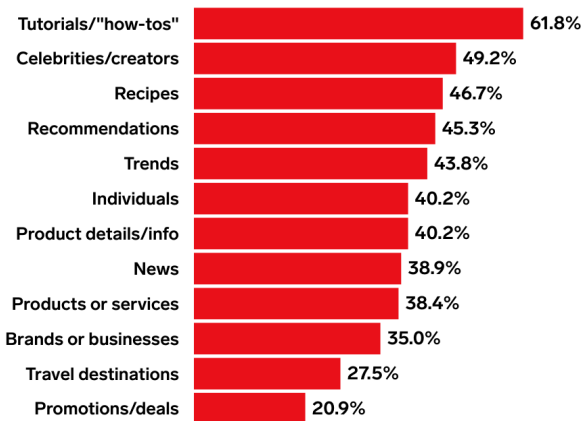
month, our survey found, putting it ahead of TikTok and Instagram. “YouTube is being overlooked to some extent by brands because of TikTok’s popularity, and it’s a big mistake, because it is one of the top places that Gen Z is going to be entertained and to learn,” MaryLeigh Bliss, YPulse’s chief content officer, said.

- **No social platform was a clear go-to for search, indicating that Gen Z’s behavior is fragmented.** And despite the rise of social search, Gen Z hasn’t totally eschewed the most popular search engine: Google. Nearly 40% of Gen Zers start their online product searches on search engines like Google, per a February 2023 Jungle Scout survey, while a majority (58%) start them on Amazon.
- **There were gender differences in social search use.** Female Gen Z social searchers are more likely to search on TikTok, while male Gen Zers show a preference for YouTube, according to our research. Generally, female Gen Zers are more likely to search social platforms than male Gen Zers.

Education Is Most Searched Topic Among Gen Z on Social Platforms

% of US Gen Z social search users who searched for content/information on social media, July 2023

Q: What type of content or information have you searched for on social media in the past month?



Note: n=411 monthly social media users ages 15-26 who use the search function on social media; excludes "other" responses

Source: Insider Intelligence | eMarketer Survey, "US Gen Z Social Media," Oct 2023

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New search habits are helping fuel social commerce

Gen Zers might not always be in a shopping mindset while searching, but they’re significantly more likely to buy directly from social networks compared with the total population, **per**

Jungle Scout.

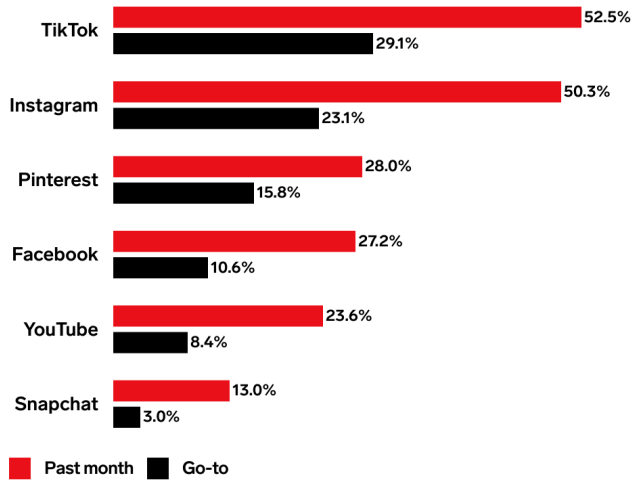
- **Gen Z often considered a purchase while searching across social media.** According to our findings, more than 40% of Gen Z social searchers had used platforms to look for product details or information in the preceding month; 38.4% had searched for products or services; and 35.0% had searched for brands or businesses.
- **Gen Z is also searching where it's shopping.** More than half of Gen Zers who used social platforms for product discovery or shopping had done so on TikTok or Instagram—two of the most popular platforms for social search—in the preceding month, per our survey.
- **Pinterest is a shopping standout.** Nearly a third of Gen Zers who used social media for shopping or product discovery had used Pinterest for that purpose in the preceding month, putting the platform ahead of Facebook, YouTube, and Snapchat. Pinterest started showing ads in its search results in 2014 and has recently rolled out new search-oriented ad units like Premiere Spotlight, which lets brands place video ads on its search page.

Takeaways

- **Search behaviors vary across platforms,** so marketers should be mindful of these differences when creating content with search in mind. For instance, Gen Zers often gravitate toward YouTube for deeper, more detailed searches on a particular topic, whereas they might go to TikTok or Instagram for quicker searches (like fashion trends or travel recommendations).
- **Social commerce trends and capabilities dovetail with new search behaviors.** Social platforms are becoming more shoppable; TikTok Shop made its US debut in September 2023, while in November Meta inked a deal with Amazon that lets users buy products from the retailer within Facebook and Instagram. As these platforms ramp up their search offerings as well, we expect search to be the next social commerce battleground.

TikTok and Instagram Are Gen Z's Top Platforms for Shopping

% of US Gen Z social media users who use social media for shopping/product discovery, July 2023



Note: n=368 monthly social media users ages 15-26 who use social media for shopping/product discovery; top 6 platforms shown; Q: "Which of the following social media platforms have you used for shopping/product discovery on in the past month, as far as you recall?" and "Which social media platform is your 'go-to' for 'shopping/product discovery?"; excludes "other" responses
Source: Insider Intelligence | eMarketer Survey, "US Gen Z Social Media," Oct 2023

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Report by Minda Smiley Feb 20, 2024

Gen Z Social Search Habits

