

Updated
2019
Report

Meet gen z: the social generation.

PART 2





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Introduction

It is impossible to have a conversation about Generation Z without talking about social media. It influences everything from the platforms they use (or don't use) to their interactions with friends and family — and, of course, the brands they consider. For Gen Z, what is happening online and on social media is what is happening IRL.

Born in 1996 and later, Gen Z is the first true generation of “social natives.” They have been the subject of study mostly revolving around always-on media consumption, but less has been written about the impact that social media has on Gen Z's emotional outlook and shopping behavior. Is it true that Gen Z is seeking relief from social media? How do they interact with brands? Do paid social advertisements really motivate purchase behavior?

To answer these questions, we, along with our in-house research arm, Origin, are digging a little deeper to examine the social profile of Gen Z. Especially because we're seeing one significant shift: By 2020, it is expected that 40% of consumers will be Gen Z.

In this report, we will take a closer look at this unique generation's outlook on media and how they are using it to engage with brands, and address the implications for today's brands and advertisers.

methodology

In August of 2019, Origin, Hill Holliday's in-house research arm, carried out an online research study to examine the social profile of Generation Z. Intended to serve as a follow-up to similar research from the agency in 2017, this study surveyed 998 members of Gen Z. In order to allow for proper comparison between the 2017 and 2019 studies, the latest round of research maintained an equivalent sample composition in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity. The only significant difference between the two samples is age, as Gen Z now (in 2019) includes 25-year-olds. Differences between the 2017 and 2019 questionnaires themselves were minimal, with only a few items being added in 2019 to better understand changes in perceptions since 2017's round of research.



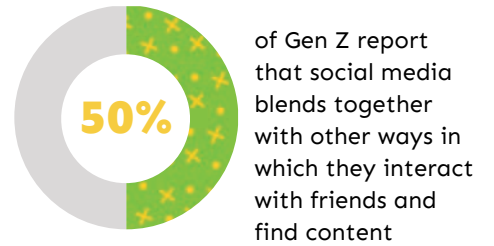
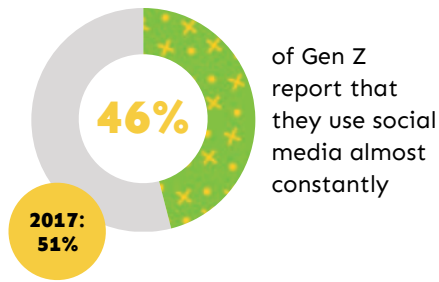
True social natives

When we look at Gen Z's near-constant engagement with smartphones, the message is clear: it's the social media platforms on smartphones that dominate their attention. And for half of this generation, social media blurs the line between the real world and the virtual world.

2017:
71%

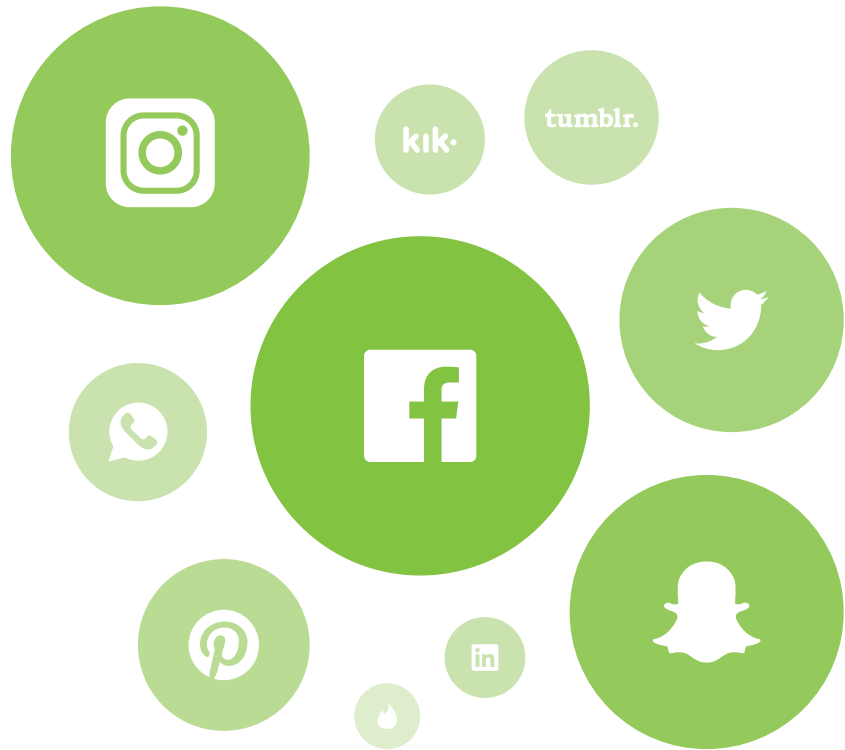
**94% of
Gen Z adults use
social media
(2017 91%)**





social platform ranked by usage by generation z

To provide a look at the social platforms where they're spending time, we asked survey respondents to share the ones they currently use. Their time is mostly split between social media platforms Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook, and less so between Pinterest, WhatsApp, and Tumblr, unchanged from 2017.



the bottom line for brands

Have A Social Mindset

It is imperative that brands adopt a social mindset, due to the overwhelming popularity of social media. Brands simply need to go where their audience is. Over 90% of Gen Z is consuming content on social media, while only 29% are consuming content via traditional TV, consistent with our 2017 findings..

For brands, this means increasing or shifting media spend to avoid missing out on valuable reach and engagement with the Gen Z audience.

The pros and cons of social media

Social media has made it incredibly easy to connect the world. One can check Instagram and see what their best friend is up to, log onto Snapchat to share their day moment by moment, or use Twitter to converse with their favorite YouTube celebrity. But for Gen Z, is this information overload a cause for serious concern? We learned that while all is not bad, all is not good either.

Our survey found that 74% of Gen Z reports that social media provides more benefits than drawbacks to their own life. But a closer look at the survey results brings in a different perspective — 48% of Gen Z social media users report that social media has made them feel anxious, sad, or depressed.

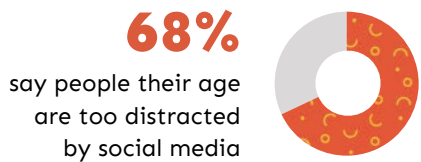
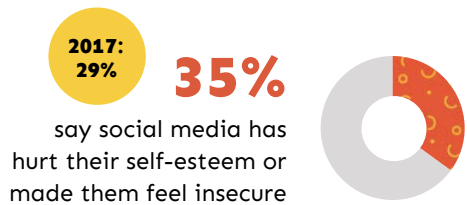
48% say social media makes them feel sad, anxious, or depressed

Up from 41% in 2017



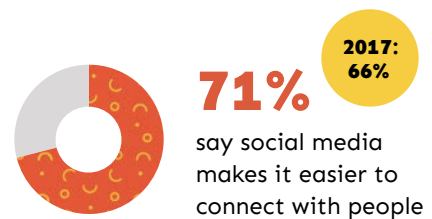
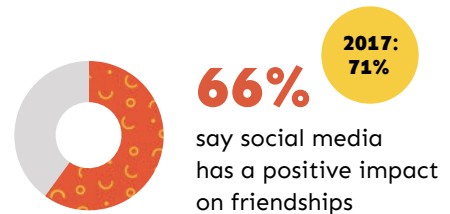
effects on gen z social media users

negative



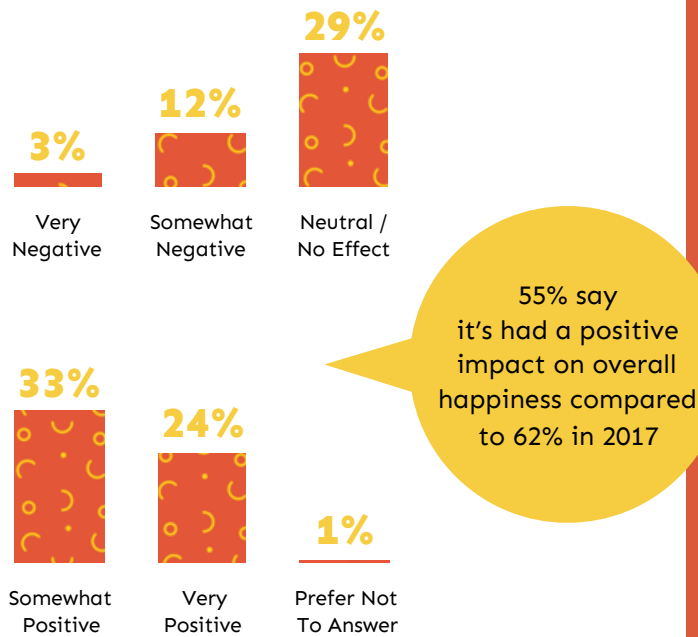
"I feel that we often compare ourselves to other people online and that has negative effects. Plus, feeling like you have to perform in some way or create some sort of image for yourself on your profile can be anxiety-provoking."

positive

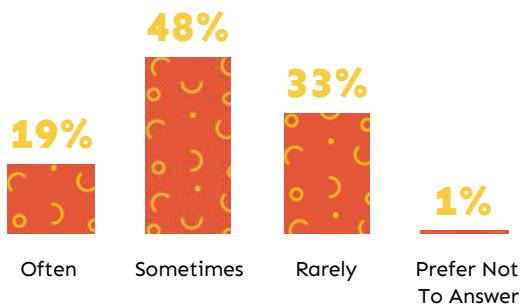


"It makes me feel happy when I can stay in touch with people that don't live near me and I see that they are genuinely happy."

benefits of social media



drawbacks of social media



the bottom line for brands

Build Relationships Through The Good, And The Bad

Brands can't be tone-deaf to the negative social media experiences had by younger consumers, but this doesn't mean they have to tiptoe around the issue. Brands can capitalize on and further facilitate what social media already does well — building confidence and connections. On the flip side, brands can also address social media's shortcomings — like pushing people to the fringe or fostering insecurity — in a way that offers some respite for their consumers.

Make Positive Brand Experiences A Priority

While brands aren't responsible for the happiness of Gen Z, they do have an opportunity to balance out the environment of social media and be an authentic source of relief to users. This starts with a social strategy that acts in the best interest of consumers through thoughtful platform, influencer, and content selection.

Represent Your Audience

Gen Z consumers want to see themselves represented in branded social media content. They have come to expect that the brands they buy from reflect their style, personality, and life stage, and social media content must do the same.

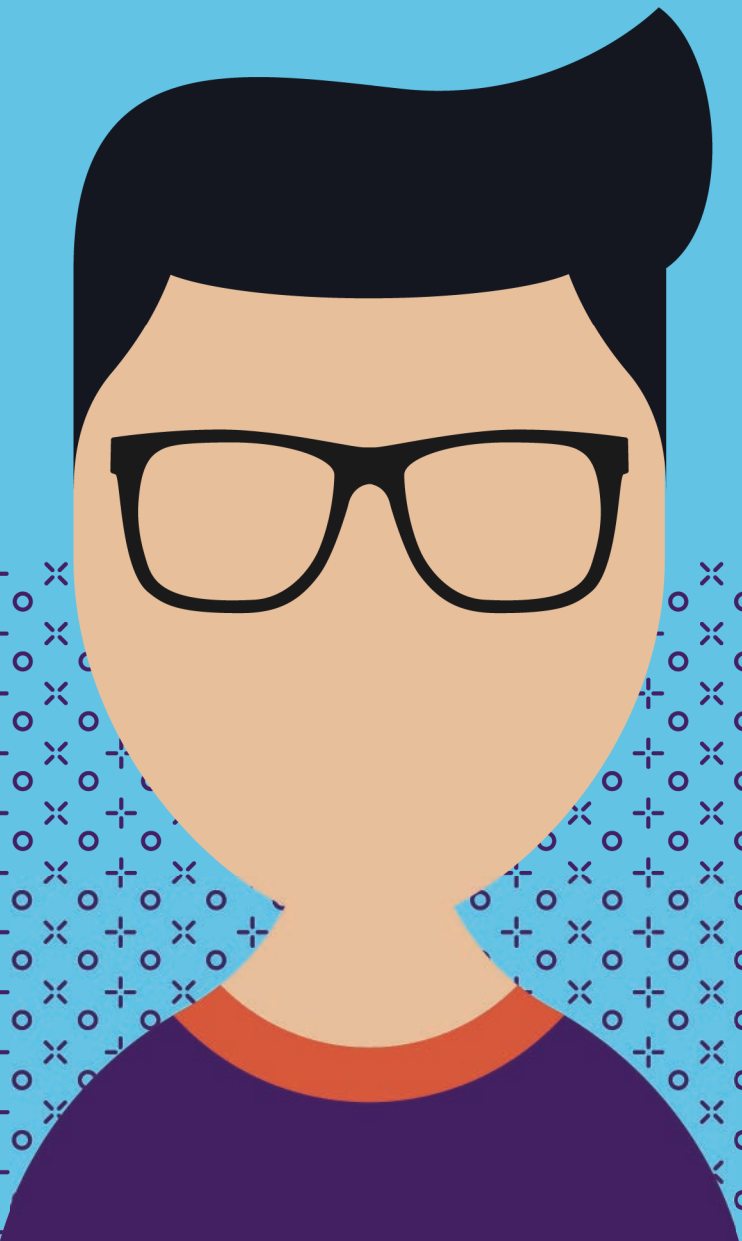
Switching off social media

The love for social media has grown and grown over the past 10 years, but the tide is turning for some platforms, with Gen Z in particular opting to take a timeout from the feelings of stress and anxiety that social media is perpetuating. Our study asked Gen Z social media users which platforms they have quit (if any), why they quit, and whether they quit temporarily or permanently.

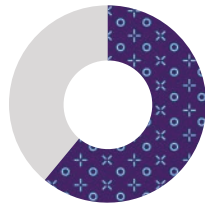
What we found is that more than half of Gen Z is seeking relief from social media temporarily, while over a third (34%) have left or deleted an account for good.

58% of Gen Z is seeking relief from social media

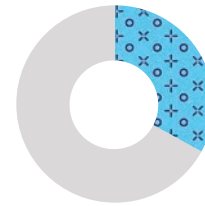
Up from 50% in 2017



taking a break versus quitting social media



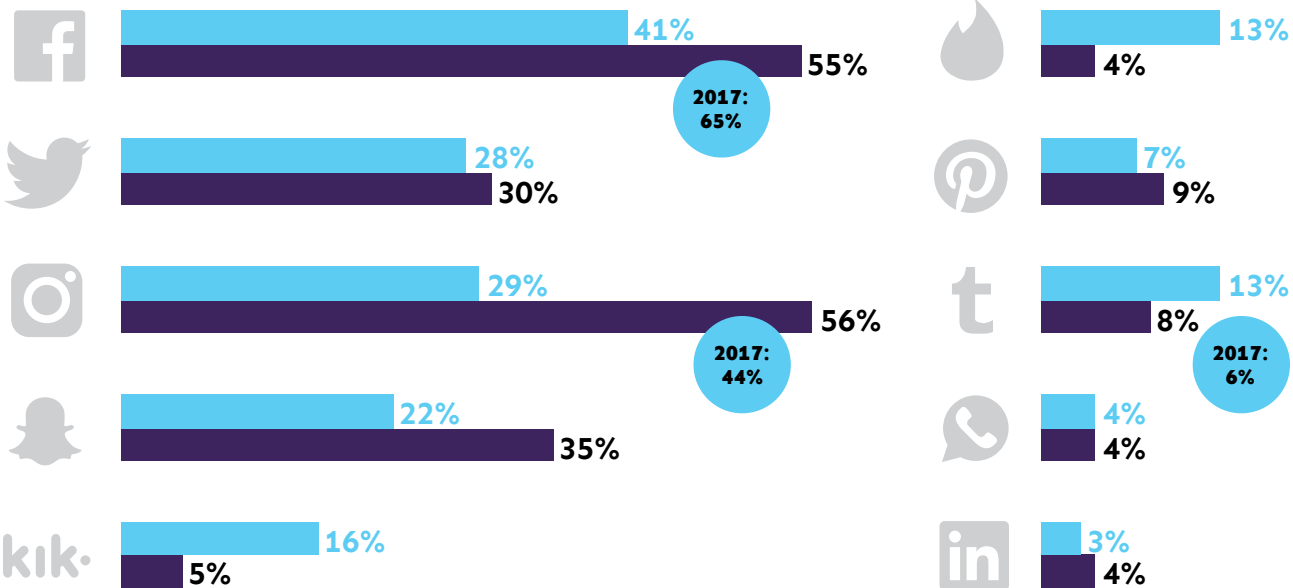
61%
of Gen Z are taking a break from social media



33%
of Gen Z are permanently quitting social media

social media brands

Note: Percentages representative of "quitting permanently" are based out of respondents who have previously quit social media platforms.



"It made me less self-centered. I don't have to worry about entertaining my audience with my day-to-day life."

"Quitting social media allows me to be more intentional with my activities and not feel like I need to spend my time online or interacting with those beyond me, but I can instead focus on projects or people in the present."

motivations for why gen z social media users considered quitting social media



48%

wasting too much time on it



35%

there was too much negativity



30%

not using it very often



23%

not interested in the content



24%

wanted more privacy



19%

too much pressure to get attention



15%

got too commercialized

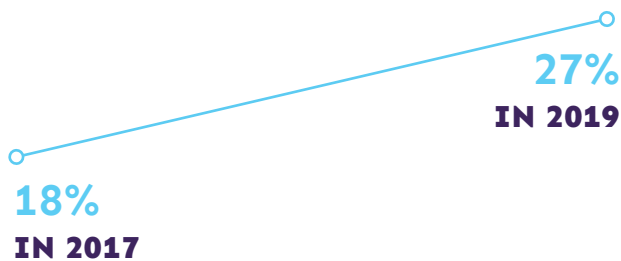


24%

made me feel bad about myself

**2017:
17%**

Negative impact on body image:



As Gen Z spends more time on visual platforms like Instagram, the negative impact on their body image increases.

These smartphone natives are starting to shift attention away from their phones.

76% agree that it's rude to always be on your phone, and 75% agree that [we] miss out on so much of life when our faces are in our phones. As a result, 33% currently use their phones less than they did 6 months ago, and 41% plan to use their phones less in the next 6 months.

In fact, as Gen Z limits the use of their phones, they are narrowing the role of apps by assigning each a primary purpose and use-case. 50% of Gen Z think of social media as a separate way to interact with friends or find content — [they] only use it for specific reasons. While Twitter and Pinterest are used to see what other people are sharing, 53% mostly use Snapchat to interact one-on-one with a curated list of friends. Meaning, it's up to advertisers to understand the role each of these channels plays in Gen Zers' collection of apps, and take full advantage of the limited screen time the Gen Z consumer is going to be exposed to. It's time to seek and deploy effective creative and media strategies to connect with this generation on digital channels.

Social shopping behavior

Gen Z grew up in the age of photo sharing, “selfie” taking, and real-time storytelling. Most recently, they have entered the age of social media shopping. Consider this: our survey found that 55% of Gen Z social media users follow brands on social media. Now factor in that 75% of those who do follow brands report that they do so to find special deals or promotions. The image of a social media shopper begins to form.

Still, while Gen Z is 4 times more likely to convert on social media than Millennials, not all are putting their money where their browsing is. Less than half (38%) of Gen Z social media users have made a purchase directly through social media.

Gen Z align their spending with their beliefs.

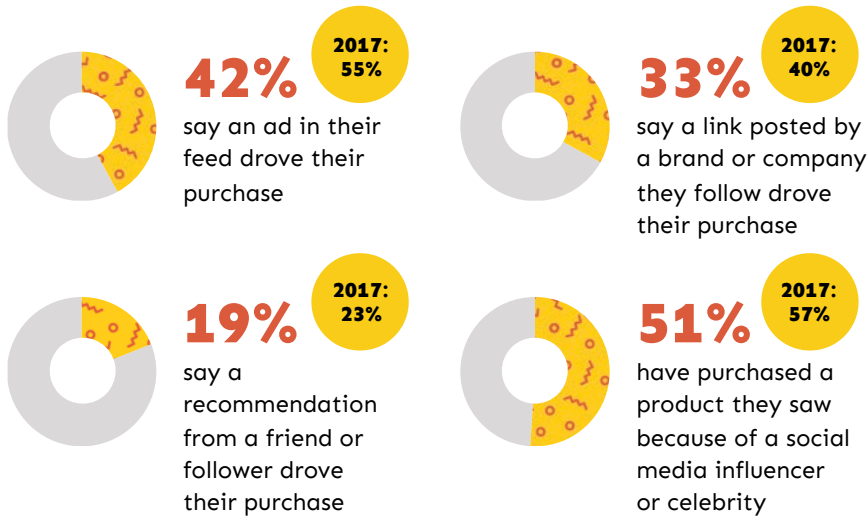
Gen Z is putting pressure on companies to take an active role in society, choosing to deepen relationships with brands that fulfill their corporate obligation to make the world a better place. However, this demand does not come without risks, as the cause that a corporation chooses to support may alienate some of its consumers. 34% of Gen Zers have boycotted a brand or stopped using a particular product or service because of their stance on a controversial issue, and a whopping 66% never returned to the brand. This is a clear indication that brands need to not only appeal to Gen Z’s consumer wants and needs, but also their values and ideals.

**38% of
generation z social
media users have
made a purchase
via social media**



social media introduces new products, and paid ads drive sales

88% of brands use social media in some capacity for marketing purposes, and Gen Z is taking notice. Gen Z social media shoppers report that Facebook (44%) and Instagram (65%) were the most popular platforms on which to find new products. They also report that paid advertising and brand content were the most common ways they came across products of interest.



fashion, fitness, and beauty sectors

Consumer shopping habits as we know them have shifted. We are in the throes of a transformation where social media and its influencers have taken a front-row seat to how Gen Z is researching and purchasing products. The power of social media to generate interest around products has become particularly prominent in the fashion, fitness, and beauty sectors, with brands like Nike, Adidas, and MAC ranking as the most-mentioned brands followed by survey respondents.

top 12 brands of generation z



Nike continues to be at the top of this list since 2017

the bottom line for brands

Be A Valuable Information Outlet

Gen Z is turning to social media not only to research, but also to purchase products. Brands that are a reliable source of product information and stay true to their roots on social media will be well-positioned to engage Gen Z.

Tap Into Pop Culture

Pop culture events and trends can present a huge opportunity for brands to be immersed in real-time conversations with Gen Z — provided that they stake their claim early. To find new and inspiring ways to connect with this, brands like Nike and Adidas are quick to start conversations surrounding pop culture trends, and according to our survey, Gen Z social media users have taken notice.

Paid Ads > Organic Posts

It's important for brands to maintain a balance of organic and sponsored content, but the path to social purchases is becoming increasingly reliant on paid ads. Good news for brands: over 50% of Gen Z social media users have purchased items they first saw in a paid social ad.

At a glance: key takeaways

Of all the media trends, few have had a larger impact on the Gen Z audience and brands than social media. The findings from our study emphasize that, as with almost everything in life, there is a light and dark side to social media. It's not surprising that this generation is so connected to social media, but our data demonstrates how their connectedness can manifest stress, anxiety, and other negative emotions. Considering this, brands cannot afford to ignore the emotional impact of social media on its Gen Z users. Brands should act now and invest in a social media strategy that offers a much-needed sigh of relief to users while also moving the needle on brand experience and engagement. Here are some bottom-line takeaways that should be considered by brands who are ready to reach Gen Z:

Have A Social Mindset

It is imperative that brands adopt a social mindset, due to the overwhelming popularity of social media. Brands simply need to go where their audience is. Over 90% of Gen Z is consuming content on social media, while only 29% are consuming content via traditional TV. For brands, this means increasing or shifting media spend to avoid missing out on valuable reach and engagement with the Gen Z audience.

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Brands can't be tone-deaf to the negative social media experiences had by younger consumers, but this doesn't mean they have to tiptoe around the issue. Brands can capitalize on and further facilitate what social media already does well — building confidence and connections. On the flip side, brands can also address social media's shortcomings in a way that offers some respite for their consumers.

Deploy Effective Creative and Media Strategies

As Gen Z consumers limit their phone usage and assign primary use-cases for each platform, brands and advertisers must understand the unique role each has in the overall consumer journey. Developing content that leans into their use-preferences and behavior can engage and strengthen relationships with this generation.

Represent Your Audience

Gen Z consumers want to see themselves represented in branded social media content. They have come to expect that the brands they buy from reflect their style, personality, and life stage, and social media content must do the same.

Make A Positive Brand Experience A Priority

While brands aren't responsible for the happiness of Generation Z, they do have an opportunity to balance and the environment of social media can be an authentic source of relief to users. This starts with a social strategy that acts in the best interest of consumers through thoughtful platform, influencer, and content selection.

Don't Limit Your Presence

With social media, Gen Z isn't just using one (or two or three) platforms; there are a host of social platforms that are soaking up their time. As a result, it's become vital for brands to meet them on more than one platform. This is especially important considering that more than half of Gen Z social media users have taken a temporary break from social media platforms like Facebook or Instagram. Brands that extend their social media presence to deliver content across multiple platforms create an opportunity to share their brand story uninterrupted.

Invest In Relevance Over Reach

While reach has ruled media buys for decades, the same cannot be said for today's social media landscape. Organic reach has fallen so low for social platforms that it has made social media a less viable channel for reaching Gen Z. On the flip side, it has become one of the best channels for delivering one-to-many or one-to-one branded content. Today's approach to social media is about engagement and conversation — not simply about reach and frequency — and a brand's investment in paid social should reflect this.

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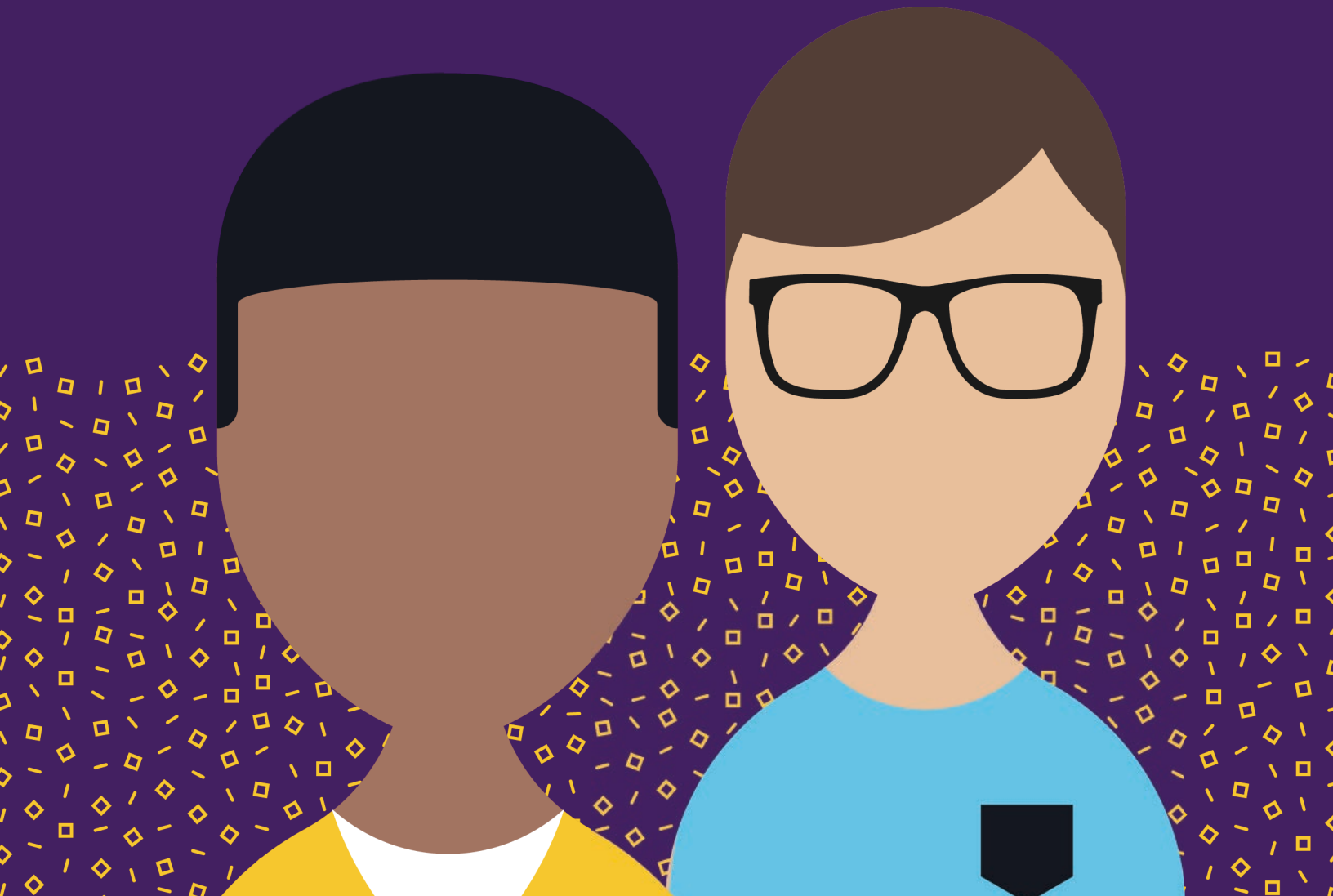
Next steps

So what does this all mean for marketers and their brands? For some, a renewed look at social media marketing may be in order. For instance, brands that target teenagers, college students, and young adults may need to rethink what it means to connect with their target audience on social media and elsewhere. In other cases, brands may need to create meaningful content that both engages and motivates the consumer to buy. The good news: Gen Z is demonstrating their expectations and preferences online constantly; the data simply needs to be assessed in a way that can be acted upon. We hope this report can help.

No matter the brand's category, Gen Z will likely be among its key customers. We "get" Gen Z. If you want to "get" this growing audience also, we'd love to hear from you.

To view more content on Gen Z, visit genz.hhcc.com

For more information on this study or to conduct a brand or consumer study of your own, contact our head of research, Dr. Kenneth Faro, at kenneth.faro@hhcc.com.



About



TRILIA



Fighting the daily share battle in the noisiest categories. It's what we do. Hill Holliday is proud to be one of the top creative marketing agencies in the country, with over 500 employees across our network. Since 1968, we've built our business on winning that daily share battle for our clients in the most competitive categories. Blending superior creative, media, and technology, we deliver game-changing ideas for industry leaders like Bank of America, Party City, Capella University, Novartis, Johnson & Johnson, Optum, Boar's Head, Cracker Barrel, Simple Mobile, and Frontier Communications. For more about our people, our work, and our culture, please visit <http://www.hhcc.com>.

Trilia is full-service media agency owned by Hill Holliday and focused on science, ideas, and outcomes. It's a deceptively simple formula: science + ideas = better outcomes. But the simplicity masks the tricky part. Knowing how to use the science and developing creative ideas that challenge the conventions is what we do. We live at the nexus of these two variables and our mission is to never rest on our laurels, never be completely satisfied, and remember that media excellence is achieved by learning from the past but always looking beyond the horizon. For more about Trilia, please visit <http://www.triliamedia.com>.

Origin is Hill Holliday's research and analytics team specializing in strategic brand and consumer research for leading brands across the US. We work at the intersection of brands and customer experience with a focus on uncovering actionable insight using qualitative and quantitative research. Capabilities include shop-alongs, user-experience mapping, consumer segmentation, prospect customer profiling, and campaign performance testing. Our team has strong bench strength and is made up of individuals with uniquely valuable backgrounds including economics, statistics, math, and engineering. Whether you want to talk about your biggest challenges or uncover opportunities to break away from the noise in your category, we'd love to hear from you. For more info about Origin, please contact Dr. Kenneth Faro at kenneth.faro@hhcc.com.

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