

Meet gen z: the social generation.






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Introduction

It is impossible to have a conversation about Gen 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 1994 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 shopper 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

This report is based on the findings of research conducted by Origin, Hill Holliday's in-house research arm. To conduct this research, Origin surveyed over 1,000 Gen Z consumers between the age of 18 and 24 across the U.S., including a broad range of demographic indicators. Data was collected in December of 2017.

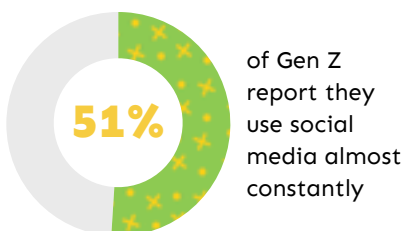


True social natives

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.

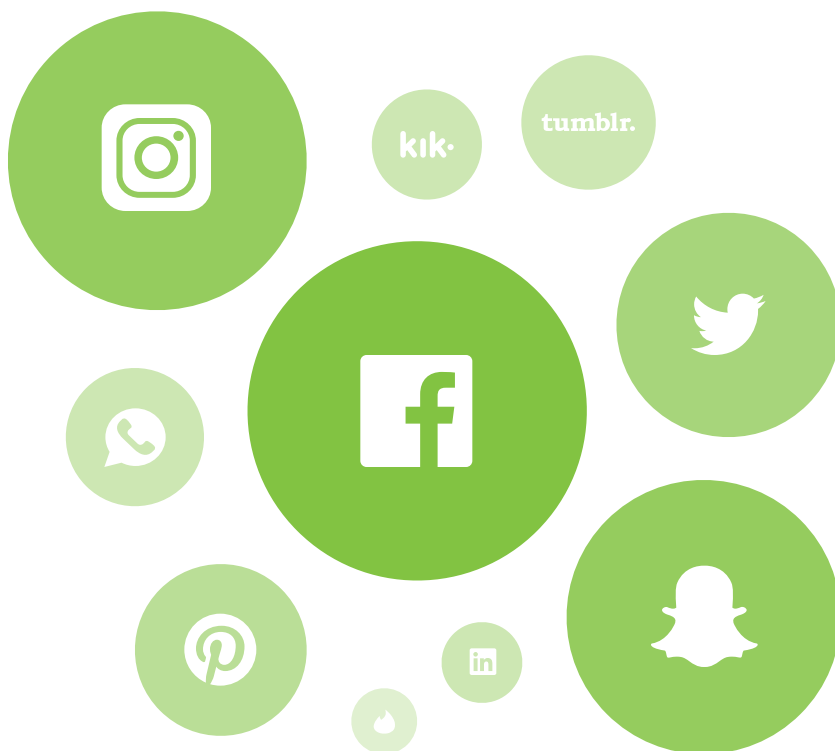
**91% of
Gen Z Adults Use
Social Media**





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.



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.

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.

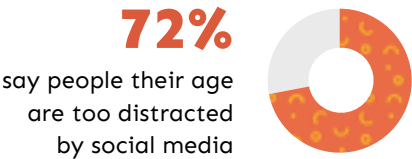
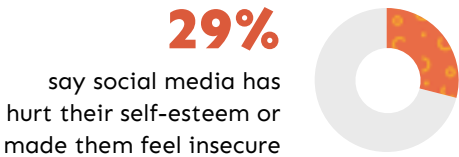
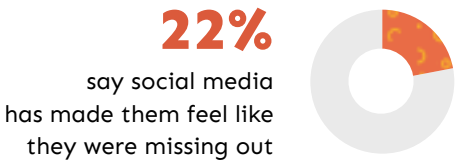
Our survey found that 77% of Gen Z reports that social media provides more benefits than drawbacks to their own life. But a closer look at the survey results brings in a different perspective—41% of Gen Z social media users report that social media has made them feel anxious, sad, or depressed.

41% say social media makes them feel sad, anxious, or depressed



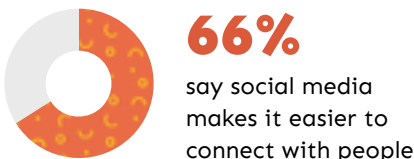
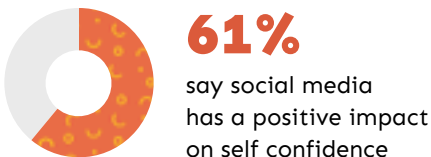
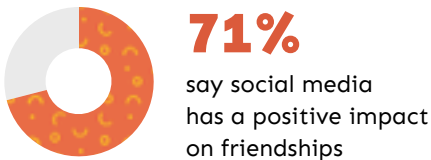
effects on gen z social media users

negative



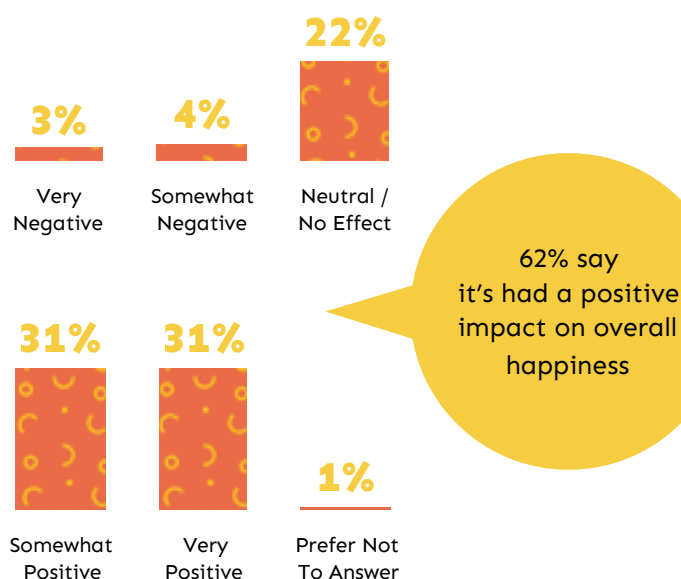
“Social media reminds me of everything I'm missing out on. A lot of the times I'll find out that I'm being ignored or just not a priority to people important to me.”

positive

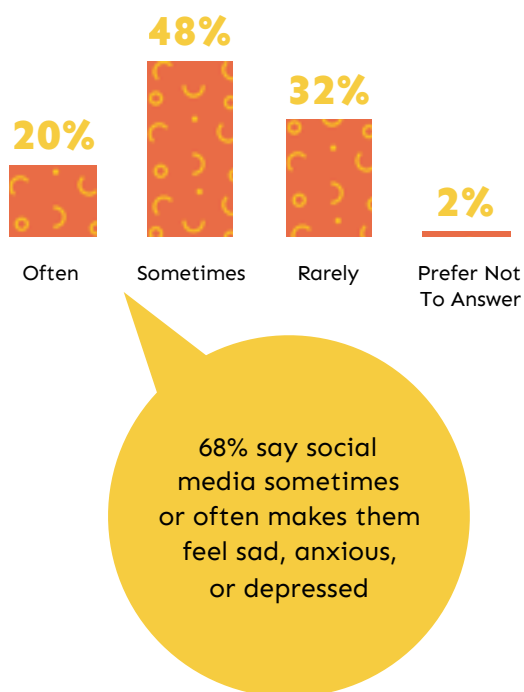


“Social media makes me feel happy when I see others doing well. When I see people thriving. When I reconnect with someone from my past.”

benefits of social media among social media users



drawbacks of social media among social media users



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 can already do 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 A Positive Brand Experience 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 ten years, but the tide is turning for some platforms, with Gen Z, in particular, is opting to take a time-out 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 quite 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.

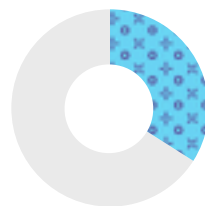
58% of Gen Z is seeking relief from social media



taking a break versus quitting social media

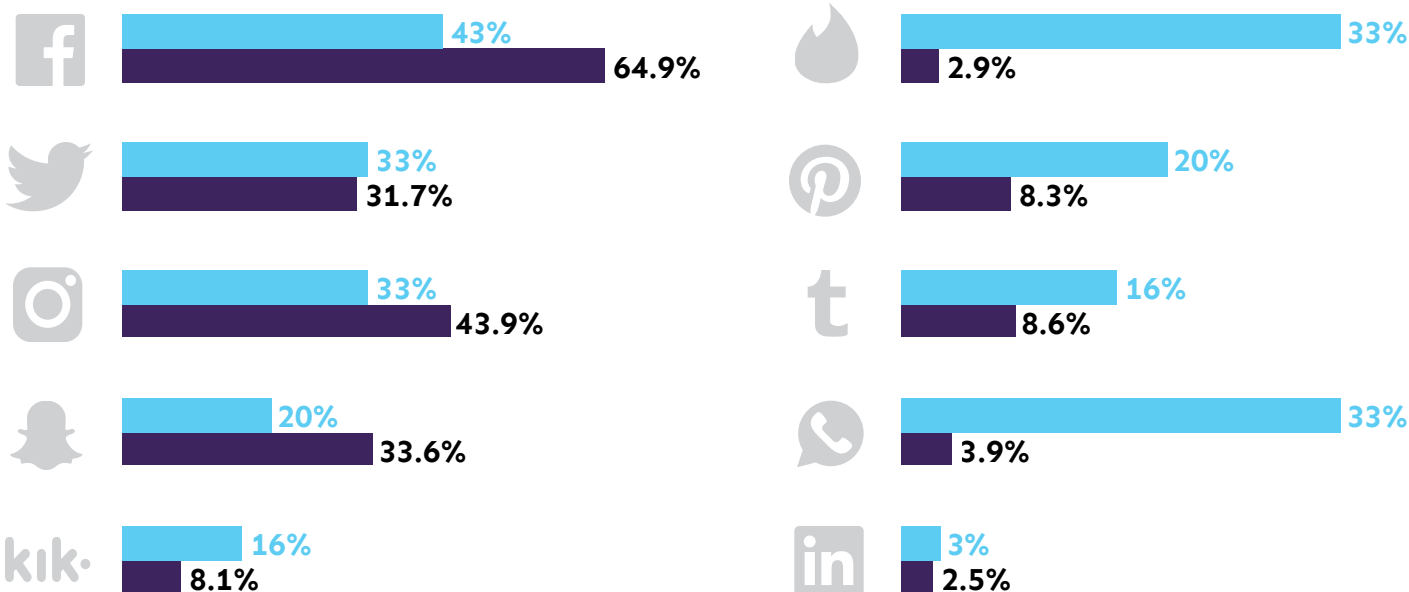


64%
of Gen Z-ers are
taking a break from
social media



34%
of Gen Z-ers are
permanently quitting
social media

social media brands



■ taking a break
■ quitting permanently

"Taking a break from social media stopped me from being on my phone every two seconds and stopped me from pressuring myself to post more often than I could manage."

"Throughout most of my life, I had Facebook since 5th grade up to 12th grade. My daily routine changed...I used to wake up and hop on Facebook first to see everyone's updates. Now...I feel like I'm not as connected to many people anymore."

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



41%

wasting too much time on it



35%

there was too much negativity



31%

not using it very often



26%

not interested in the content



22%

wanted more privacy



18%

too much pressure to get attention



18%

got too commercialized



17%

made me feel bad about myself

“Taking a break from social media has definitely made me feel more productive with my time.”

“I felt I wasn't in the loop but eventually my life was easier because I didn't have to constantly check my Facebook.”

“It lifted a weight from me because I wasn't obligated to posting.”

the bottom line for brands

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 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.

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 65% 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.

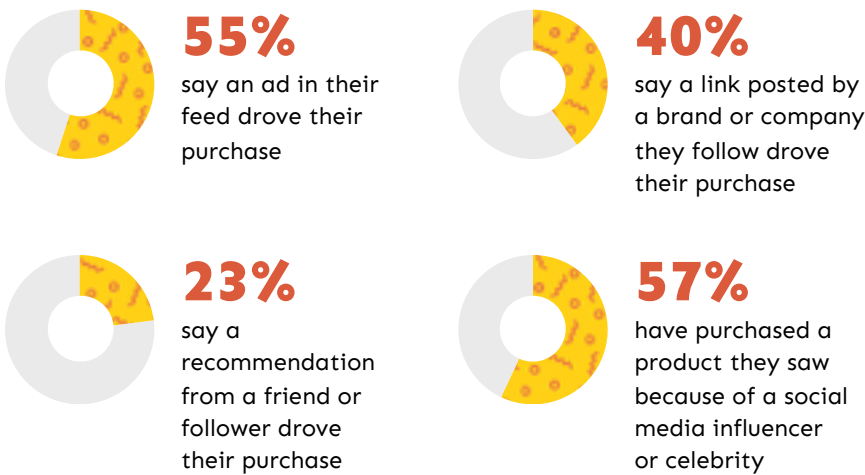
Still, while Gen Z is 4 times more likely to convert on social media than Millennials, not all are putting their money where their browsing is. Less than half (43%) of Gen Z social media users have made a purchase directly through social media.



**43% of
Gen Z social media
users have
made a purchase
via social media**

social media introduces new products, and paid ads drive sales

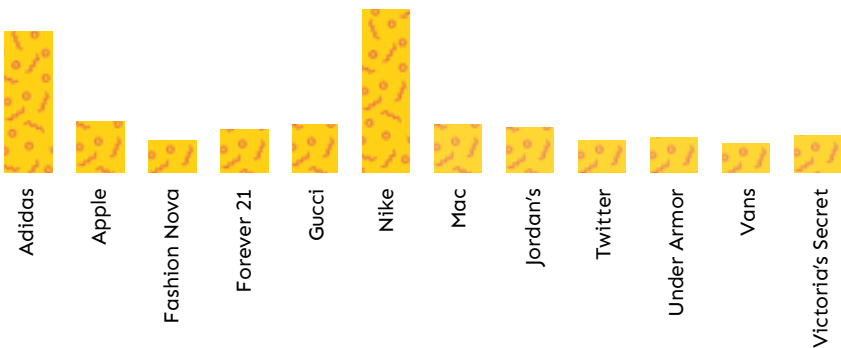
88% of brands use social media in some capacity for marketing purposes, and Gen Z is taking notice. Gen Z social media shoppers report that Facebook (61%) and Instagram (47%) were the most popular platforms on which to find new products. They also report that paid advertising and brand content were the 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 most mentioned brands followed by Gen Z



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 you 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 take-aways that should be considered by brands who are ready to reach Gen Z:

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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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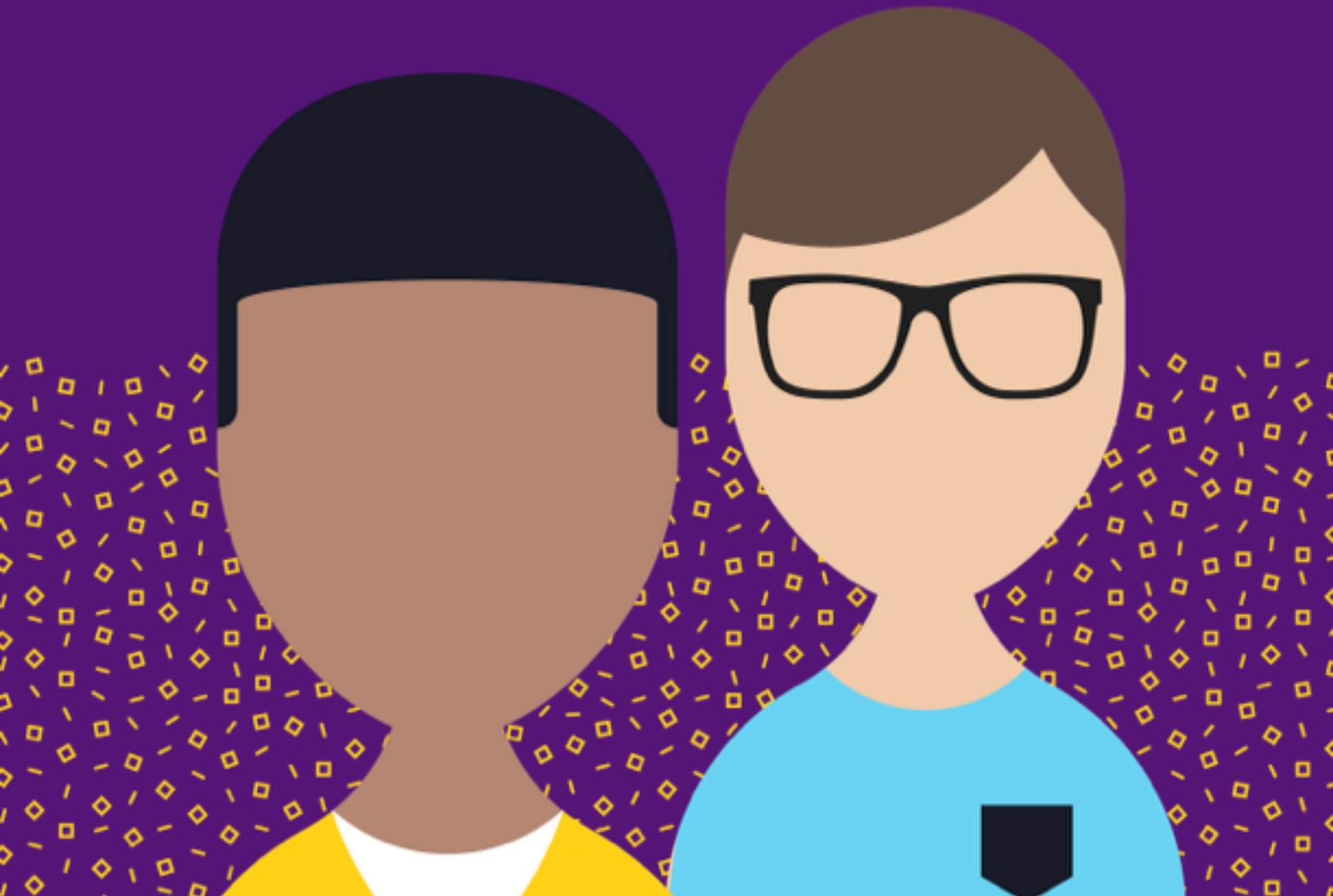
Next steps

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 800 employees across our network. Since 1968 we've built our business on winning that daily share battle for our clients in the noisiest and most competitive categories. Blending superior creative, media and technology, we deliver game changing ideas for industry leaders like Bank of America, Dunkin' Donuts, Planet Fitness, Tempur Sealy International, Calvin Klein, Party City, Great Wolf Lodge, Capella University, Novartis, Johnson & Johnson, Smuckers, and White Wave. 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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