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How to Engage Gen Z on Social Media

Consumer Survey - Spring 2022

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# The Gen Z Mindset: How Is It Different?

As Gen Z matures, we are seeing distinct behaviors and preferences from this group that differ from older generations.

This is particularly true when it comes to how they use and engage on social media platforms. Demographic data, and understanding the generational nuances this data brings to light, should be leveraged by brands as a cornerstone of how they define their target audiences across social channels.

With recent data uncovering that **Gen Z is four times more likely to convert on social media than**

Millennials, the time is now for advertisers to get it right.

To understand better the role social media plays in how consumers connect and engage with brands and how the Gen Z mindset differs from the generations before, Smartly.io conducted two surveys in May of 2022. The first focused on 1,000 U.S. based consumers (age 18+) with the second surveying 1,000 Gen Z adults, ages 18-22.
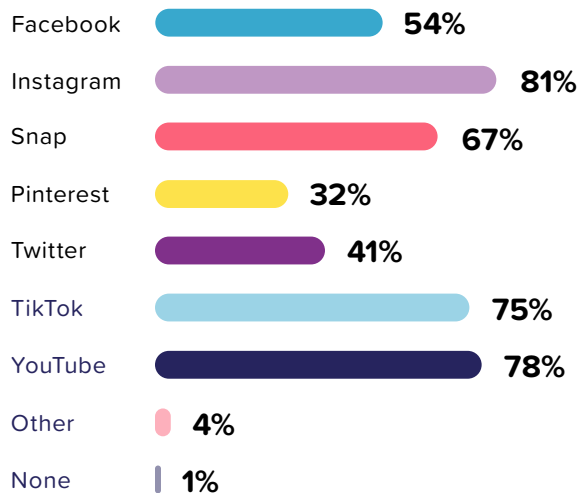
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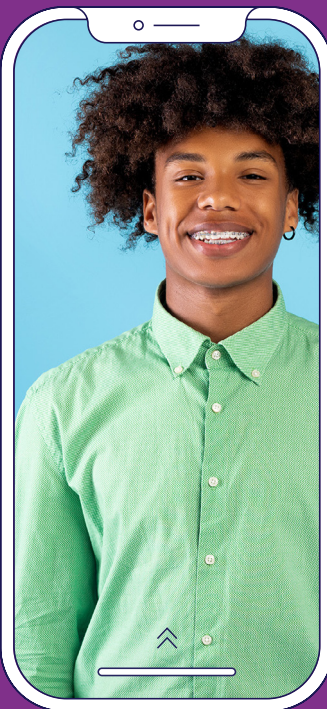
"Gen Z is active across more social platforms"

With the insights from these surveys we seek to uncover what motivates consumers to respond to a brand's advertising on social media and, ultimately, make purchases, as well as how Gen Z's motivation differs. Through this research we uncovered that Gen Z is active across more social platforms than other age demographics. While Facebook and YouTube rank high across general consumers, **Gen Z adults are regularly leveraging Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and Snapchat, among others.**
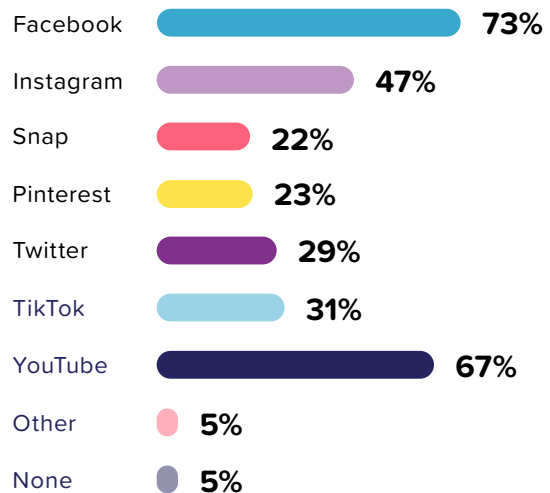
On which social media platforms are you regularly (4-5 times per week) active?
Gen Z consumers

Platform	%
Facebook	54%
Instagram	81%
Snap	67%
Pinterest	32%
Twitter	41%
TikTok	75%
YouTube	78%
Other	4%
None	1%

On which social media platforms are you regularly (4-5 times per week) active?
US Consumers (18+)

| Platform	%
Facebook	73%
Instagram	47%
Snap	22%
Pinterest	23%
Twitter	29%
TikTok	31%
YouTube	67%
Other	5%
None	5%

Additionally, while 57% of consumer respondents note using social media as a way of finding new brands, 82% of Gen Z consumers do this. With Gen Z being on a variety of social surfaces, more than other age groups, and with their willingness to use social media as a way to engage with brands, find new products and more how brands show up on each platform needs to be germane not only to the platform but to the brand, and thus to who the consumer is.

Gen Z is a social savvy group and they represent a new wave of social media usage. A 2021 survey from SproutSocial showed the most common reason Gen Z uses social media is to kill time, and they are the only generation that ranked this above connecting with family and friends. Seeing how their mindset differs, we need to understand what will reach them.

Do you use social media as a way of finding new brands to follow and engage with?
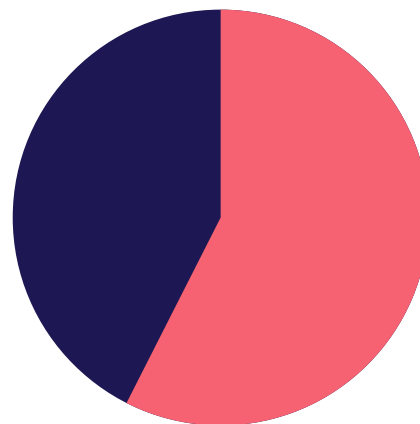
Gen Z consumers
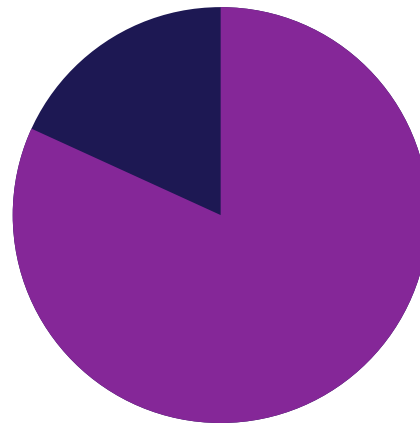
- 82%   Yes
- 18%   No

Do you use social media as a way of finding new brands?

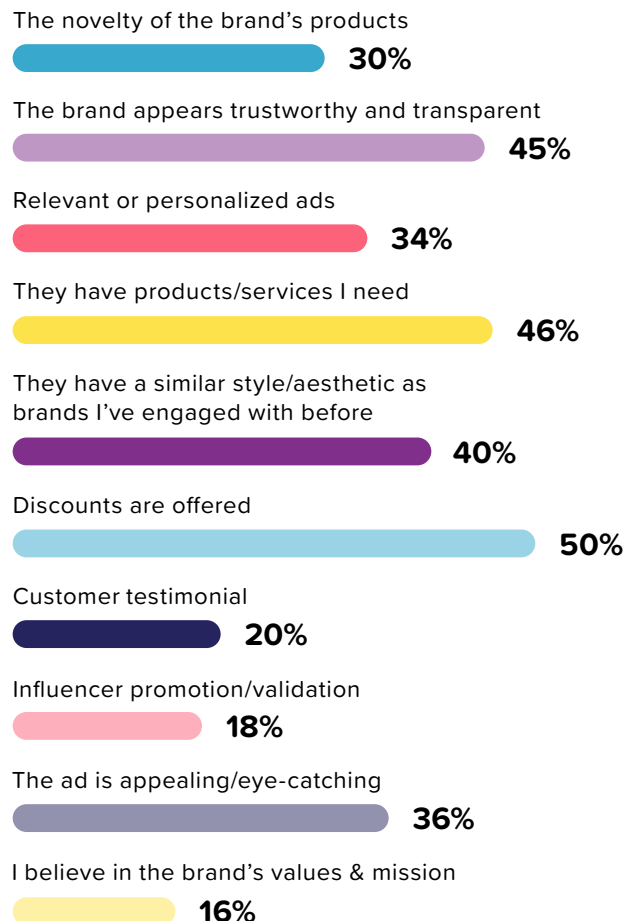US Consumers (18+)

- 57%   Yes
- 43%   No

Gen Z LOVES Variety

Consumers love choice. This isn't a surprising fact. They want to be able to choose what they buy, where they spend their money, time, or attention, and more. But more than choice, Gen Z loves variety.

Gen Z consumers are active across more social channels than other demographics. They also take more into consideration when deciding what ads or brands to interact with on these platforms and how - from discounts to their need for the product/service offered to a brand's transparency and perceived trustworthiness to the style and aesthetic of ads. Our general consumer survey showed higher focus on discounts and need for the product/service, specifically.

What motivates Gen Z consumers the most to engage with a new brand via social media?

The novelty of the brand's products
30%

The brand appears trustworthy and transparent
45%

Relevant or personalized ads
34%

They have products/services I need
46%

They have a similar style/aesthetic as brands I've engaged with before
40%

Discounts are offered
50%

Customer testimonial
20%

Influencer promotion/validation
18%

The ad is appealing/eye-catching
36%

I believe in the brand's values & mission
**16%**

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"Gen Z consumers are active across more social channels than other demographics."

This age demographic also appears to be more open to seeing ads on social media. From the surveyed, **87% said they are open to seeing advertising from brands they like or have purchased from before as well as new brands they are unfamiliar with.**

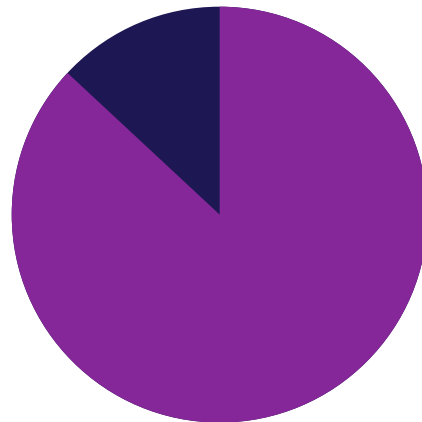**Are you open to seeing advertising from new brands on social media?**

Gen Z Consumers
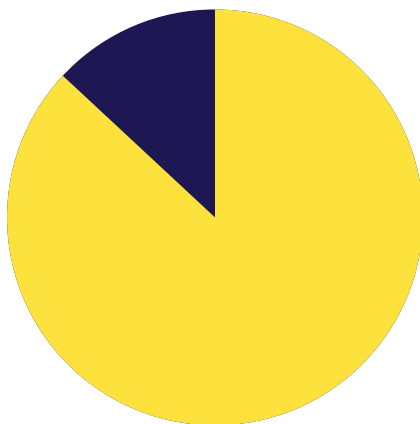
- 87% Yes
- 13% No

Would you be interested in seeing advertising on social media from brands you like or have purchased from before?

US Consumers (18+)

- 87% Yes
- 13% No

Video is King

The digital landscape has been oversaturated with content for years, decades even. It's been a while since visual experiences took over, but in more recent years Gen Z has taken it even further, moving away from the more curated aesthetics many Millennials adopted and opting for content that feels more authentic and unfiltered.
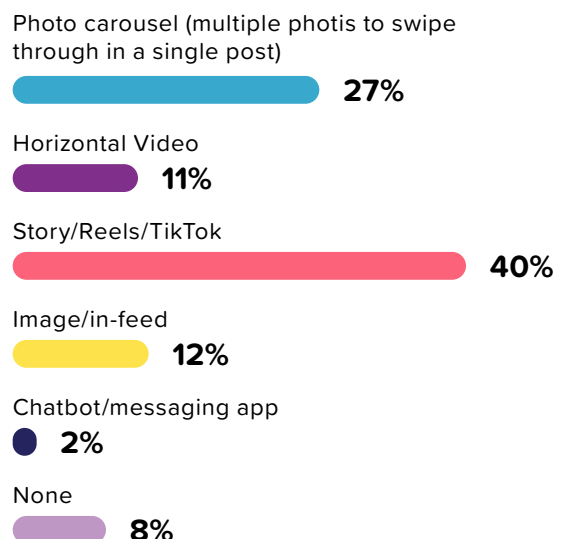
A richer, more versatile form of content, video offers more variety (which, as we already know, GEN Z loves) in how you can interact. If you're interested in the visuals, you can watch without sound. Or, if it's the message you're interested in you can listen to the audio without being beholden to keeping your attention on the video. If you're interested in it all, you have that option too. It's also been found in recent years that video serves as a way for Gen Z to decompress and de-stress.

Our survey data shows that **40% of Gen Z consumers prefer Stories, Reels or TikTok videos when seeing ads from brands on social media.** Video or motion-specific content is more eye-catching to this audience. Additionally, it helps brands come across more authentically, especially if they are participating in a trend on TikTok, for example.

When you see an ad from a brand on social media, what style do you prefer most?

Gen Z Consumers

Photo carousel (multiple photis to swipe through in a single post)
27%

Horizontal Video
11%

Story/Reels/TikTok
40%

Image/in-feed
12%

Chatbot/messaging app
2%

None
8%

Getting Clicks & Views to Translate to Purchases

Social media has proven to be a popular place for consumers to search for products, services, new brands and more. In our 2021 holiday shopping report more than half (52%) of consumers said they've found inspiration for a holiday gift from a social media ad. In the same survey nearly six in 10 (57%) noted they are open to making holiday gift purchases directly via a social media ad.

With this in mind, it's not surprising that 62% of respondents from our consumer survey noted in the past 30 days they have clicked on an ad from a brand they saw on social media. Our Gen Z respondents were even higher, with 75% saying they've clicked an ad on social media in the past 30 days.

However, the data does suggest a disconnect between clicks or views on an ad and consumers being inspired to make a purchase as a result of those ads. 63% of our consumer respondents say they have not made a purchase based on social media ads, and 55% of Gen Z say the same.

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Over the past 30 days, have you clicked on an ad from a brand that you saw on social media?
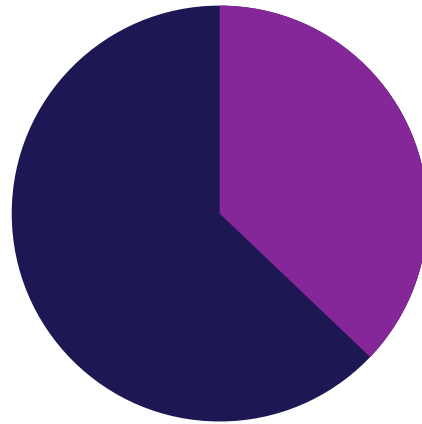
US Consumer (18+)
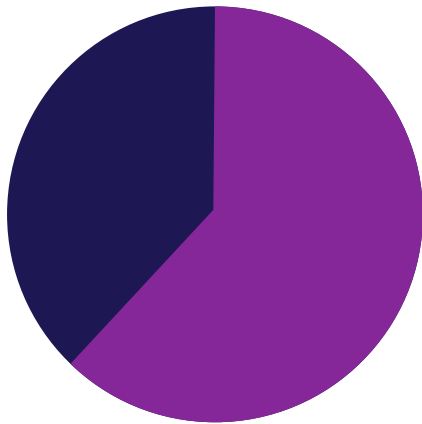
- 62%   Yes
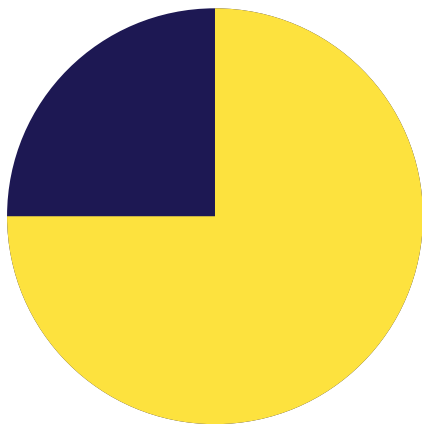- 38%   No

Over the past 30 days, have you actually made a purchase from a brand based on a digital ad you saw on social media?

- 37%   Yes
- 63%   No

Over the past 30 days, have you clicked on a brand's ad that you saw on social media?
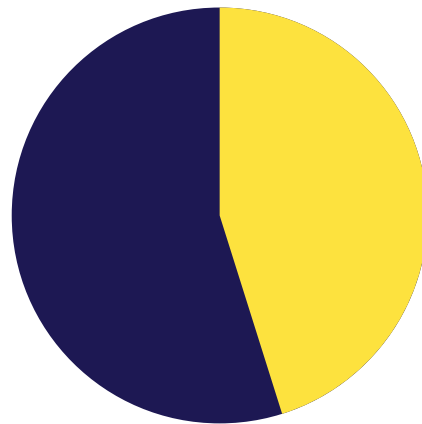
Gen Z Consumers

- 75%   Yes
- 25%   No

Over the past 30 days, have you actually made a purchase from a brand based on a digital ad you saw on social media?

- 45%   Yes
- 55%   No

For Gen Z specifically, there is a 30% gap between consumers who are clicking on social media ads and those making purchases as a result of those ads (45%). From our general consumer survey, the gap between ad clicks and purchases is 25%. So, how can brands close this gap and put ads in front of social media users that will convert?

Multiplatform or bust!

Everyone is investing more heavily in social media advertising. We're seeing some brands now dedicating up to 90% of their marketing budgets to social ads alone - and this growing investment is being spent across a much wider range of platforms than ever before.

Consumer journeys are becoming more complex by the minute and it's increasingly important for advertisers to meet these consumers wherever and whenever they are. This means creating an omnipresent multiplatform social strategy that speaks to consumers at all touchpoints along their path to purchase and that can shift along with changing preferences and mindsets.

If you haven't, pull the creative lever

Creative has become one of the most important tools for impactful personalization, especially as we enter a post-cookie world. As privacy regulations continue to change the course of the advertising market, creative allows advertisers to unleash new strategies for personalizing each experience.

Now we're seeing consumers gravitate towards content that is highly visual and personalized. Creative is critical and brands should invest more time understanding the creative performance of previous campaigns to identify what drove engagement. Advertisers should also set up robust test and learn approaches as insights gained from creative testing are critical in our privacy-first digital world.
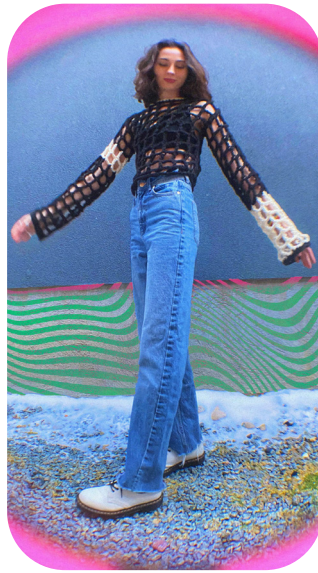
"GEN Z, WHO ARE LOOKING FOR MORE RELATABLE, TRANSPARENT AND AUTHENTIC BRANDS TO ENGAGE WITH."

The right testing helps brands understand what to show to the right consumer as well as the creative that resonates most to drive purchases. This is easier said than done - still to this day, many advertisers launch campaigns without getting a handle on the data and insights to effectively make creative decisions, and do this well across platforms.

Through it all, be authentic

It's increasingly important for brands to be relatable to their new and existing consumers. When advertising on social media, creating a genuine connection and interacting with the audience is critical. This is especially true with

Gen Z, who are looking for more relatable, transparent and authentic brands to engage with.

TikTok presents a prime example - Leveraging User-Generated Content (UGC), such as a "get ready with me" video from a creator on the platform, can feel more intimate and raw as an advertising medium. UGC shows how real people are benefiting from your product or service, and there's an added benefit of being easier and more cost effective to produce.

Authenticity is a major part of getting creative right in that it dictates how you will show up to your varying audiences across platforms.

About
Smartly.io

Powering beautifully effective ads, Smartly.io automates every step of social advertising to unlock greater performance and creativity. We combine creative technology, ad buying automation and intelligence with outstanding customer service to help 700+ brands scale their results—on Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat and TikTok. Last year Smartly.io acquired Ad-Lib.io and Viralspace.ai and are now a fast-growing community of over 700 Smartlies with offices around the world, managing over $4B in annual ad spend.

Visit **Smartly.io** to learn more.