



STUDENT EDGE

I Hate Ads Report

Earning Attention with
the Next Generation



INSIGHTS BROUGHT TO YOU BY

different we are AND **YOUTH INSIGHT**



I HATE ADS REPORT

is produced by:

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About Student Edge



Student Edge was founded in 2003 by four students who recognised the challenges faced by young people on a range of issues such as cost of living, student life, access to part-time work and career guidance.

Student Edge is now the largest member-based organisation of high school and tertiary students in Australia with more than 1.4 million members nationwide.

studentedge.org

About YouthInsight



YouthInsight is a full-service research arm, powered by Student Edge. Our team of experienced researchers specialise in youth insights, with countless years of experience unlocking young people's thoughts, behaviours and motivations to help clients see the world through their eyes.

Our unique access and understanding of Australia's Gen Z and Gen Alpha populations enable us to conduct online national surveys and swiftly recruit 11 to 29 year olds for workshops, interviews and focus groups.

youthinsight.com.au

About We Are Different



Different represents the next generation of PR – a team who understands that although the media and creator landscape has changed, the power and influence of earned is as strong as ever.

As consumers continue to skip past traditional advertising, the agency has built industry-leading service capabilities across PR, influencer, social, AI/LLM influence, owned content, experiential and

more – all designed to capture the attention of the next generation.

Since its inception in 2019, Different continues to be recognised as the country's leading earned-first creative agency, with over 40 awards, a culture-defining client list, and team of industry leaders at its helm.

Let's be different, together.

wearedifferentpr.com.au

Introduction

It's never been harder to capture the attention of young people.

Today's consumer exists in a fast-paced, fragmented and ever evolving media landscape. They expect more from brands, and the advertising landscape has never been more saturated.

Yet despite this change, often the ways in which brands engage with the next generation feels like it's from a bygone era.

This led us to a curious question: do they hate it?

Our inaugural I Hate Ads Report explores how the next generation of consumers think and feel about brand advertising today.

It combines responses from 1,000 Australians aged 14 to 29 with commentary from Gen Z creators and earned attention experts.

The study explores how young people engage with, interpret, and respond to certain types of brand messages in a world where those messages are everywhere and always on.

It helps identify what captures young people's attention, earns their trust, and makes a brand feel more loved (and less hated) in their constantly-evolving world.

The research was developed in partnership with YouthInsight and We Are Different – combining our longstanding commitment to understanding young Australians with Different's expertise in earned attention.

We see this report as a rallying cry for the industry, hoping it will help brands build more meaningful connections with young people by listening, questioning assumptions, and understanding what really matters to the next generation.

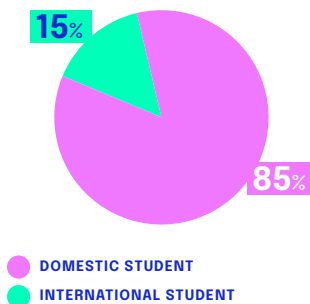
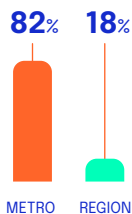
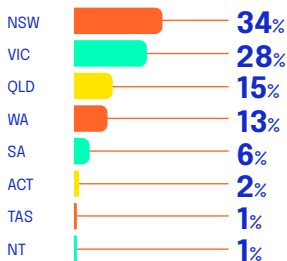
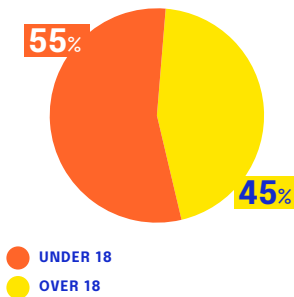
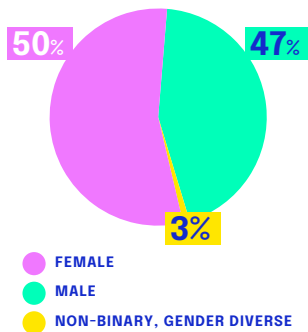
Dr Hande Akman,
YouthInsight Research Director



Demographics

1,000 responses provided a 95% confidence level with a margin of error of $\pm 3\%$. To ensure the survey results are representative of the Australian population aged 14 to 29, quotas were applied based on age, gender, and state and territory distributions.

These quotas were aligned with data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The data was weighted after to correct for any over or under representation of demographic subgroups.



Snapshot

The question on everyone's lips – do Gen Z hate ads?

Mostly yes, but there's more to the story.

Young people are redefining what earns their attention and what turns them away. The research and commentary reveals four key themes to unlock more love.

1) Gen Z don't hate all ads (just bad ones)

Gen Z's world is defined by constant exposure to content, yet exposure does not equal connection. 81% say they hate ads and 60% find them intrusive. What's interesting is that only 28% of young people want fewer ads overall – so it's not the presence of branded content that's leading to hate, rather the type of content they're being served.

2) Brand love requires some polish remover

Young people are rejecting brand messaging that feels forced or artificial. Almost half (40%) agree that over-polished ads make them trust a brand less, whereas content that feels authentic (56%), teaches something new (50%) and/or shows the 'behind the scenes' of a brand (36%) is enjoyed by Gen Z. By all accounts, brands are entering their authenticity era with many requiring some polish remover to drive brand love.

3) Opinions (still) driven by opinion leaders

When forming opinions about brands, Gen Z rank content creators (41%), influencers (28%) and media outlets (25%) as their most trusted sources. Despite its widespread adoption, AI chatbots / LLMs rank relatively low (13%) on perceived trust. The numbers shift slightly when looking at influence over purchase intent with media outlets (35%), AI (26%) and influencers (14%) driving intent in that order. With constant exposure to

content, the data shows Gen Z is leaning on trusted sources to help shape both opinions and purchase intent.

4) Show me the money (then the information, then the creative)

Cost of living is impacting Gen Z's expectation from brands with almost half (45%) saying they want more discounts in the future. Beyond the financial, Gen Z want more useful information (33%), more creative content (34%) and more funny content (30%). To drive more love, brands should remain cost-conscious while offering content that informs, entertains and inspires.

For brands, the message is clear: to be less hated, you need to be more connected to the world young people live in, the type of content they engage with, and the opinion leaders they follow. Love is there for the taking.



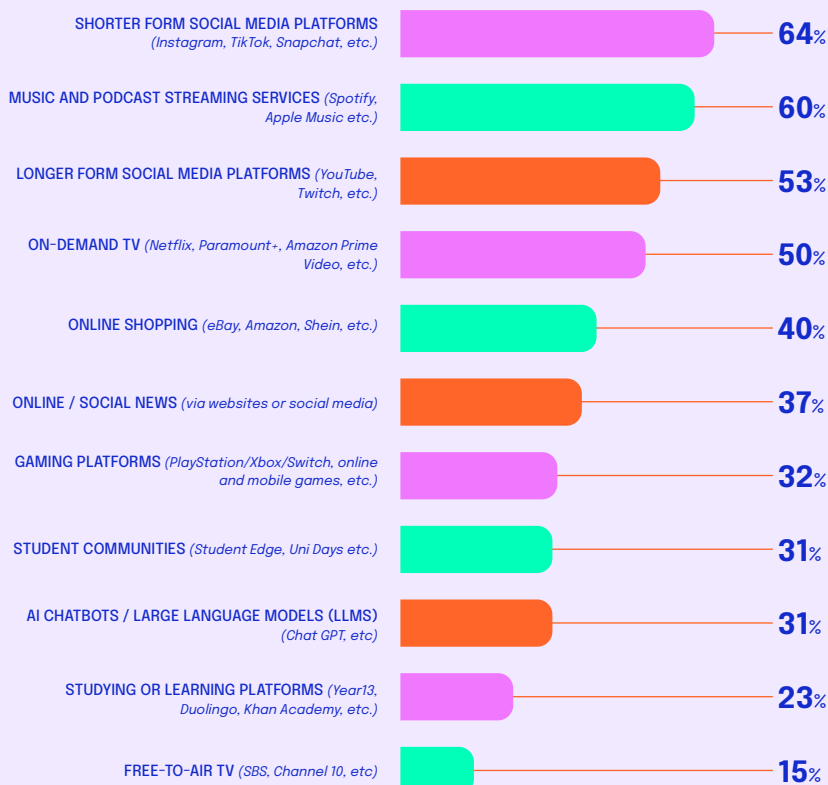
Gen Z fills their days with scrolling, streaming, and screens of every kind

Short form social platforms dominate Gen Z's digital time, offering quick entertainment that fits into short breaks and dual screen consumption.

Longer form platforms also hold a strong place in their media mix, challenging the idea that Gen Z has no attention span.

AI tools / LLMs are on the rise with 31% of young people now spending time on chatbots or large language models such as ChatGPT, almost as common as gaming. This highlights how quickly AI has become part of their everyday media use.

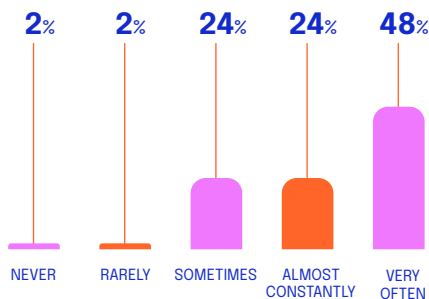
WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU USUALLY SPEND TIME ON?



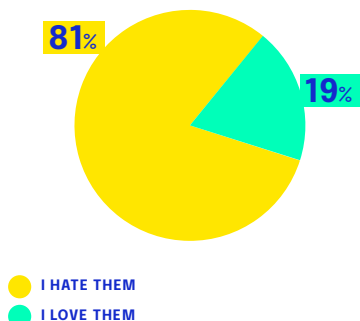
Ads are everywhere, but love for them is rare

While scrolling and streaming on screens, Gen Z is exposed to advertising **almost constantly** (24%) or **very often** (48%). However, constant exposure does not lead to connection, 81% say they **hate ads**. Their most common reaction is to **skip, ignore, or fast-forward** them. Some install ad blockers, avoid platforms that rely heavily on advertising, or stop using them altogether.

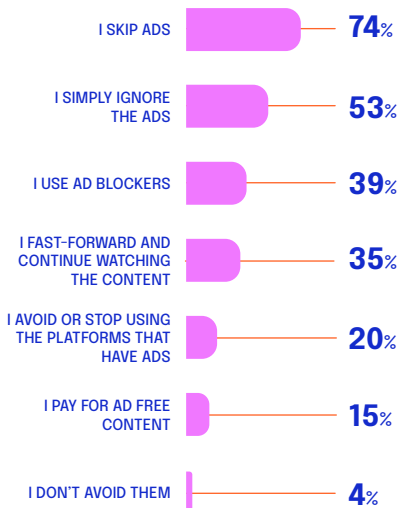
HOW OFTEN DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE EXPOSED TO ADVERTISING?



IN GENERAL, HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT ADS?



HOW DO YOU AVOID ADS?



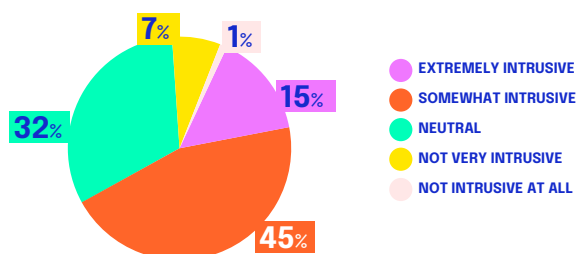
Ads feel **intrusive** and **disconnected**

Almost half view ads as somewhat intrusive (45%), while a smaller group find them extremely intrusive (15%).

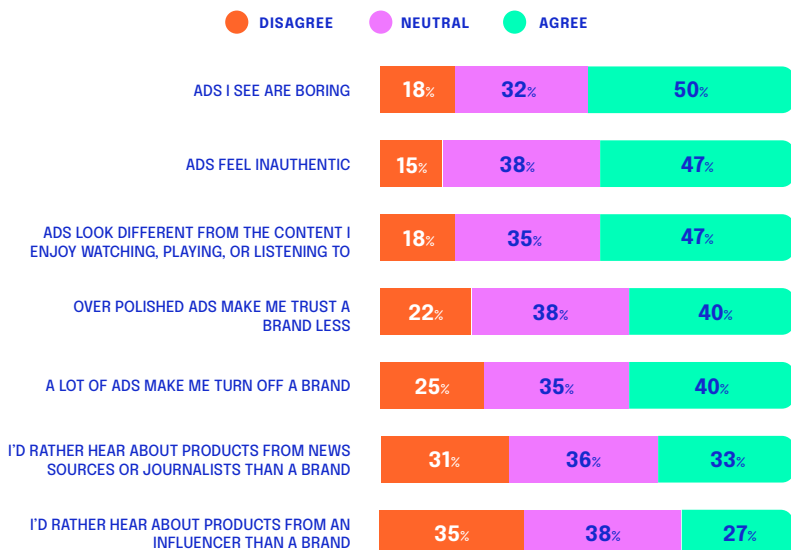
About half agree that the ads they see are **boring** (50%) or **feel inauthentic** (47%).

They also agree that ads **look different** from the content they enjoy (47%). In addition, 40% feel that over polished ads can make a brand seem less authentic, and another 40% agree that ads can make them turn away from a brand.

HOW INTRUSIVE DO YOU GENERALLY FIND THE ADVERTISING YOU ENCOUNTER ONLINE?



TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING?



Branded content works best when it teaches and feels authentic

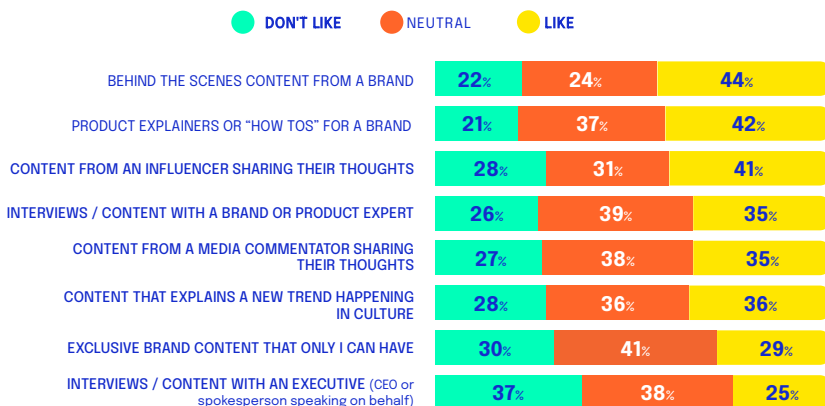
Branded content is liked when it is **informative**. Gen Z likes it when branded content is shared as behind the scenes pieces (44%), product explainers, or “how to” content (42%).

Influencers (41%) and content featuring brand experts (35%) perform relatively well, showing that young people are open to hearing from knowledgeable voices.

In contrast, exclusive brand content is liked by only 29%. This suggests that **exclusivity is over**. Young people prefer to be part of open conversations rather than having access to content that feels limited.

The most liked types of branded content **feel authentic** (56%) and help Gen Z **learn something new** (50%). Only 8% say they do not like any type of branded content.

THINKING ABOUT THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF BRANDED CONTENT, HOW MUCH DO YOU LIKE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING FORMATS?



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF BRANDED CONTENT DO YOU ENJOY?



Expert Eye

MARK MARIANO

WRITER, SOCIAL PRODUCER, SPEAKER
FORMER BUZZFEED AND SBSFOOD



“

As a proud Chronically Online Zillennial, it's been a real joy seeing fellow Tumblr/Bebo/Moshi Monster babes come into adulthood and bring their digi-habits with them.

It comes as no surprise that a generation raised by YouTube make-up tutorials, wikiHow and sick-day Huey cooking marathons are welcoming of educative and informative social content.

Young audiences are increasingly prioritising information, facts and knowledge presented to them in a way that is Group Chat Friendly. Preferred content is no longer broadcast – it's shared as if a know-it-all (tone, positive) mate is telling them the scoop. It's become a completely collaborative and shareable experience, and it looks like we're truly all in this together (IYKYK).

Will the next generation ever truly come to love ads? I say, absolutely – when they're done right. Brands and branded content that have learned to exist among their consumers – not above or adjacent to them – will have the most longevity and impact amongst younger demographics.

When it comes to content, I will take a TheDailyAus news carousel or a SBS The Feed explainer reel over a clunky link any day. Brands that lean into community, share with care and treat me like a BFF will be my BFF for life.

This research presents a really fun and experimental opportunity for brands. Now is the time to become fluent in BFF and communicate not just as a brand, but as our super-smart bestie with all the tea.

”

Ads could work if they feel real, informative, and inspiring

A deeper dive shows Gen Z want brands to speak like real people, not like marketing machines. They can recognise exaggerated efforts to sound young or trendy, and they respond more **positively to humour, honesty, and authenticity**.

They also value **learning something new**. They appreciate content that informs, explains, or helps them make sense of a product's purpose, rather than entertainment for its own sake.

Reviews and first hand experiences are trusted more than paid promotions or polished influencer endorsements.

Gen Z want to see **creativity**, relevance to their own interests, and alignment with real life passions such as design, technology, and self expression. They expect brands to understand their world and reflect that understanding in tone, visuals, and substance.

IF YOU WERE A BRAND TRYING TO GET YOUR ATTENTION AND SHARE A MESSAGE WITH YOU AND PEOPLE LIKE YOU, HOW WOULD YOU DO IT SO IT ACTUALLY WORKS?

"If you wanna get my attention, talk to me like a real person, not a brand bot. Show your personality through short, scroll-stopping videos or memes I'd send to my friends. Don't just sell me stuff, make me feel like I'm part of something real. In short: be authentic, be bold, and please... don't try too hard to sound gen z."

18 yrs, Female

"Advertise only to the people who would be interested. Don't try and make a story within an ad. Just get to the point."

16 yrs, Male

"[Young people] know what they want, and if you're a brand that also knows what you want, then keep that loyal fan base around."

25 yrs, Female

"Using genuine young Aussies instead of actors makes it feel authentic, and offering free merch or giveaways helps build interest."

18 yrs, Male

"Interesting content which I can learn something from"

19 yrs, Male

"No reason to faff about with trying to make it entertaining or trendy or pay an influencer to lie about it. Just be informative and let the viewer draw their conclusions."

24 yrs, Male

"I enjoy informative content but lose trust the second they try to sell me something. I do not trust a review that is black and white and tells you to buy something, rather I enjoy reviews that objectively tell you the use of the product and what it is or is not good for."

24 yrs, Male

"First i would make a product that i love then give it to a few content creators to give an honest review if they liked it or not then I will give them a discount code to give to fans"

17 yrs, Male

"Behind the scenes and ads that 'debunk' customers claims would be also effective in my opinion."

21 yrs, Male

"Fairly and accurately demonstrate the abilities of products & being creative without the use of AI generative technology."

17 yrs, Female

"A brand should be relatable, but honor the expectation that they are professional in the sense that they are 'a brand'. So while, there can be certain tactics like using new slang, or covering the newest trends, I will try to showcase our foundation of what we do and why we do what we do as the brand."

19 yrs, Female



There is more to purchase than we know

When we asked Gen Z which sources they find most effective and trustworthy for forming opinions about brands, and then whether those same sources influence their actual purchase decisions, we found some very interesting results.

Friends and peers are the most common influence on brand opinions (61%) and also the most common source driving purchases (49%). However, their impact drops by 12% when it comes to turning opinions into buying actions. **Content creators** follow a similar trend, with a 12% decline from shaping brand perception

(41%) to influencing purchase decisions (29%).

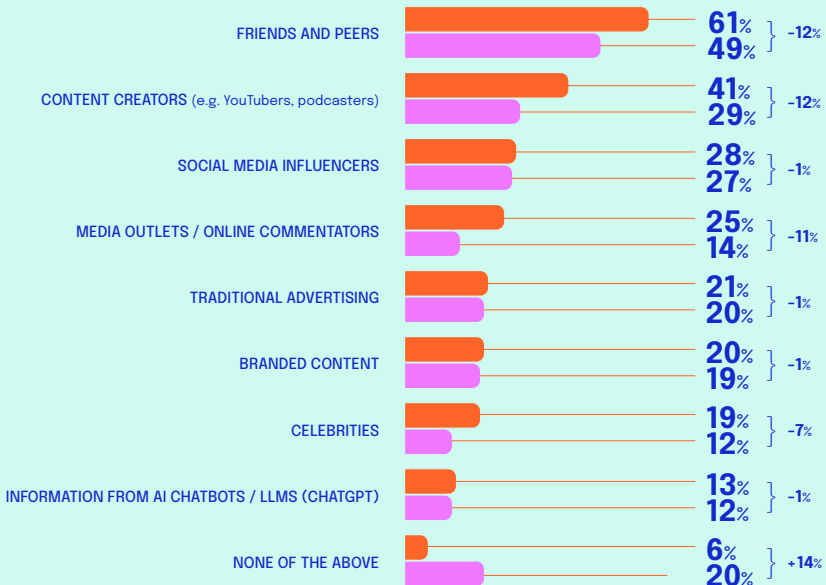
While **influencers** perform well on shaping opinions and driving purchase, there is an interesting distinction emerging between them and **content creators**. Creators such as Podcasters and Youtubers rank higher in their ability to influence opinion. This perhaps speaks to the oversaturation of influencer content and the rise of longer form creator content that drives both trust and community with young audiences.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS MOST EFFECTIVE OR TRUSTWORTHY WHEN IT COMES TO SHAPING YOUR OPINION OF A BRAND?

IN THE PAST YEAR, HAVE YOU BOUGHT SOMETHING BECAUSE OF EITHER OF THE FOLLOWING?

● PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS AND TRUST

● MADE ME BUY SOMETHING



Gen Z cares when the media is involved in product recommendations

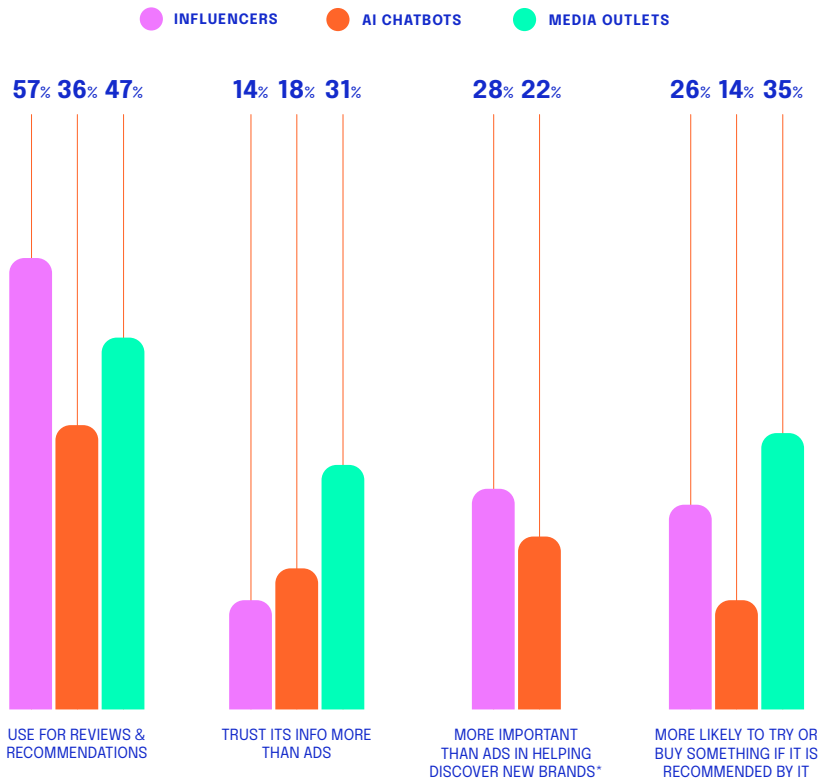
Not surprisingly, Gen Z turn to social media influencers (57%) and media (47%) for reviews and recommendations. Interestingly, a slightly higher proportion trust AI chatbots (18%) more than ads compared to influencers (14%).

The most interesting outcome is that more young people say they are likely to buy or try something if it is

recommended by a media outlet (35%), compared to recommendations from influencers (26%) or AI chatbots (14%).

Recommendations made by media sources seem to lead to higher intentions, despite the growing presence of AI chatbots and social influencers in Gen Z's daily lives.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING REFLECT HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT INFORMATION FROM INFLUENCERS, AI CHATBOTS & MEDIA OUTLETS?



*NOT MEASURED FOR MEDIA OUTLETS

Expert Eye

LAUREN MEISNER

FOUNDER AND LONG-FORM
CONTENT CREATOR

CENTENNIAL WORLD



“

While Gen Z are the most educated generation in history, their formative years have also been marked by a global rise in anti-intellectualism.

This has created an interesting tension: on the one hand, they've grown up with unlimited access to information and the tools to critically interpret it. On the other, shifting societal attitudes toward expertise (and now the rise of AI) have made them inherently sceptical of who's worth listening to.

With that in mind, these findings aren't surprising.

Traditional media outlets still hold credibility among young people because they're built on journalistic authority, formal training, and teams of fact-checkers. Long-form creators like podcasters and YouTubers have earned trust through parasocial relationships and the depth, or sometimes simply the length, of their content.

Gen Z are the first generation to grow up alongside the influencer industry, and their beliefs about the industry are largely built on perception over reality. Brands shouldn't

ignore the likes of TikTok and influencers for reach and engagement, but the data shows new media formats and long-form creators offer trust and connection which is really powerful.

A good way to gauge if working with a creator or new media outlet will actually help you build that brand affinity is to measure its "cultiness". You can do this by looking at the comment sections on community-based platforms like YouTube and Reddit, rather than mass reach platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Take note of how engaged their audience is on these community-based platforms— are there meaningful conversations in their comment sections? Do the comments reference in-jokes or parasocial details about the creator/personalities that front the outlet? Do they have a fan subreddit? How do people talk about them on Reddit?

These are helpful guides in gauging if people actually care about these creators/podcasters/media brands and if your spend with them will provide results.

Because there's more to reach than reach.

”

Gen Z shows low price elasticity for ad-free content

37% of Gen Z say they **would pay** to remove ads from digital services, while 53% would not and 10% already pay for an ad-free option.

Among all only 28% would pay between \$1 and \$4 per month. Considering that most prefer to skip or ignore ads to avoid them, as seen earlier, it is not surprising that appeal for paying for ad free content is limited.

IF YOU HAD THE OPTION TO PAY TO REMOVE ADS FROM A DIGITAL SERVICE, WOULD YOU DO IT?

37%

YES

53%

NO

10%

ALREADY PAY

HOW MUCH WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO PAY PER MONTH FOR AN AD-FREE SERVICE?

28%

\$1-\$4 PER MONTH

6%

\$5-\$9 PER MONTH

2%

\$10-\$14 PER MONTH

1%

\$15 OR MORE PER MONTH



Gen Z shows both love and hate for ads, depending on the content

In total, 320 respondents could not recall any advertisement they liked recently, and 353 said they do not remember liking any ads at all.

Successful ads tend to feel authentic and engaging, showing real people,

genuine stories, or products in action rather than simply pushing a sale.

Unsuccessful ads feel misleading, artificial, or inauthentic, over promising or disguising paid promotion in ways that undermine trust.

CAN YOU THINK OF AN ADVERTISEMENT OR BRANDED CONTENT YOU ACTUALLY LIKED RECENTLY?

"An ad came up on my Instagram that was for a very uniquely designed desk chair. I liked the ad because the product was very interesting and they showed me the different ways the chair could be used."

22 yrs, Female

"AAMI- their recent driving test ad contains humour, an engaging plot, and a catchy song (Scatman John's Scatman) to appeal to a wide range of people who drive."

17 yrs, Male

"I liked an ad for Adidas which followed the steps of an athlete and their struggle to performance was authentic."

22 yrs, Male

"Ninja Creami ads cos they felt authentic, the product was cool and the people advertising them shared feedback and negatives too so I felt I could trust them more."

16 yrs, Female

CAN YOU THINK OF AN ADVERTISEMENT OR BRANDED CONTENT THAT ANNOYED YOU RECENTLY?

Mobile game ads that misrepresent their games and use intentionally bad gameplay to bait viewers.

18 yrs, Male

"Especially on TikTok, you see a lot of videos where they promote makeup or skincare, and they don't mention that it is a paid promotion. This annoys me as when I search on TikTok for product recommendations, I'm looking for genuine and real opinions and its annoying to have to watch out for non obvious branded content."

18 yrs, Male

"The rise of AI generated ads has been horrible. I hate watching them and they are so ugly."

20 yrs, Male

"I think advertisements that are too cringy or try to be on trend when they don't know it that well makes it look inauthentic and annoying."

17 yrs, Female

Connecting with Gen Z requires a deeper understanding of their world

Only 28% want fewer advertisements overall, which shows that the issue is not the presence of ads but rather their content. Our results clearly suggest that brands should focus on understanding young people's world.

Given cost of living pressures, it's no surprise that young people are seeking more financial support from brands in the form of discounts, rewards or giveaways. Beyond this, education, inspiration and authenticity follow closely.

Interestingly, our results suggest that brands should aim to **inspire**. Gen Z's access to technology and their use of it for creating and finding inspiration should encourage brands to reflect these trends in their messaging.

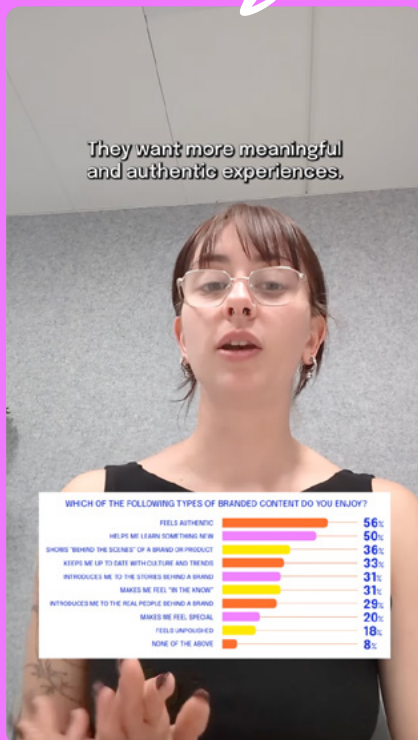
Authenticity is already known as a key value for Gen Z and is an important factor in how brands communicate with them. However, our findings show that connecting with Gen Z does not have a single formula. It is **complex and requires a multi-dimensional solution**.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU MOST WANT FROM BRANDS IN THE FUTURE WHEN IT COMES TO ADVERTISING?



Gen Z Content Creators Reflect on the I Hate Ads Report

GEN Z ON THE I HATE ADS



SCAN HERE TO WATCH
THE FULL VIDEO



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