

A Fresh Take

Staying ahead of evolving dynamics in the marketplace and our culture

Disconnect to Reconnect

How Real-Life Shared Experiences Are the Antidote for Social Media Isolation Among Gen Z





Despite being labeled ‘digital-first’, Gen Z is increasingly drawn to shared experiences

The negative impacts of social media platforms have become impossible to ignore, including **persistent feelings of isolation and unhappiness** which has created numerous mental health issues among Gen Z.

As Gen Z steps back from social platforms to improve their mental well-being, **they are embracing more positive, real-life shared experiences that instill greater emotional connections and a break from their online lives.**

Shared moments - such as watching TV, streaming or theatrical movie releases with friends or family - fosters community and excitement, filling the emotional void created by social media.

By harnessing the deep emotional connections these experiences ignite, brands can **develop more impactful campaigns that resonate with Gen Z and drive meaningful consumer engagement.**

‘Gen Z’ is typically defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012 (ages 12-27).

Gen Z's growing recognition of the real harms caused by social media usage is leading many of them to disconnect



Social media constantly creates negative experiences for Gen Z which makes many feel isolated, sad and unhappy



57%

of Gen Z **associate social media with 'isolation'**



37%

of adults 18-24 agree that they **often feel sad or unhappy after going on social media***
(vs. 34% in 2021)

Source: Harris Poll via EMARKETER, *Gen Z's love-hate relationship with social media deepens*, 9/25/24. *VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons Spring 2024 vs. 2021 USA Study, A18+. Percentages are based on respondents who agreed with the statement, 'I often feel sad or unhappy after going on social media.' Any agree.

A significant segment of Gen Z say that social media has hurt them personally and has had an adverse effect on their emotional health

29%

of adults ages 18-27 say that social media has **hurt them personally**

% of A18-27 who believe social media had a negative impact on their emotional health

37%

A18-27

47%

LGBTQ A18-27

44%

Women A18-27

Source: Harris Poll via The New York Times, *Gen Z Has Regrets*, 09/17/2024. Based on online survey of 1,006 Gen Z adults, aged 18-27 about their beliefs regarding the impact that social media and smartphones have had on them and whether they'd support select reform efforts to address addiction; fielded 8/8/24 – 8/15/24.

Numerous research studies highlight the mental health risks associated with social media use that impact the overall wellbeing of youths

The New York Times 6/17/2024

Surgeon General: Why I'm Calling for a Warning Label on Social Media Platforms

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. 9/14/2021

Facebook Knows Instagram Is Toxic for Teen Girls, Company Documents Show

Its own in-depth research shows a significant teen mental-health issue that Facebook plays down in public

Yale Medicine 6/17/2024

How Social Media Affects Your Teen's Mental Health: A Parent's Guide

CNN

10/8/24

TikTok sued by 14 attorneys general over alleged harm to children's mental health

ScienceNews 2/20/2024

Social media harms teens' mental health, mounting evidence shows. What now?

Mass General Brigham 3/29/2024

The Social Dilemma: Social Media and Your Mental Health

PsyPost 2/20/2024

Experiment finds limiting social media use can reduce mental health issues in distressed youth

Forbes 6/17/2024

Social Media Should Have Labels Similar To Tobacco Products, Surgeon General Says—Noting 'Significant Harm' For Teens

USA TODAY 6/10/2024

I'm always on social media and I'm pretty sure you are, too. Why are we still lonely?

'Social media can cause 'a range of documented risks that affect heavy users, including sleep deprivation, body image distortion, depression, anxiety, exposure to content promoting suicide and eating disorders, sexual predation and sextortion, and "problematic use," which is the term psychologists use to describe compulsive overuse that interferes with success in other areas of life.'

- *The New York Times, Gen Z Has Regrets (9/17/24)*

Gen Z views social platforms as unsafe for teenagers and plans to limit their own children's access, with many even supporting bans for minors

% of Gen Z who agree with the following

82%

believes that social media is **responsible** for the **increase in teen depression**

45%

Say they **“would not or will not allow my child to have a smartphone** before reaching high school age”*
(i.e. about 14 years old)

36%

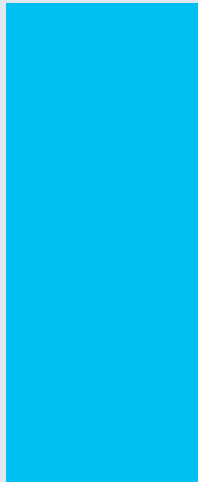
Support **social media bans** for those under the age of 18*

Source: YouGov, *What Americans think about social media and mental health*, 3/11/2023. Based on Gen Z (born 2000 and later) respondents who believe social media is 'completely', 'mostly' or 'somewhat' responsible for the increase in teen depression. *Harris Poll via The New York Times, *Gen Z Has Regrets*, 09/17/2024.

They also harbor concerns around the harmful and opaque practices of social media platforms

% of Gen Z who agree with the following

66%



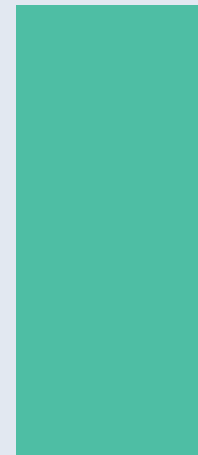
I don't think social media platforms **do enough to delete harmful content**

63%



I'm **sharing less data** with platforms because it's too hard to track how it's being used

62%



I'm concerned about the **polarization of political opinion** on social media

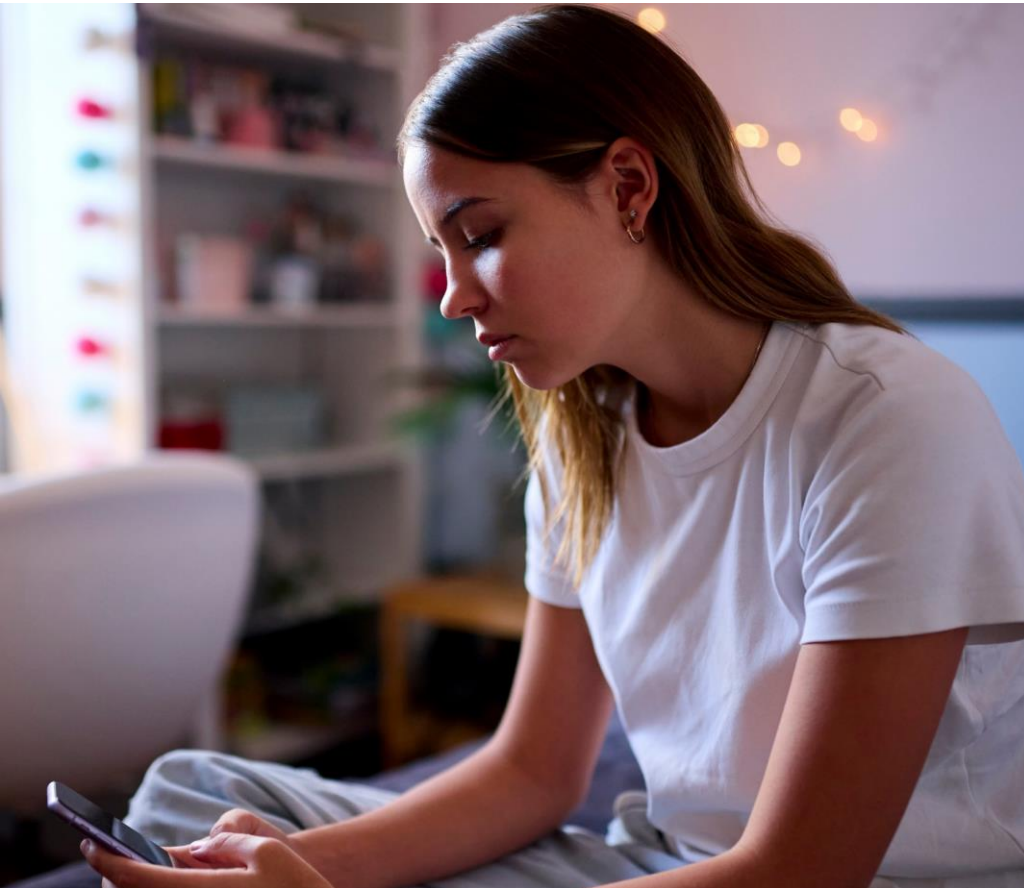
48%



I feel **manipulated by the algorithms and rules** which control what content I see

Source: Marigold, 2024 U.S. Consumer Trends Index.

These concerns extend to the advertising experience on social media platforms, which many find to be annoying



% of Gen Z who agree with the following regarding their experience with social media websites or apps*

65%

are concerned about malware, viruses, buffering and other issues

43%

often find themselves feeling annoyed / frustrated with the video ad experience

Source: VAB custom research fielded by Hub Entertainment Research as part of the 2023 *Conquering Content* report. Data sourced from Hub's survey of 1,600 TV consumers, ages 16-74 who meet the following criteria: watch at least one hour of TV / week, have broadband access / U.S. Census balanced. Data collected October 2023. QVAB2: How often do you find yourself feeling annoyed / frustrated with the video ad experience on the following platforms? QVAB3: How concerned are you with malware, viruses, buffering etc. when watching video ads on the following apps or websites? Based on respondents aged 16-24.

Most of Gen Z don't trust the advertising they see on social media platforms either

58%

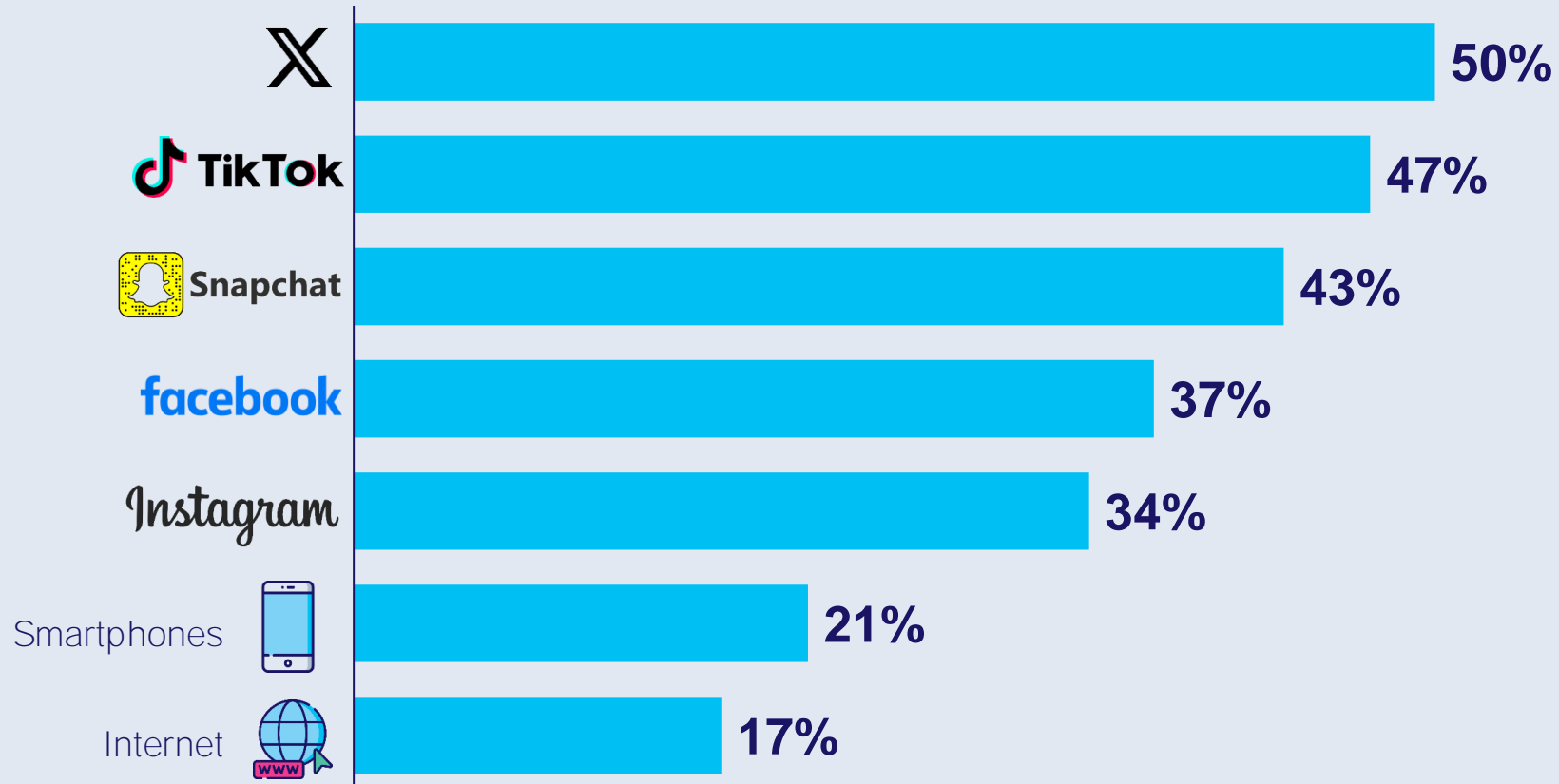
**of Gen Z don't trust
the advertising they see
on social media**



Source: Marigold, 2024 U.S. Consumer Trends Index.

Due to all their issues with social media, many of Gen Z have even gone so far as to wish that the major platforms weren't invented in the first place

Percentage of Gen Z respondents who agree with the statement
"I wish ___ had never been invented"



Source: Harris Poll via The New York Times, *Gen Z Has Regrets*, 09/17/2024.

As a result, Gen Z is disconnecting from social media, seeking relief from its negative impact and upsetting content

% of Gen Z respondents who agree with the following



83%

Have **taken steps to distance themselves** from social media (e.g., turning off in-app notifications, deleting accounts, or muting and unfollowing certain users)



54%

Have **closed or stopped using an account** in the last year because they've been upset by posts they've seen*



51%

Are **actively engaging less with social media** for the sake of their mental health*

Source: Harris Poll via EMARKETER, *Gen Z's love-hate relationship with social media deepens*, 9/25/24. *Marigold, 2024 U.S. Consumer Trends Index.

Gen Z has significantly cut down on the time they spend on social media platforms, signaling a broader shift in their behavior

-25%


A18-24 YoY Total Time Spent on Social Networking Apps

(Snapchat, Facebook, TikTok, X, Instagram)

May - July '23 vs. May - July '24



Source: VAB analysis of Comscore Media Metrix multiplatform media trend data (includes mobile, desktop). Based on A18-24 total minutes spent during a three-month period YoY (May – July '23 vs. May – July '24) across Snapchat, Facebook, TikTok, X and Instagram. Among P13-17, YoY time spent was down -18% across Snapchat, Facebook, TikTok, X and Instagram (desktop only, excludes mobile).



"Gen Z is championing **a slower, more thoughtful approach to life**. They're reminding us all that in our fast-paced, instant-everything world, there's still a place for the slow development of film, the excitement of unexpected outcomes, and **the lasting value of holding a piece of history in your hands.**"

Sharmin Attaran, Marketing Professor at Bryant University
(Business Insider, 5/9/23)

To get away from the toxicity of social media, some Gen Z are adopting flip phones instead, finding they allow them to live in the moment more easily

ZD
NET

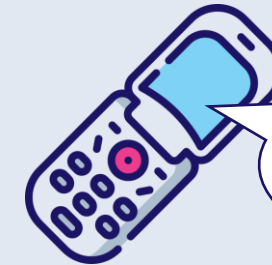
11/21/23

Interest in flip phones is exploding among Gen Z and younger Millennials

If younger shoppers are any indication, flip phones may soon become mainstream.

"2023 [was] the year that **many young people have reflected** on their digital lives. **Remembering the simpler times of tech** in the noughties and the trends of that era are also coming back around."

- Liam Howley, CMO, Decluttr



The hashtag **#flipphone** is trending and has more than 830 million views on TikTok!*

15x

Increase in online searches for flip phones among Gen Z and Millennials from 2022-2023

Source: ZDNET, *Interest in flip phones is exploding among Gen Z and younger Millennials*, 11/21/2023. *CNBC, *How Gen Z uses technology – flip phones, digital cameras, voice memos*, 10/17/23.

They are even turning to technology and games that directly satisfy their desire for more tangible, authentic experiences

FORTUNE

7/5/2024

Gen Z's enthusiasm for all things touchable is resurrecting the analog economy—and costing parents



10/17/2023

How Gen Z uses technology — flip phones, digital cameras, voice memos



4/19/2024

Gen Z listen to more vinyl, CDs and cassettes than any other age group, survey shows

More than half of surveyed 18-24-year-olds are listening to physical music

The Guardian

4/2/2024

Why are younger generations embracing the retro game revival?

Retro video games and aesthetics are having a moment, but it's not just gen X and older millennials reliving their heyday: younger millennials and gen Z are getting in on the nostalgia too

Gen Z is counteracting the negative effects of social media by embracing real-life shared experiences with friends and family through TV, streaming and cinema



As they seek out authentic experiences, many Gen Z are returning more to socializing in-person with friends to relieve stress and boost their mood



25%

of Gen Z have socialized with others specifically to relieve stress

+56% vs. 2021 (+16%)

Source: VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons Spring 2024 vs. 2021 USA Study, A18+ . Based on A18-24 respondents who said they have socialized to relieve stress in the last 30 days.

They are also spending more time socializing at home with friends and family to satisfy their craving for shared, tangible experiences



30%

of Gen Z enjoy entertaining friends or relatives at home

+7% vs. 2019 (28%)



Source: VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons Spring 2024 vs. 2019 USA Study, A18+. Percentages are based on A18-24 respondents who have entertained friends or relatives at home in the last 12 months.

A common bond among most of Gen Z is their passion for long-form, professionally produced content across multiscreen TV



Gen Z's Passion for Premium Video Across Screens



Streaming

75%

say that they
'love streaming TV shows'



Linear TV

72%

say that they
'just love watching TV'

Source: VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons August 2024 Cord Evolution, Study/ Based on A18-24 respondents, 'any agree.'

TV and streaming has the power to uplift their moods much more effectively than the major social platforms

% of Gen Z who say something they watched on TV or streaming has...



49%

'Made me **laugh out loud**'

142 Index vs. Instagram (35%)



28%

'Brought me to **tears**'

142 Index vs. TikTok (20%)



25%

'Made me feel **overjoyed**'

170 Index vs. Snapchat (15%)

Source: VAB custom research fielded by Hub Entertainment Research as part of the *2023 Video Redefined* report. Data sourced from Hub's survey of 1,900 consumers, ages 13-74. P13-24 respondents = 620 (unweighted). Data collected December 2023. Q1: Which of the following statements apply to you when you watch videos, shows or movies on the following platforms? Learn more by downloading '[Laugh, Cry, Share, Buy: How TV & Streaming Influences Gen Z More Than Leading Social Platforms](#)'.

Gen Z audiences use TV and streaming as a primary way to foster shared experiences with friends and family



43%

of Gen Z say when watching
TV or streaming
‘they enjoy the quality time they
share with friends / family’



Source: VAB custom research fielded by Hub Entertainment Research as part of the *2023 Video Redefined* report. Data sourced from Hub's survey of 1,900 consumers, ages 13-74. P13-24 respondents = 620 (unweighted). Data collected December 2023. Q1: Which of the following statements apply to you when you watch videos, shows or movies on the following platforms? Learn more by downloading ['Laugh, Cry, Share, Buy: How TV & Streaming Influences Gen Z More Than Leading Social Platforms'](#).

They are receptive to advertising, which enables marketers to reach and engage them in relaxed, attentive environments

% of Gen Z respondents who agree with the following

58%

prefer **streaming free video content with ads / commercials** instead of paying for a subscription without ads / commercials

38%

say the ability to **access free content in exchange for ads** has motivated them to watch or sign up for a free ad-supported streaming service*

Source: VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons 2024 August Cord Evolution Study, A18+. Based on A18-24 respondents. *VAB custom research fielded by Hub Entertainment Research as part of the 2023 *Evolution of Video Branding* report. Data sourced from Hub's survey of 2,400 TV consumers, ages 16-74 who meet the following criteria: watch at least one hour of TV / week, have broadband access. U.S. census balanced. Data collected early February 2023. Q: Which of the following are reasons for why you have watched / signed up for a free ad-supported streaming TV service? Based on respondents aged 16-24.

Shared experiences of watching TV in their living room also leads to increases in ad recall



+23%

**Increase in ad recall when
watching with others in the living
room vs. watching alone**

Source: Thinkbox UK, *Context Effects*, Map The Territory & Tapestry Research, 2024. Source: A18. Do you remember seeing any advertising when you watched [occasion]? A10. Who, if anyone, were you watching [occasions] with? Base: 4,005 viewing occasions with ads answered by 2,017 online respondents aged 18-75 who watched any type of video content via any source the previous day. Sample matched to Barb.

Outside of the home, Gen Z is also increasing their social time with friends and family around their community

% of A18-24 who consider themselves 'heavy' socializers

'Socializing / doing things with friends around town' ('heavy' # of hrs/wk)



26%

+63% vs. 2022 (16%)



Source: VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons Spring 2024 vs. 2022 USA study, A18+. 'Socializing / doing things with friends around town' based on A18-24 respondents who did this activity for a 'heavy' number of hours per week as assigned by MRI-Simmons. To learn more, download ['The Pursuit of Happiness: How Mood Lights Up Ad Engagement at the Cinema'](#).

Cinema is a popular destination for Gen Z with nearly two-thirds having gone to see a movie at their local theater in the last six months



% of A18-24 who attended a movie in the last 6 months



63%

+43%

vs. 2021 (44%)

Source: VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons Spring 2024 vs. Spring 2021 USA study, A18-24. To learn more, download [‘The Pursuit of Happiness: How Mood Lights Up Ad Engagement at the Cinema’](#).

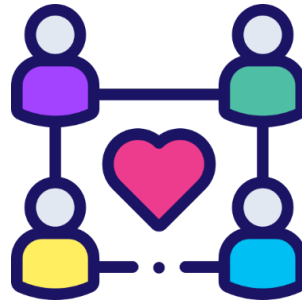
A universally 'shared' experience, cinema fosters social connection and bonding between family and friends

% of moviegoers that...



98%

of viewing at the movie theater is **'co-viewing'** with others in your group



88%

say 'shared experiences' provide a sense of **social connection and bonding** that creates lasting memories they cherish*



80%

say going to the movies **brings family and friends together****

Source: Digital Cinema Media (DCM), *Maximising Cultural Power with Cinema*, 2024. Barb / TRP / 2023 / All devices + DCM, 2024 YTD. *NCM, Moviegoing Audience Insights, Behind-The-Screens (BTS) Online Community, November/December 2023, Base: A18+ Moviegoers. **The Cinema Foundation, 'The Value of A Movie Ticket', April 2023.

Because of their shared experience, people are much more likely to be in a good mood at the movie theater vs. when they are on social media

78%

**of people who visit the cinema
spend their time there in a
good mood**

% of time spent in a good mood

Visiting the Cinema

78%

Using the Internet

62%

Using Social Media

61%

Source: Digital Cinema Media (DCM), *Cinema Effectiveness Roadmap*, 2023. IPA Touch Points. To learn more, download [‘The Pursuit of Happiness: How Mood Lights Up Ad Engagement at the Cinema’](#).

TV, streaming and cinema all create positive vibes which makes people more inclined to purchase products they see advertised

Impact of positive mindset on response to advertising

+18%

Increase in brand favorability

+35%

Increase in purchase intent

Source: Hearst, *Power of Positivity*, 2023. To learn more, download ['The Pursuit of Happiness: How Mood Lights Up Ad Engagement at the Cinema'](#).

Gen Z eagerly takes inspiration from TV, streaming and movies when planning real-life shared experiences with friends

Sampling of TV & Streaming Shows and Movies Gen Z Pulls Inspiration From

teenVOGUE

9/7/2022



16 Stranger Things Halloween Costumes for Diehard Fans of the Netflix Show

You can trust in our selects because like Eleven once said "friends don't lie."

EL PAÍS

10/15/2022

From 'Stranger Things' to 'Peaky Blinders': all the current fashion trends come from TV shows

Elite DAILY

2/20/2024

Summer I Turned Pretty Recipes From TikTok Like The Pomegranate Margarita

STUDY BREAKS MAGAZINE

5/7/2020

'NEVER HAVE I EVER' OFFERS A FUNNY, DIVERSE LOOK INTO GENERATION Z

THE SPECTRUM 2/25/2021



Spaghetti Tacos Remain Iconic

Legendary dish satisfies childhood dreams

BUSINESS INSIDER

5/24/2023

Gen Zers are basing their travel plans on where TV shows like 'The White Lotus' are set

BUSINESS INSIDER

7/24/2022

Barbiecore isn't just the summer's hottest trend. It's a Gen Z and Millennial statement on diversity and feminism.

MEL



WHY GEN Z LOVES GUY FIERI, FOOD NETWORK'S MEME KING

Daily Mail .com

5/4/2024

The rise of tennis core! Gen Z is ready for Wimbledon as sales of skorts surge 134% after Zendaya perfected method dressing on the Challengers press tour

• Zendaya's tennis-inspired red carpet looks have created a new Summer trend

teenVOGUE

2/22/2023



The American Eagle x Outer Banks Fashion Collab Is Filled With Vacay Essentials

COSMOPOLITAN

7/24/2023

Found: The Most Iconic 'The Summer I Turned Pretty' Outfits & Where to Buy Them

SCREENSHOT

9/16/2024

Beetlejuice lips are the latest TikTok beauty trend urging Gen Z to embrace their natural looks

Key Marketer Takeaways

- ▶ Gen Z is pulling back from social media to protect their mental health, choosing more fulfilling, offline activities for connection and a break from negativity
- ▶ To escape the toxicity of social media, more positive, real-life shared experiences are gaining popularity as Gen Z seeks tangible and more sociable activities
- ▶ Shared experiences like watching TV and streaming content and going to the cinema with others provide Gen Z with a sense of community and excitement, standing in contrast to the isolation of social media
- ▶ High-quality premium video content profoundly **influences Gen Z's mood and behavior, providing** brands with a unique opportunity to engage these highly attentive audiences

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Laugh, Cry, Share, Buy

How TV & Streaming Influences Gen Z More Than Leading Social Platforms



The Pursuit of Happiness

How Mood Lights Up Ad Engagement at the Cinema



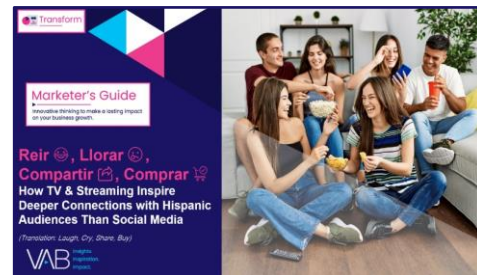
The Big Picture

12 Key Charts on the Impact of TV & Streaming vs. Social Media Platforms



The Consumer Connection

Understanding the Effect of Quality Across Media Platforms



Reir, Llorar, Compartir, Comparar

How TV & Streaming Inspire Deeper Connections with Hispanic Audiences Than Social Media



Unite, Empower, Reflect, Shop

How TV & Streaming Cultivate Richer Interactions with Black Audiences Than Social Platforms

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