

The ultimate guide to today's most influential consumers

THE GEN Z MARKETING PLAYBOOK

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Inside this issue

1. GETTING TO KNOW GEN Z

For marketers. Gen Z represents a tremendous opportunity—and a significant challenge. Page 4

2. GEN Z AND MONEY

Zs are financially cautious, but don't mistake that for frugality. Page 5

3. GOING SHOPPING

Gen Z shoppers seek quality and value, and they look to the people they trust for advice. Page 7

4. CATCHING THE TRAVEL BUG

Gen Zs want to see the world, and they're doing it on their own terms. Page 10

5. WHAT'S FOR DINNER?

Zs enjoy eating out, and they don't mind spending more for the experience. Page 12

6. CHOOSING HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Zs prioritize health and wellness, viewing physical and mental well-being as equally important. Page 13

7. WHERE TECHNOLOGY MEETS REALITY

Raised in a digital world, Zers are part cutting-edge technophile yet part traditionalist. Page 15

8. LOOKING FORWARD

Gen Zs look to the future with feelings ranging from optimism to uncertainty. Page 17

9. THE BEST WAYS TO REACH GEN Z

Follow these five best practices for marketers that want to engage with Gen Z.

Page 19



Ten Things You Should Know About Gen Z



GETTING TO KNOW GEN Z

Meet Gen Z: the generation born between 1997 and 2012, the oldest of whom are just now reaching adulthood. For marketers, this generation represents a tremendous opportunity—and a significant challenge.

Some marketers might be tempted to write this group off as too young (and possibly too broke) to pay much attention to. Before you become one of them, keep in mind two essential facts. First, Gen Z makes up 26 percent of the U.S. population. And, second, they already command as much as \$143 billion in U.S. spending power, according to estimates by Barkley—and that's before most members of this generation have even graduated from college, launched their careers and started families. This moment in time is a golden opportunity for you to influence a generation that will wield massive purchasing power for decades to come. If, that is, you make the right moves now.

To help you get to know this audience, The Gen Z Marketing Playbook offers an in-depth look at this generation based on a series of surveys of Gen Z college students ages 17 to 23 from the U.S., the U.K., Australia and New Zealand by Student Affinity Network UNiDAYS.

The Playbook provides current data on key areas of importance to Gen Z, along with their hopes and concerns for the future and their spending habits worldwide. It also suggests the best ways to reach these young, digitally savvy and politically aware consumers.

The generation timeline

While generation designations aren't an exact science, here's a look at how the generations are defined by birth years:

The silent generation: 1928-1945

The defining moments for Americans of this generation were, by and large, the Great Depression, World War II and the Korean War. Members of the Silent Generation are similar to members of Generation Z in their overall favoring of pragmatism over idealism.

Gen X: 1965-1980

Gen Zers are, by and large, the children of Gen Xers, so they tend to share similarities with their parents—like their underlying wariness of overtly "sunny" messaging and, thanks to the Great Recession, a greater appreciation for thrift and value.

Gen Z: The future



Baby boomers: 1946-1964

As consumers, Baby Boomers differ heavily from Gen Zers in that they have a stronger affinity for brand loyalty and much of that loyalty stems from how well they see themselves being treated as customers.

Millenials: 1981-1996

Many marketers have spent the entirety of their careers striving to appeal to Millennials' sense of optimism—and taking for granted their trust in the privacy policies of social media. Where Gen Zers are turning to Snapchat up to 11 times a day, Millennials depend on less anonymous networks such as Facebook and Twitter. So while Gen Z may share Millennials' bright outlook, marketers need to remember one major difference: The younger generation is less trusting than Millennials.

GEN Z AND MONEY

When it comes to money, Gen Zers are much more cautious than previous generations. The Great Recession of 2008 has had a lasting impression on this group of consumers, as many of them saw their families struggling financially and want to avoid that fate for themselves.

As a result, Gen Zers are extremely practical with money, choosing to save up for big purchases rather than take on credit card debt (a full 83 percent say they do this). In fact, 52 percent of Zs in the 2018 UNIDAYS Money Survey don't even have a credit card. While 61 percent of those without a credit card plan to apply for one, 81 percent of those say their primary motivator is to establish a credit score.

Watching Millennial siblings and parents deal with sky-high college debt has also shaped Z's educational and career choices. Zs select their colleges thoughtfully, opting for programs that incur the least amount of debt rather than chasing after the most prestigious (and expensive) schools. In fact, 26 percent plan to graduate college without taking on any debt.

Instead, Gen Zs choose to work and save—73 percent of undergrads have a job or side hustle to help pay for their education and expenses. And their pragmatism doesn't stop

26%

expect to graduate college with no debt.

26%

expect to graduate with less than \$25,000 in debt.

Banking on Gen Z

When it comes to banking, many Gen Zs are influenced by their parents' choices. Overall, 72 percent have a savings or checking account that they opened in high school with guidance from their parents. Sixty-one percent opened an account at their parents' bank.

Another influence? Fourteen percent choose banks close to home or school. And, in spite of being coined "the online generation," 45 percent say they would not bank with an online-only institution, with 70 percent of these respondents saying they want a bank with a physical location.

So, how can financial institutions attract the university crowd? It won't be easy. Traditional incentives might work—but not always, as 54 percent of Zers say they don't plan to open another account regardless of the incentives offered. However, 25 percent would open a new account for a \$100 incentive, and 16 percent would open accounts at a bank that offered student discounts. there. Eighty percent are going to college with the goal of earning a higher salary, choosing majors that will open the door to practical, better-paying jobs (as opposed to the "follow your passion" Millennials).

What does this mean for marketers? First, don't interpret Gen Z's caution with money as frugality. Zs are willing to spend money in exchange for perceived value, but they want quality products and experiences, not throwaway goods. When they do buy something, they want to pay for it outright, opting to use debit cards or payment solutions such as PayPal or Apple Pay. Appealing to this group means understanding their strong desire to avoid debt and offering them value at a good price. After all, this online-savvy generation has pricing and product information at their fingertips, and they will use it.

Don't interpret Gen Z's caution with money as frugality. Zs are willing to spend money in exchange for perceived value, but they want quality products and experiences, not throwaway goods.

Gen Z and Credit Cards How do you use-or don't use-credit cards?



GOING SHOPPING

Given Gen Z's attitudes about spending, it stands to reason they're mindful shoppers who look for quality and value. They're also more difficult to influence with traditional advertising campaigns and celebrity endorsements that worked with previous generations.

Where do Gen Zs turn for shopping advice? Friends rank first at 77 percent, according to the 2019 UNIDAYS Retail Survey, followed by product reviews at 65 percent and family at 57 percent. Traditional advertising draws 38 percent, although 60 percent of Gen Zs say the main factor in effective ads is a special offer or discount.

When it comes to ads that work, trust is also key. Fifty-nine percent of Zs have paid attention to an ad because it was from a brand they trust. In other words, ads can work with Gen Z, but marketers need to focus on brand building in order to establish meaningful, long-term relationships with them. To build awareness, marketers can turn to content, brand storytelling and influencer marketing in order to demonstrate their brands' values and

Shopping by app

In general, Gen Z doesn't use a ton of shopping or retail brand apps. For brands, this means it's more important to focus on aggregator shopping apps rather than on your own brand apps. Aggregator apps have much more appeal than a store's own brand app, and they also add value by simplifying shopping for Gen Z.

The Brand App Experience

How many retail brand apps do you use?



Source: UNIDAYS 2019 Retail Survey, all respondents.



Making Buying Decisions

Who do you turn to for purchasing advice?

Source: UNIDAYS 2019 Retail Survey, answers multiselected, all respondents.

earn trust from young consumers. But remember—Zs crave honest opinions and recommendations, so home-grown micro-influencers have more sway than big-name celebrities, who are not seen as trustworthy.

While digital is an essential channel for reaching this generation (mobile informs Zs even when they're browsing store aisles), it's not the only way to get in front of these young consumers. Television remains a strong influence (53 percent say they pay attention to TV commercials). Equally important is old-school out-of-home advertising, with 84 percent of Gen Zs saying they pay attention to advertising in places such as trains, airports, taxis and malls. Plus, 58 percent discover new brands just by walking past stores, 54 percent are captured by in-store merchandising and 45 percent say window displays spark their interest.

As it turns out, Gen Z isn't all digital—even when it comes to shopping. While Zs definitely do their fair share of online shopping, they still prefer to shop in-store. When it comes to brickand-mortar stores, the foundational elements of a great shopping experience are the same as they've always been, according to the 45 percent of Gen Z survey respondents who value great customer service.

Yet, Zs also crave unique shopping experiences, and they find the experiential aspect of brand-sponsored events appealing—78 percent of Gen Zs are interested in pop-up stores, while 50 percent look for in-store events. These experiences work for Gen Z because, let's face it: FOMO is real. There's a sense of urgency and immediacy that comes with those experiences, and the more unusual they are, the better especially for those who are looking for great content for their Instagram feeds.

What does this mean for marketers? When it comes to shopping, Zs are a mix of old-school and new. They appreciate great customer service and make their buying decisions based on trust, so don't neglect the fundamentals of great retail. However, they're also looking for unique, socially driven shopping experiences, so look for ways to surprise and delight with retail moments that generate engagement and word-of-mouth.

Shopping by Phone

How do you use your mobile device for shopping?



Source: UNIDAYS 2018 Technology Survey, answers multiselected, all respondents.

The Impact of Traditional Advertising

What non-digital ads do you pay attention to?



Source: UNIDAYS 2019 Retail Survey, answers multiselected, all respondents.

The Power of Brand Events

Are you interested in these brand-sponsored events?



Source: UNIDAYS 2019 Retail Survey, answers multiselected, all respondents.

CATCHING THE TRAVEL BUG

For college-aged Gen Zers around the world, travel is an essential part of life. While they're generally cautious when it comes to money, this generation sees value in experiences, and they're willing to spend in order to have those experiences. For Zs, travel is a visible status symbol—something they can post to friends and family on Instagram and Snapchat, using the backdrop of an exotic locale or iconic city as a means of showcasing and celebrating their individualism.

Respondents to the 2018 UNIDAYS Travel Survey are almost universal in their enthusiasm, as nearly 99 percent of students surveyed share an interest in travel. Around 51 percent say they travel more than 50 miles every one to three months, and 61 percent plan to take a trip for spring break. Interestingly, many Zs travel year-round and typically prefer to make spur-of-the-moment travel plans rather than plan in advance.

For marketers in the travel and hospitality industries, Z's passion for travel is an incredible opportunity to engage with consumers who have the highest lifetime value of any generation. Travel is an always-on, ever-renewable opportunity—one that allows airlines, hotels and rental cars to sell excess inventory by offering last-minute deals to cost-conscious student travelers. Travel brands that can extend these last-minute offers to this spontaneous yet value-minded group will have an advantage in the long run.

And that's a critical point: Unlike certain brands that are only relevant to this particular age group, travel brands have the potential to span all life stages. Getting on board with Gen Z now at a time when they are developing brand affinities gives you the potential to engage them early—and keep them engaged for decades. Plus, Gen Z's loyalty is contagious, as they share their trips—including carefully curated photos of authentic local foods—with friends through social media. And, as we've already seen, friends are the first place this generation turns to for recommendations.



Gen Z's Travel Spending

How much did you spend on your last trip? (By currency of country)

Source: UNIDAYS 2018 Travel Survey, all respondents.





Source: UNIDAYS 2018 Travel Survey, answers multiselected, all respondents.

Travel Inspiration

What influences you to travel?



Source: UNIDAYS 2018 Travel Survey, all respondents.

Favorite Travel Incentives

What discounts motivate you to travel?



Source: UNIDAYS 2018 Travel Survey, answers multiselected, all respondents.

WHAT'S FOR DINNER?

Like travel, eating out is an experience for Gen Zers, and their spending reflects this. Seventyeight percent of college-aged Gen Z respondents to the 2017 UNIDAYS Restaurants Survey say that, aside from tuition and bills, they spend the majority of their money on food. It's not surprising: Even when traveling, the majority of Gen Zs ranked eating out as their favorite thing to do.

Nearly half of Gen Zs spend \$10 to \$20 when eating out, and 15 percent spend \$20 or more. Although nearly all of the respondents (94 percent) report having access to kitchens, only 43 percent typically prepare meals at home, and a surprising 14 percent never cook. While they enjoy new food experiences, 41 percent of respondents to the 2018 UNiDAYS Health & Wellness Survey eat fast food at least once a week. Fast food doesn't necessarily mean burgers and fries, however. This generation looks for healthy alternatives, such as salads and wraps. In fact, 84 percent say healthy ingredients are important, 72 percent want ingredients high in protein and 66 percent crave organic foods.

While Gen Zers are willing to spend money on food, they still enjoy getting a deal: 93 percent say they are more likely to try a restaurant that offers student discounts, and 78 percent use student discounts at local restaurants. Ninety-one percent will eat at an off-peak time if it means getting a discount. Gen Zs are likely to try new quick-service chains once a month (48 percent), so offering a student discount is a great way to attract new Gen Z customers.

Social media is another great way to get Gen Zs talking about your restaurant. Zs communicate in images, and smart marketers can appeal to this crowd by focusing on atmosphere and food presentation that will stand out in customers' social feeds. Sharing images and video snippets of menu items can pay dividends, as friends will brag to each other about their latest restaurant finds.

Serving Gen Z

How do college students discover new menu items?



Source: UNIDAYS 2017 Restaurants Survey, all respondents.

Gen Z's Healthy Food Choices

What is your go-to healthy menu item?



Source: UNIDAYS 2018 Health & Wellness Survey, answers multiselected, all respondents.

CHOOSING HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Although eating out is a popular pastime for Gen Z, they are very conscious of how what they consume impacts their overall health. In fact, college students around the world prioritize health and wellness as a central part of their lives—and they view physical well-being and mental health as virtually synonymous, and equally important.

Gen Zers are united in what concerns them most. According to the 2018 UNiDAYS Health & Wellness Survey:

• **72 percent** say managing stress and mental health is their most important health and wellness concern.

• **68 percent** state that a well-balanced diet is critical.

Finding Restaurants and Fitness Opportunities

• 61 percent say exercise is a major concern.

• **60 percent** believe getting enough sleep is another area of importance.

Overall, Gen Zs are willing to make a financial commitment to working out, with 59 percent saying they'd pay up to \$20 a month, or \$240 a year, for a gym membership or personal training, and another 21 percent willing to pay up to \$50 a month, or \$600 annually. Thirty-three percent say they spend up to \$50 a year on workout clothing, and 39 percent spend up to \$200.

As with other products and services, Gen Zers turn to family and friends for recommendations for new restaurants (82 percent) and new gyms (64 percent), with 71 percent discovering new eateries and fitness opportunities through social media. Just walking around the



Source: UNIDAYS 2018 Health & Wellness Survey, answers multiselected, all respondents.

neighborhood also snags their attention, with 58 percent discovering new restaurants and 22 percent finding new workout clubs on their way to class or meeting friends.

To reach this health-and-wellness-minded generation, brands need to create both online and offline experiences that break out of traditional product silos to recognize health and well-being as a wellness and social lifestyle. This involves spending face-to-face time with consumers as well as digital word of mouth. By focusing on experiential, lifestyle-focused offerings, marketers can get Zs talking about and engaging with their health and wellness brands.



Source: UNIDAYS 2018 Health & Wellness Survey, answers multiselected, all respondents.

WHERE TECHNOLOGY MEETS REALITY

By now, it should be obvious that technology flows through Gen Zs' lives like air and water. Unlike previous generations, Zers—no matter where they live—see digital as an integral and essential part of their lives. This generation has never known life without the internet. They take for granted that they can find new restaurants, shops or gyms in a few seconds and review online price comparisons while shopping in a brick-and-mortar store.

But this doesn't mean that all gadgets are created equal. Certain tech is essential for Zers; for example, 98 percent own a smartphone, and 94 percent have laptops, according to UNiDAYS' 2018 Technology Survey. At the same time, only 14 percent own a smartwatch, and just 18 percent use standalone fitness trackers.

In other words, this generation is part cutting-edge technophile and part traditionalist. They may love browsing online, but they still enjoy shopping at brick-and-mortar stores. They may get news via social media (80 percent say they do), but they overwhelmingly prefer print books over digital ones (77 percent vs. 38 percent).

For brands, this information is critical. When reaching out to Gen Zs, a mobile-first strategy is extremely important. But marketers should still make certain to cover all platforms—including desktop, in-person, email and even the good old-fashioned phone—when creating consumer touch points. A carefully balanced and personalized omnichannel approach is needed to make a lasting connection with this highly influential consumer group.

Connecting with Gen Z consumers might be complex, but it can yield great rewards. Zs are accessible through a wider variety of channels than any previous generation, which means brands can reach them in the moment more easily than they could with their predecessors.

That's true for Gen Z around the world.

These are macro trends that appear consistently no matter where Zers live—providing even more evidence that this is the first truly global generation. Gen Z offers marketers a promising and lucrative relationship for brands that do the legwork necessary to reach them.



Source: UNIDAYS 2018 Technology Survey, answers multiselected, all respondents.

How Gen Z Watches TV

What's your preferred device for watching shows, programs, sports and movies?



Source: UNiDAYS 2018 Technology Survey, answers multiselected, all respondents.

How Gen Z Connects With Brands

What's your preferred method of reaching out to a brand?



Source: UNIDAYS 2018 Technology Survey, all respondents.

LOOKING FORWARD

College-aged Gen Zs look toward graduation with emotions ranging from optimism to uncertainty. While many have made smart financial and lifestyle choices up to this point, 57 percent of respondents to UNiDAYS' 2019 Future Survey have mixed feelings about the future, both for themselves and for society at large.

The transition to adult life can be challenging, and it's clear that Zs are worried about their financial futures: 70 percent say they're concerned about getting a job and 85 percent are afraid they won't find affordable housing. Yet, they also have hopes for what the future will bring: 72 percent of survey respondents say they plan to get married, and 70 percent plan on having children. And although financial stability is a top concern, 77 percent of Gen Zs would prefer to work for a company that doesn't just offer a good salary, but also shares their political views.

When it comes to society at large, Gen Zs are concerned about a wide range of issues, including healthcare, education costs, the environment and equality. And they're frustrated with their countries' governments: 54 percent don't trust their country's leadership, and 58 percent don't see their country's leadership, making progress on issues important to them. In fact, 61 percent of Gen Z believe brands are better positioned than governments to solve social problems.

Whether they look at the future from a personal or political perspective, 85 percent of this generation feel either very or somewhat empowered to shape the future. They are uncertain—yet still hopeful—about how big an impact they will have on the world. Smart brands can seize this opportunity to influence and inspire these consumers as they move toward adulthood.

When marketing to Gen Z, it's important to be aware of the issues that matter to them and to behave in a way that shows you're informed. But getting involved in politics shouldn't be a

The Environmental Equalizer

Gen Zs around the world are united in their opinions on the environment. Eighty-two percent say they would be more likely to buy a product if it were environmentally friendly. For brands interested in connecting with this group, environmental issues are a relatively safe (and welcome) place to take a stand.

Top five environmental issues

What environmental issues are most important to you?



Source: UNIDAYS 2019 Future Survey, answers multiselected, all respondents.

given: 46 percent of survey respondents say brands should address political issues, while 36 percent say they shouldn't. When asked if they trust brands more when they take a stance on political issues, 34 percent of Zers say yes while 40 percent say no. Zs are split when it comes to how much goodwill brands can gain by speaking out; they expect brands to do so only when they have a relevant—and credible—point of view.

In short: Let authenticity be your compass. Your brand should support causes that matter to Gen Zs but, more importantly, those causes must also align with your mission and brand values. Demonstrate your company's core beliefs and operate by them without ulterior motives. Invite Gen Zs to participate in your causes and help write your story. If your activism is nothing but a marketing ploy, Zs will see right through you; but if it is genuine, you can inspire Gen Z to connect with your brand and take action.

Gen Z Looks Ahead What is your overall outlook on the future?



Source: UNIDAYS 2019 Future Survey, all respondents.



Gen Z's 10 Top Issues What issues are most important to you?

Source: UNIDAYS 2019 Future Survey, answers multiselected, all respondents.

THE BEST WAYS TO REACH GEN Z

As Gen Z makes moves to become the largest cohort of consumers in just a few short years, marketers willing to do the work to engage this influential generation have an incredible opportunity. This group already influences \$143 billion in direct U.S. spending power, and their influence on the marketing industry can only grow. Their affinity for brands, once firmly established, has the potential to continue through their prime spending years as they establish careers and start families and households.

To help you successfully connect with these young consumers while they're still exploring what they want and which brands work best for them, we have compiled five best practices that will set you up for a long and satisfying relationship with Gen Z:

• **Do your homework.** Understanding what Gen Z wants from brands in general is a start, but it's even more important to understand what Gen Z likes and does not like about your brand. While this generation of young consumers shares many traits, they also expect brands to understand them as individuals. To appeal to them, you must start by demonstrating that you understand their nuances and their differences as well.

• Connect your story to what matters to Gen Z. More than previous generations, Gen Z cares about the world and what brands stand for. Brands today must have a crystal-clear narrative. For many of the most successful brands, this starts with a social promise. To connect with Zs, give back to the community in real and meaningful ways, and invite them to join you in your efforts. Be real, and hold yourself to high ethical standards. Gen Z expects the companies they do business with to speak authentically and behave with integrity. Don't take a stand on issues important to this generation just to capitalize on a trend, but because your brand values guide you there.

• Approach Gen Zs as collaborators, not just consumers. Take every opportunity to listen to Gen Z's concerns and questions. By engaging with them to exchange ideas (for example, through product feedback or design competitions), you'll be more apt to deliver on exactly what this generation wants and needs. And, if you stop marketing too hard and focus instead on helping them be their best selves (for example, through social good or career development opportunities), your brand will earn their respect now and in the future.

• Focus on value, not price. Gen Zs are willing to spend, but they want value for their money. Help Gen Z make smart purchasing decisions by offering advice about how to choose the best products and services. Take steps to ensure that the overall value, quality and social promise of your products and services merit the price tag you put on them. Gen Z feels a connection to brands that do good, so they are often willing to pay more for sustainably sourced clothing or brands that give back to the community with every purchase.

• Digital is important—but it's not everything. Yes, Gen Zs have grown up in a digital world, but in many ways they're also a "throwback" generation. They transition easily between digital and traditional media, but the key to success in either medium is not to disrupt them. Instead, engage them where they are—with what they care about. While they spend time on social media, family and friends are also highly influential. And even though they can purchase things quickly online, Zs still have a passion for shopping in stores and crave unique, in-person experiences.

When it comes right down to it, the most important action marketers must take is to engage with Gen Zs now. Getting on board with Gen Z early can open the door to relationships that last long after they've graduated. Smart marketers won't just talk at Zs, but will work to encourage dialogue and participation. Remember, Gen Z's loyalty is contagious. Make them an integral part of your marketing, and you can secure the loyalty of these young, powerful consumers for decades to come.

Ad Age Studio 30

Ad Age Studio 30 helps your brand connect with an influential audience actively seeking new partners, solutions and products. Through original custom articles, thought-leadership content, events, research, webcasts, white papers, infographics and more, our endto-end solutions help your content reach and resonate. Studio30@adage.com

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About the Data

The information in this guide was drawn from surveys conducted by Student Affinity Network UNIDAYS of college-aged students in the U.S., U.K., Australia and New Zealand unless otherwise noted:

2019 Retail Survey:

Conducted Spring 2019 8,290 respondents

2019 Future Survey:

Conducted Winter 2018-19 16,747 respondents

2018 Health & Wellness Survey: Conducted Fall 201 12,269 respondents

2018 Technology Survey: Conducted Summer 2018 22,723 respondents

2018 Money Survey:

Conducted Summer 2018 1,800 respondents

2018 Travel Survey: Conducted Spring 2018 11,661 respondents

2017 Restaurants Survey: Conducted Summer 2017 1,800 respondents, U.S. only

About UNiDAYS

UNIDAYS is the world's leading Student Affinity Network. We connect brands to more than 10 million Gen Z college students around the world, giving them the power to make every experience more valuable and rewarding. Our award-winning marketing platform provides student verification technology and integrated marketing solutions to some of the world's most recognizable brands, including Levi's, Adidas and Samsung. Founded in 2011 by CEO Josh Rathour, UNIDAYS has offices in London, New York and Sydney, and is headquartered in Nottingham, U.K.

For more information, visit www.myunidays.com/genz.

Ten Things You Should Know About Gen Z

¹ "Uniquely Generation Z," IBM Institute for Business Value/NRF. ² Current Population Survey, United States Census Bureau. ³ "The Real Figure of Gen Z Direct Spending (Hint: It's Bigger Than You Think)," Millennial Marketing.⁴ "The Monetization Generation," Cassandra. ⁵ "Mobile Kids: The Parent, the Child and the Smartphone," Nielsen Insights. ⁶ "Social Live," Cassandra. ⁷ "Side Buy Side," Cassandra. ⁸ "Social (TV) Network," Cassandra. ⁹ Current Population Survey, United States Census Bureau.

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