

Gen Z Media Consumption, News Habits, and Purchasing Trends (2019–2024)

This report was created using ChatGPT's Deep Research on March 15, 2025 using the following prompt:

Research GenZ in the United states. Highlight how Gen Z has changed over the last 3 to 5 years in terms of media consumption, where they get their news, and how they are influenced to purchase products and services.

Generation Z (born ~1997–2012) is the first cohort of true digital natives. Over the past 3–5 years, their behaviors have shifted significantly with the rise of new social platforms, evolving content formats, and changing economic conditions. Below is an analysis of U.S. Gen Z's media consumption, news sources, and purchasing influences – with a focus on fashion, tech, and food – and how brands can adapt to these trends.

1. Media Consumption Trends

Dominant Platforms: Gen Z spends much of their time on social and digital media. Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are among their most-used platforms. Surveys show **91% of Gen Z social media users are on Instagram and 86% are on TikTok**, making these the top channels for this cohort ([Gen Z Social Media Trends & Usage | Sprout Social](#)). YouTube also has massive reach (around 84% of 18–24 year-olds use it) ([What are the most visited social media platforms among Gen Z?... - Comscore, Inc.](#)), and Snapchat remains popular (reaching ~58% of Gen Z mobile users) ([What are the most visited social media platforms among Gen Z?... - Comscore, Inc.](#)). In contrast, only about one-third of Gen Z frequent Facebook or Twitter ([What are the most visited social media platforms among Gen Z?... - Comscore, Inc.](#)). **TikTok's growth has been explosive** – average use is roughly 95 minutes per day ([Inside the Gen Z Mind Consumer Survey](#)) – and it's especially popular with teens (63% of U.S. teens have used TikTok) ([More Americans are regularly getting news on TikTok, especially young adults | Pew Research Center](#)). Gen Z's digital savvy extends beyond social networks to music streaming, gaming, and other online entertainment, making digital media their default. On average, Americans now spend roughly **twice as much time with digital media as traditional media** ([Media usage in the U.S. - statistics & facts - Statista](#)), and Gen Z epitomizes this shift.

Short-Form vs. Long-Form Content: One major change in the past few years is Gen Z's embrace of short-form video (TikTok/Reels) without completely abandoning long-form content. **Short videos are a staple** – about 80% of Gen Z watches short-form videos (e.g. TikTok, Instagram Reels) on at least a weekly basis ([Gen Z not just scrolling: Long-form TV content holds strong](#)

[appeal - NewscastStudio](#)). In fact, **57% of Gen Z say they prefer short videos for product research** ([Firework | 40+ Short Form Video Statistics: The Jaw-Dropping Numbers You Must Know in 2024](#)), reflecting their penchant for quick, engaging content. However, the idea that they only consume bite-sized media is a myth. **About 70% of Gen Z also watch full-length TV shows or streaming content weekly** ([Gen Z not just scrolling: Long-form TV content holds strong appeal - NewscastStudio](#)). Many Gen Zers binge Netflix series, follow YouTube vloggers, or stream movies, indicating strong engagement with long-form content alongside the quick scrollable videos. Notably, *professionally produced* content still commands a significant share of their attention – Gen Z adults actually spend **over half of their viewing time on TV content (mostly via streaming)** as opposed to user-generated content ([The Truth About Gen Z Media Consumption Trends | Effectv](#)) ([The Truth About Gen Z Media Consumption Trends | Effectv](#)). This means a Zoomer might catch up on TikTok trends and YouTube clips during the day, then watch a Netflix show or NFL game highlight in the evening. **Streaming services are their main way of watching TV:** Gen Z 18–24-year-olds spend ~59% of their TV time on streaming platforms, far eclipsing live cable (13%) or broadcast TV (9%) ([The Truth About Gen Z Media Consumption Trends | Effectv](#)). In summary, short-form content has surged in popularity, but Gen Z still finds time for longer videos and shows – they consume *both*, depending on context.

Decline of Traditional Media: In contrast to their heavy digital usage, Gen Z's engagement with traditional media (print newspapers, broadcast TV, magazines, radio) has **diminished sharply**. Few in Gen Z get information from printed newspapers or physical magazines on a regular basis – those formats have largely been replaced by online articles, apps, and social feeds. Even “TV” for Gen Z usually means streaming on-demand video rather than a cable box. **Linear television viewership is low** in this group; when they do watch TV content, it's often through smart TVs or mobile devices streaming online ([Gen Z not just scrolling: Long-form TV content holds strong appeal - NewscastStudio](#)). Traditional cable and broadcast networks together account for barely one-fifth of Gen Z's TV screen time ([The Truth About Gen Z Media Consumption Trends | Effectv](#)). Likewise, radio and print media reach a small fraction of Gen Z (often only indirectly, such as hearing radio in a parent's car or seeing a school library magazine). Over the past 3–5 years, this generational gap has widened – for example, digital subscription revenue for newspapers now far exceeds print, driven in part by young readers' online-only habits ([Gen Z is changing the media landscape. Can you keep up?](#)). **Social media and streaming have effectively supplanted newspapers and cable TV for Gen Z.** Brands targeting this demographic should prioritize digital channels (social, streaming, podcasts) over legacy media, as that's where Gen Z's attention lies.

2. News Consumption Habits

Where Gen Z Gets News: Gen Z increasingly treats social media as a news source. In the early 2020s, platforms like Twitter (now X), Instagram, YouTube, and especially TikTok became news feeders for young adults. **Roughly 74% of Gen Z report getting news daily via social media** – a higher rate than older generations ([How Social Media, Gen Z, and Millennials Are Changing the](#)

[News ...](#)) ([Gen Z Social Media Trends & Usage | Sprout Social](#)). In fact, **social platforms now beat out search engines for information gathering** among Gen Z ([Gen Z Social Media Trends & Usage | Sprout Social](#)). Recent surveys found that **about 39% of U.S. adults under 30 regularly get news from TikTok** ([More Americans are regularly getting news on TikTok, especially young adults | Pew Research Center](#)) – an enormous jump from just a few years ago. (In 2020, that figure was only around 3%; by 2024 it reached 17% of all adults and nearly 40% of under-30s ([More Americans are regularly getting news on TikTok, especially young adults | Pew Research Center](#)) ([More Americans are regularly getting news on TikTok, especially young adults | Pew Research Center](#))). This **represents a 5x increase** in TikTok news usage in four years. Similarly, Instagram and YouTube host news content (both from official outlets and independent creators), and Snapchat's Discover section and Twitter threads are also news sources for many Zoomers. Traditional news outlets are still accessed, but often indirectly – e.g. a Gen Z user might learn about a New York Times story through a TikTok video or an Instagram infographic. Only a minority visit dedicated news websites or watch nightly TV news regularly. Even Google is seeing competition from social apps: **nearly 40% of Gen Z prefer searching on TikTok or Instagram when looking for info (like a lunch spot) over using Google Search/Maps** ([Nearly Half of Gen Z Prefers TikTok and Instagram Over Google Search - Business Insider](#)) ([Nearly Half of Gen Z Prefers TikTok and Instagram Over Google Search - Business Insider](#)). This trend, disclosed by Google in 2022, highlights how *discovery of news and local info* has shifted to social feeds and influencer content.

Trust in News Sources: Gen Z's trust in information sources has been in flux. Overall, young adults have **lower trust in traditional news media** than older generations, and slightly higher trust in social media sources. A 2022 Pew study showed that **half of 18–29-year-olds say they trust information from social media**, nearly equaling the share who trust national news outlets (56%) ([Gen Z Trusts Local News Over Social Media – BRINK – Conversations and Insights on Global Business](#)). Notably, that 56% trust in national news was a record low for young adults, reflecting some skepticism toward institutions. Local news is more trusted across ages (around 71% of Gen Z trusts local news orgs) but even that has declined from prior years ([Gen Z Trusts Local News Over Social Media – BRINK – Conversations and Insights on Global Business](#)). Meanwhile, trust in social media for news hit a high among Gen Z, rising in recent years ([Gen Z Trusts Local News Over Social Media – BRINK – Conversations and Insights on Global Business](#)). This doesn't necessarily mean they find every TikTok credible – rather, they often approach news with caution, parsing multiple sources. Gen Z is accustomed to seeing breaking news first on Twitter or TikTok, and they may trust *the accounts or people* they follow (who often summarize news) more than faceless media corporations. **Influencers and peer networks play a role in news delivery:** Many Zoomers follow commentators, YouTubers, or TikTok creators who present news with a certain style or perspective. For example, a science TikToker explaining a climate report or a Twitch streamer talking about an election might resonate more with Gen Z viewers than a traditional news anchor. **Nearly 40% of Gen Z consumers say they trust influencers more than they did a year ago** ([Gen Z Social Media Trends & Usage | Sprout Social](#)), indicating growing comfort with individual content creators. Some **68% of Gen Z even say they trust online influencers more than celebrity endorsements** ([The Role of Social Media](#)

[in Gen Z's Purchasing Decisions. | Kadence](#)), which extends to how they receive news on social issues from relatable personalities. However, Gen Z also values authenticity and can be quick to fact-check or call out misinformation. They tend to trust *friends and family* for important updates as well – personal networks (group chats, Discord servers) often serve as news hubs where they share headlines and verify stories together.

Influencers vs. Journalists: The line between journalist and influencer is blurring for Gen Z. While traditional journalists still break many stories, Gen Z often encounters news via “**newsfluencers**” – influencers who package current events into short videos or posts. For instance, TikTok creators distilling complex news into viral clips have large Gen Z followings. These personalities aren’t *formal* journalists, but they act as news curators. Brands and news outlets have noticed: major publishers like *The New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* launched TikTok accounts to reach Gen Z ([Inside the Gen Z Mind Consumer Survey](#)). The result is that a Gen Z user’s news feed might feature a mix of content: a reposted CNN clip, a native TikTok commentary, and an Instagram slide summary of a news article. *Who* delivers the news can matter as much as the source – **peer recommendations and influencer framing often drive what news Gen Z pays attention to.**

For example, if a popular YouTuber highlights an issue or a meme about a news story trends on Instagram, Gen Z is more likely to engage with it. This generation also expects a two-way conversation. They comment, share, and remix news, rather than passively consuming it. Traditional journalists still provide the raw reporting, but **influencers often translate or personalize the news for Gen Z.** Brands should recognize that partnering with credible voices (including micro-influencers or subject-matter experts on social media) can be as important as press releases or ads when it comes to informing and persuading young consumers. The key is credibility – Gen Z will dismiss overt misinformation, but they respond well to authentic, relatable communicators (whether an influencer or a journalist on TikTok) who deliver news in a conversational, transparent way.

3. Purchase Influence and Customer Journey

Gen Z’s path from discovering a product to making a purchase has evolved with their media habits. Below we examine how they find new fashion, tech, and food items, what influences their decisions, and how they ultimately buy – highlighting recent shifts and implications for brands.

Product Discovery: Social Media and Beyond

Social Media as the New Mall: In the last few years, social platforms have become *the* primary discovery zone for Gen Z consumers across fashion, tech, and food. Instead of browsing catalogs or visiting stores first, Gen Z scrolls their feeds. **Nearly half (47%) of Gen Z use social media as inspiration for shopping** ([85+ Stats on Gen Z Spending and Buying Habits \(2024\)](#)), far more than older generations. In fashion, for example, Instagram and TikTok serve as living

lookbooks – outfit posts, “haul” videos, and style challenges introduce new apparel trends daily. **49% of Gen Z say social media causes them to buy more clothing** ([85+ Stats on Gen Z Spending and Buying Habits \(2024\)](#)), as they see new styles on influencers or peers. On the beauty and skincare side, over half of Gen Z women reported buying more products due to social media influence ([85+ Stats on Gen Z Spending and Buying Habits \(2024\)](#)). TikTok in particular has driven *micro-trends* in fashion (think viral items like a certain dress or shoe) that sell out quickly once they catch on with Gen Z. The hashtag **#TikTokMadeMeBuyIt** became popular because so many young consumers discover products via TikTok recommendations and viral videos.

In the **tech industry**, YouTube and TikTok are key discovery engines. Many Gen Z shoppers learn about the latest gadgets, apps, or gaming gear from tech YouTubers and TikTok tech reviewers. **Almost half (47%) of Gen Z turn to YouTube to research products before buying** ([Gen Z: Social Media and Shopping Habits](#)) – this includes tech products like phones, laptops, and electronics where video reviews or unboxings help showcase features. TikTok is catching up here too: a recent survey found **TikTok is Gen Z’s favorite channel for product discovery, closely followed by Instagram** ([Gen Z Social Media Trends & Usage | Sprout Social](#)). A Gen Z tech enthusiast might see a cool new smart home device in a TikTok demo or hear about a new app on an influencer’s Instagram story before they see any official ad. Even for cars or electronics, short videos and influencer endorsements now rival traditional ads in reaching young buyers.

In the **food space**, social media drives both product and restaurant discovery. Gen Z often finds new snacks or food hacks from viral content (e.g. a unique Starbucks drink or a new fast-food menu item blowing up on TikTok). They’re also using visual platforms as a search tool for dining: Google noted that *nearly 40% of young people go to TikTok or Instagram instead of Google when looking for a place to eat* ([Nearly Half of Gen Z Prefers TikTok and Instagram Over Google Search - Business Insider](#)). This means a Gen Z user might discover a cafe or dish on TikTok first (via a food blogger’s video or a trending challenge) and then decide to try it. Apps like Instagram expose them to niche foodie trends (vegan bakeries, boba flavors, spicy noodle challenges, etc.), and platforms like Yelp are less consulted by Gen Z than a quick TikTok search for “best brunch in [city].”

Even recipes and cooking techniques spread through Gen Z via short videos – for instance, a ramen recipe or whipped coffee trend can go viral and get millions of young people to try it. In summary, **platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are the chief discovery channels** for Gen Z across categories. Friends and family are still influential (45% of Gen Z cite friends/fam as a source of purchase inspiration) ([Gen Z: Social Media and Shopping Habits](#)) ([Gen Z: Social Media and Shopping Habits](#)), but much of that word-of-mouth now happens on social media as well (tagging friends, sharing posts). For brands in fashion, tech, or food, this means *having a strong social media presence and shareable content is critical*. Gen Z expects to *find* you on the platforms they frequent – if your product isn’t being talked about on TikTok or showing up in their Instagram feed, it effectively “doesn’t exist” to a large segment of this generation.

The Role of Influencers, Peers, and Brand Authenticity

Influencer Marketing: Influencers are a powerful force in guiding Gen Z purchase decisions. Compared to Millennials, Gen Z relies more on influencer input and less on direct brand messaging ([Gen Z's reliance on influencer marketing outpaces millennials](#)). In 2023, a survey found **85% of Gen Z said social media influences their purchasing decisions** ([ICSC: 85% of Gen Z says social media impacts purchase decisions | Retail Dive](#)), and much of that influence comes via creators and influencers they follow. Around **54% of Gen Z consumers have made a purchase based on an influencer's recommendation** ([Influenced How persuasion powers purchasing decisions - Empower](#)) ([The Role of Social Media in Gen Z's Purchasing Decisions. | Kadence](#)). Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are full of influencer product reviews, tutorials, and endorsements that effectively replace traditional commercials for Gen Z.

Notably, **TikTok and Instagram are the top platforms driving Gen Z purchases** (45% of Gen Z cite these two as most influential on what they buy, ahead of YouTube at 38%) ([ICSC: 85% of Gen Z says social media impacts purchase decisions | Retail Dive](#)). We've seen this in fashion with "TikTok fashion influencers" whose clothing picks sell out overnight, in tech with popular YouTubers (like tech reviewers) swaying gadget sales, and in beauty/food with influencers launching or endorsing products (e.g. a makeup line or an energy drink) that Gen Z fans rush to purchase.

However, Gen Z is also **keen on authenticity**. They are quick to sniff out insincere or overly sponsored content. Influencer partnerships work best when the influencer genuinely aligns with the brand's image and values. **About 68% of Gen Z say they trust influencers more than traditional celebrities** ([The Role of Social Media in Gen Z's Purchasing Decisions. | Kadence](#)) – largely because influencers are seen as more relatable and candid. But that trust can be lost if an influencer promotes something off-brand or dishonest. **Authenticity and transparency are highly valued:** 32% of Gen Z (vs 24% of older shoppers) say a brand's authenticity impacts their purchase decision ([Gen Z: Social Media and Shopping Habits](#)).

They respond to influencers who keep it "real" and to brands that demonstrate consistency and social responsibility. In practice, this means a peer reviewer on TikTok who gives an unsponsored, honest opinion might influence Gen Z more than a polished celebrity ad. It also means micro-influencers (with smaller, engaged followings) can be very effective, as Gen Z often perceives them as more genuine and closer to "peer recommendations." Peer influence, in general, is huge: a friend posting about a product or a high number of positive comments can sway Gen Z interest. In a 2022 survey, nearly **one-quarter of Gen Z said lots of likes or positive comments on social media would make them more likely to buy a product** ([Gen Z online shopping behavior – statistics & facts - Statista](#)) – essentially, social proof matters.

Brand Values and Social Causes: Another influence on Gen Z's buying choices is alignment with personal values. This generation is socially conscious and expects brands to **stand for something** credible. Over the past few years, as issues of sustainability, diversity, and ethics

have been in the spotlight, Gen Z has gravitated toward brands that demonstrate authenticity in these areas. For example, **34% of Gen Z (vs 24% of all shoppers) prioritize brand authenticity** when deciding where to spend ([85+ Stats on Gen Z Spending and Buying Habits \(2024\)](#)). **25% (vs 16% overall) prioritize brand transparency** about things like business practices ([Gen Z: Social Media and Shopping Habits](#)). Many Gen Z shoppers will actively research how a fashion brand treats workers or sources materials, or how a tech company handles data privacy, before purchasing. In fact, **83% of Gen Z say they are more likely to buy from brands they trust with their personal data** ([85+ Stats on Gen Z Spending and Buying Habits \(2024\)](#)) and **84% are more likely to buy from a company known to treat its employees well** ([85+ Stats on Gen Z Spending and Buying Habits \(2024\)](#)).

On the flip side, a significant segment will vote with their wallet against brands that clash with their values – **20% of Gen Z shoppers reported stopping purchasing from a brand in 2023 due to its poor sustainability or ethics reputation** ([85+ Stats on Gen Z Spending and Buying Habits \(2024\)](#)). This is a major shift from five years ago when such cause-based boycotts by teens/20-somethings were less common. For brands, the takeaway is that influencer hype alone isn't enough; the brand's own actions (environmental efforts, social justice stances, inclusivity in marketing, etc.) are under the microscope. Gen Z rewards brands that are genuine and align with causes they care about (for instance, many Gen Z consumers love brands with eco-friendly products or those that support mental health initiatives) ([85+ Stats on Gen Z Spending and Buying Habits \(2024\)](#)), and they may shun those that appear performative or irresponsible.

Research and Consideration Phase

Once Gen Z becomes aware of a product (often via social media or influencers), they typically enter a *research phase* before purchasing – especially for pricier items in tech or fashion. Unlike the stereotype of impulsive clicking, many Gen Z consumers are quite thorough: **68% will read or watch at least 3 reviews of a product before a first-time purchase**, and about 1 in 6 will consult 9 or more reviews ([Inside the Gen Z Mind Consumer Survey - Snipp](#)). They tap into the abundance of information online to ensure they're making a wise choice. Key characteristics of Gen Z's research process include:

- **Online Reviews and UGC:** Gen Z heavily relies on user-generated content and reviews to evaluate products. **About 68% of Gen Z trust online reviews and other consumers' UGC more than brand-produced content** ([The Role of Social Media in Gen Z's Purchasing Decisions. | Kadence](#)). They will scroll through Amazon reviews, watch YouTube unboxing videos, check TikTok for people mentioning the product, and read threads on Reddit or Twitter for real-life feedback. For example, when considering a new smartphone, a Gen Z shopper might watch multiple YouTube reviews, read customer comments on Best Buy, and search TikTok for "review" to see short opinions. In fashion, they might look for try-on haul videos or see how real customers style a garment (rather than just the model photos). This behavior has grown in the past few years as review content has become more accessible via social media. Brands should note that

authentic positive reviews can significantly boost Gen Z buyers' confidence, whereas inconsistent or overly polished info from the brand site alone won't be as convincing.

- **YouTube and Long-Form Research:** As noted, **YouTube is a crucial research platform** for Gen Z – nearly half use it to research products ([Gen Z: Social Media and Shopping Habits](#)), more than any other social platform for this purpose. Particularly for tech and electronics, Gen Z values long-form video reviews or comparisons (e.g. a 15-minute video reviewing the latest smartphone or a Twitch stream showing gameplay on a new console). Even in beauty or fashion, longer tutorials or vlogs on YouTube can help Gen Z see how a product performs in real life. This trend underscores that while TikTok sparks interest, YouTube often seals the decision with in-depth info. Brands should maintain a strong presence on YouTube (either via their own content or by seeding products to reputable reviewers) to cater to Gen Z's need for detailed evaluation.
- **Search and Comparison Shopping:** Gen Z are savvy online searchers when it comes to finding deals or comparing options. They will use multiple sites and tools – from Google (for product specs or price comparisons) to TikTok's search (for visual reviews, as mentioned). They often compare prices across websites or look for coupon codes, reflecting their budget-conscious nature. Many Gen Z grew up during the Great Recession's aftermath or saw economic uncertainty in the pandemic, so **price and value are top of mind**. In a 2024 survey, 63% of U.S. Gen Z said they want to save more in the next few months ([US Gen Z Shopping Habits & Retail Trends - GWI](#)), and they actively seek sales: Gen Z shoppers are 18% more likely than last year to browse end-of-season sales for deals ([US Gen Z Shopping Habits & Retail Trends - GWI](#)). They will wait for a holiday sale or choose a slightly older model of a tech product if it means a better price. **Nearly half (48%) of Gen Z say they most frequently shop at discount or off-price retailers** ([ICSC: 85% of Gen Z says social media impacts purchase decisions | Retail Dive](#)), illustrating their hunt for affordability. So, during the consideration phase, they might put an item in their cart and then delay purchase until a discount is available or they've checked if a cheaper alternative is just as good.
- **Omnichannel Research:** Gen Z blends online and offline in their consideration process. For instance, in fashion, a Gen Z shopper might see a clothing item online, then visit a physical store to try it on for size/fit, then ultimately order it via the brand's app for a discount or convenience. *More than three-quarters of Gen Z like to purchase clothing in physical stores to see and feel the item and ensure fit (77% say seeing in-person, 76% ensuring fit, are reasons to shop in-store)* ([The Surprising Ways Gen Z is Shopping Now - Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor™](#)). They value the tactile experience for things like apparel and even some tech (e.g. testing a gadget demo in-store). However, if the store doesn't have the exact item or size, **Gen Z will seamlessly switch to online ordering on their phone – even while standing in the store** ([The Surprising Ways Gen Z is Shopping Now - Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor™](#)) ([The Surprising Ways Gen Z is Shopping](#)

[Now - Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor™](#)). This behavior, observed in 2024, shows Gen Z expects a **smooth integration of offline and online**. They might use a store as a showroom and then buy online (showrooming), or vice versa: browse online and then pick up in store. **73% of Gen Z prefer to browse products online** even if many end up buying in person ([The Surprising Ways Gen Z is Shopping Now - Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor™](#)). And for repeat purchases of known items, they heavily favor e-commerce (67% choose online for reorders vs. 28% going in-store) ([The Surprising Ways Gen Z is Shopping Now - Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor™](#)). Brands should ensure consistent experiences across channels – for example, accurate online info (since Gen Z will check on their phones in-store), easy mobile purchasing, and perhaps AR try-on or reviews accessible in physical locations.

Purchasing Decisions and Shopping Habits

Shift to E-commerce and Mobile: Gen Z was already inclined toward online shopping pre-2020, but the pandemic years cemented e-commerce as a norm. **Over 56% of U.S. Gen Z now say they prefer to shop online rather than in-store** ([US Gen Z Shopping Habits & Retail Trends - GWI](#)). The frequency of online purchases has also jumped – the share of Gen Z who buy products online at least weekly has increased by 28% since Q2 2020 ([US Gen Z Shopping Habits & Retail Trends - GWI](#)). By 2024, many Gen Z consumers shop online multiple times a week, whether it's ordering a meal kit, buying clothes on a brand's website, or using Amazon for essentials. Mobile commerce is especially prevalent: **98% of Gen Z own a smartphone, and 55% have made purchases via mobile devices** ([Gen Z Shopping Trends in Social Commerce | SimplicityDX](#)) ([Gen Z Shopping Trends in Social Commerce | SimplicityDX](#)).

They are comfortable using apps for shopping, whether it's retail apps, payment apps, or even social media checkout features. Digital wallets and peer-to-peer payment apps are second nature – Gen Z readily uses Apple Pay, Venmo, Cash App, etc., to complete transactions ([Gen Z: Social Media and Shopping Habits](#)). This means brands should optimize the mobile purchase experience (fast-loading sites, easy checkout, mobile-friendly design) or risk cart abandonment from an impatient Gen Z shopper.

Social Commerce and DTC: An emerging trend is Gen Z's openness to **social commerce** – buying directly through social media platforms. Nearly half of U.S. consumers (47%) have made a purchase through social media and an even higher share of Gen Z have likely done so or are interested ([Nearly half of US consumers say they have made a purchase ...](#)). Instagram and TikTok now feature in-app shops or links that make it easy for Gen Z to move from discovery to purchase in one flow. **61% of Gen Z have bought a product after seeing a social media ad** (according to global data) ([The Role of Social Media in Gen Z's Purchasing Decisions. | Kadence](#)), showing that when inspiration strikes on social, they do convert. Still, many Gen Z use social media as a discovery tool but prefer to purchase on official brand sites or marketplaces for security. Direct-to-consumer (DTC) brands have thrived with Gen Z because they often meet

Gen Z where they are (online) and offer a seamless path from content to checkout. For example, a Gen Z shopper might see an Instagram story for a new sneaker drop, swipe up to the brand's site, and purchase immediately if the site is quick and trustworthy. **54% of Gen Z follow brands on social media** that they like ([Gen Z: Social Media and Shopping Habits](#)), and 43% of those say they're more likely to buy from the brands they follow ([Gen Z: Social Media and Shopping Habits](#)).

This illustrates how social engagement ties into direct sales – brands that foster a community or cool factor online can drive Gen Z to become customers through their own e-commerce channels. We're also seeing Gen Z embrace alternative shopping formats like live shopping streams or TikTok Shop flash sales, which blend entertainment with instant purchasing (a trend that has grown since 2020).

In-Store and Experiential Shopping: Despite their digital dominance, Gen Z hasn't abandoned physical retail – they just expect it to complement their digital life. They tend to visit stores for **experience and immediacy**. For example, in fashion, as noted, they like to try on items and enjoy the social aspect of shopping in groups. They also appreciate getting the product immediately (no shipping wait) ([The Surprising Ways Gen Z is Shopping Now - Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor™](#)) ([The Surprising Ways Gen Z is Shopping Now - Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor™](#)). Brands targeting Gen Z in brick-and-mortar should focus on creating engaging, Instagrammable store experiences and integrating technology (like QR codes that pull up reviews or the option to order out-of-stock sizes for home delivery).

In tech retail, stores like Apple or Best Buy might see Gen Z visitors test devices in person even if the final purchase happens online. In food, while much grocery shopping is still done in person, Gen Z has embraced online ordering for convenience – whether meal delivery (DoorDash, Uber Eats) or grocery delivery services, especially if they live in urban areas or on college campuses. Still, many Gen Z enjoy dining out or visiting new eateries discovered online, meaning restaurants must consider their digital reputation (social media presence and reviews) as part of the customer journey.

Major Shifts in the Last 3–5 Years: Summarizing the key changes: (1) **Explosion of TikTok and short-form influence** – this has changed how Gen Z finds and engages with content, making video-based discovery a norm. (2) **Social media becoming a one-stop shop** – for news, entertainment, and shopping – accelerating the influence of peer content on purchases. (3) **Greater emphasis on value and values** – Gen Z is cost-conscious (especially with recent inflation), but they're also *values-conscious*, caring about what a brand stands for. (4) **Omnichannel expectations** – they fluidly mix online/offline, expecting brands to meet them seamlessly across platforms. (5) **Rising trust in influencers and UGC** – correspondingly lower trust in traditional ads – which means marketing strategies have shifted to creator collaborations and community-building.

Implications for Brands Targeting Gen Z

To successfully engage Gen Z in fashion, tech, food, or any consumer sector, brands should adapt to these insights:

- **Meet Gen Z on their Platforms:** Prioritize **TikTok, Instagram, YouTube**, and emerging social apps for marketing and product discovery. Create short-form videos (e.g. product demos, challenges, behind-the-scenes) to capture their 8-second attention span ([Firework | 40+ Short Form Video Statistics: The Jaw-Dropping Numbers You Must Know in 2024](#)), but also provide longer content for when they seek details. An active social presence isn't optional – Gen Z expects to find brands and news on social media, and **brands with no social media presence risk being ignored** (nearly one-third of Gen Z say they're more likely to buy from a brand with an active social presence) ([Gen Z: Social Media and Shopping Habits](#)).
- **Leverage Influencers & Peers (Authentically):** Influencer marketing can pay off greatly with Gen Z, but it must feel authentic. Collaborate with influencers who genuinely align with your brand values and who have credibility with young audiences. Micro-influencers and content creators who focus on niche communities (fashion thrifters, tech gadget reviewers, foodie vloggers) can drive trust. Encourage real customers to share their experiences – **Gen Z trusts peer reviews and user content** more than polished ads ([The Role of Social Media in Gen Z's Purchasing Decisions. | Kadence](#)). Highlight user testimonials, reshare UGC, and engage with customers on forums or comments. Essentially, turn your happiest Gen Z customers into advocates on social media.
- **Emphasize Brand Authenticity and Values:** Gen Z can be intensely loyal to brands that reflect their values and equally quick to “cancel” those that violate them. Brands should **practice transparency** (about sourcing, pricing, labor, etc.) and communicate their purpose. Whether it's sustainability (e.g. using eco-friendly materials, which 57% of Gen Z say they prefer ([42 Statistics on Gen Z Spending Habits - EcoCart](#))) or social justice or simply a stance of inclusivity, make it known in a genuine way. Authentic storytelling resonates: share your brand's mission, support causes that matter (e.g. mental health, diversity in fashion, digital privacy in tech, ethical sourcing in food). But avoid performative activism – Gen Z will see through it. When done right, this builds trust and goodwill, as evidenced by the **strong majority of Gen Z who reward ethical behavior** (e.g. treating employees well, caring for community) ([85+ Stats on Gen Z Spending and Buying Habits \(2024\)](#)). The past few years have proven that brands which actively engage in two-way dialogue (listening and responding to Gen Z concerns) and show consistency in their values can cultivate a passionate Gen Z customer base.
- **Simplify the Path to Purchase:** Make it as easy as possible for Gen Z to go from discovering a product to buying it. This means optimizing **social commerce** capabilities (shoppable posts, swipe-up links, affiliate codes) since many Gen Z want to buy the moment interest is piqued. Ensure your website is mobile-friendly and quick, with support for digital wallets (Gen Z likes Apple Pay, PayPal, etc. for one-tap checkout).

Provide multiple fulfillment options (ship to home, buy online pickup in store, easy returns) to align with their omnichannel habits. Given their tendency to research, having comprehensive product information, FAQs, and customer reviews on your site can keep them from leaving to seek info elsewhere. Also, consider offering loyalty or referral programs that encourage Gen Z to spread the word – they enjoy sharing deals with friends and being part of brand communities.

- **Content and Community Over Ads:** Traditional advertising alone (banner ads, TV commercials) is often tuned out by Gen Z. Instead, focus on **content marketing and community building**. Create engaging content that provides value or entertainment – tutorials, style inspiration, gamified challenges, or insider looks that make Gen Z want to follow and engage. Brands like Nike have done well by aligning marketing with empowerment messages that Gen Z appreciates ([The Role of Social Media in Gen Z's Purchasing Decisions. | Kadence](#)) ([The Role of Social Media in Gen Z's Purchasing Decisions. | Kadence](#)). In fashion, share user photos, start a hashtag challenge; in tech, perhaps host live Q&As on Twitch or how-to videos; in food, partner with popular food TikTokers or host recipe contests. Cultivate a community where young customers can interact (Discord servers, Instagram comment threads, etc.). Gen Z wants to feel part of a brand's story, not just a target of sales pitches.

Conclusion: In the past 3–5 years, Gen Z in the U.S. have dramatically reshaped the media and commerce landscape. They've moved decisively toward digital and social media for entertainment, news, and shopping. Short-form video and influencers now play outsized roles in what they buy and believe, yet they still value depth, whether it's a long YouTube review or a brand's deep commitment to values. For brands in fashion, tech, food and beyond, the key is to be **present, authentic, and responsive in the channels Gen Z frequents**. By providing engaging content on Instagram/TikTok, facilitating social proof and peer input, and upholding authenticity and transparency, brands can effectively reach and earn the loyalty of Gen Z. The major shifts – from TikTok's rise to the surge in social commerce and values-driven shopping – all point to a generation that is **hyper-connected, informed, and empowered** in their consumption. Tapping into these behaviors with a genuine, data-backed strategy will be crucial for any brand aiming to win over Gen Z in the years ahead.

Sources:

- Pew Research Center – Social media usage and news source trends ([More Americans are regularly getting news on TikTok, especially young adults | Pew Research Center](#)) ([More Americans are regularly getting news on TikTok, especially young adults | Pew Research Center](#)) ([Gen Z Trusts Local News Over Social Media – BRINK – Conversations and Insights on Global Business](#))
- Axios / Pew – Rise of TikTok as a news source for young adults ([More Americans are regularly getting news on TikTok, especially young adults | Pew Research Center](#))

- Comscore – Gen Z social platform reach (2023) ([What are the most visited social media platforms among Gen Z?... - Comscore, Inc.](#))
- Sprout Social – Gen Z social media usage and discovery habits ([Gen Z Social Media Trends & Usage | Sprout Social](#)) ([Gen Z Social Media Trends & Usage | Sprout Social](#))
- Horowitz Research – Gen Z short-form vs long-form video consumption ([Gen Z not just scrolling: Long-form TV content holds strong appeal - NewscastStudio](#))
- Effectv / Comcast – Gen Z streaming vs cable TV habits ([The Truth About Gen Z Media Consumption Trends | Effectv](#))
- Pew/BRINK – Trust in news among 18–29-year-olds (local vs social vs national) ([Gen Z Trusts Local News Over Social Media – BRINK – Conversations and Insights on Global Business](#)) ([Gen Z Trusts Local News Over Social Media – BRINK – Conversations and Insights on Global Business](#))
- Business Insider (Google data) – Gen Z using TikTok/IG for search over Google ([Nearly Half of Gen Z Prefers TikTok and Instagram Over Google Search - Business Insider](#)) ([Nearly Half of Gen Z Prefers TikTok and Instagram Over Google Search - Business Insider](#))
- SurveyMonkey (2025) – Gen Z purchase factors and behaviors (authenticity, brand follow, research platforms) ([Gen Z: Social Media and Shopping Habits](#)) ([Gen Z: Social Media and Shopping Habits](#))
- Retail Dive / ICSC – Gen Z social media influence on purchases, platforms ranking ([ICSC: 85% of Gen Z says social media impacts purchase decisions | Retail Dive](#)) ([ICSC: 85% of Gen Z says social media impacts purchase decisions | Retail Dive](#))
- ExplodingTopics (SurveyMonkey) – Social media driving Gen Z clothing purchases ([85+ Stats on Gen Z Spending and Buying Habits \(2024\)](#))
- Cotton Inc. Lifestyle Monitor – Gen Z fashion in-store vs online preferences ([The Surprising Ways Gen Z is Shopping Now - Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor™](#)) ([The Surprising Ways Gen Z is Shopping Now - Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor™](#))
- GWI (2024) – Gen Z online shopping growth since 2020 ([US Gen Z Shopping Habits & Retail Trends - GWI](#))
- SimplicityDX – Gen Z online shopping and social influence stats ([Gen Z Shopping Trends in Social Commerce | SimplicityDX](#))
- Kadence / Morning Consult – Gen Z trust in influencers vs reviews ([The Role of Social Media in Gen Z's Purchasing Decisions. | Kadence](#)) ([The Role of Social Media in Gen Z's Purchasing Decisions. | Kadence](#))