

MARKETING

How Gen Z anxiety is shaping the China market

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The comfortable Gen Z lifestyle also comes with many new pressures, which is why brands should look to ease their burden with light-hearted entertainment. Image courtesy of Apple

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China's Gen Z those born after 1995 are products of the country's one-child policy and have grown up with their parents' resources concentrated on them. Simultaneously, China has seen rapid economic growth, giving most Gen Zers in their late teens and early-20s unprecedented quality of life and stability.

But unfortunately, Gen Z's comfortable lifestyle comes with pressures to maintain the pace of growth introduced by their older counterparts.

In this atmosphere, overtime and **long working hours**, which start in the education system, have been the norm.

Never-ending competition is reflected in the term *neijuan*, which has become popular online as people complain about the constant stress leading to few positive benefits.

Adding to their burden are changing demographics a slowing birth rate, **aging population** and diminishing working force and expectations from relatives surrounding marriage and family.

The juxtaposition between growth pressures and wanting to maintain the comfortable quality of life that they have become accustomed to has led to growing mental health problems for Gen Zers, who are quickly becoming the **"anxious generation."**

Yet, affluence has meant that an increasing number of Gen Zers are no longer willing to sit back and endure a high-pressure lifestyle, as highlighted in the "lying flat" trend (*tangping*).

More broadly, consumer trends and online behaviors now reflect how young Chinese have found ways to cope with their stress.

China's youth turn to light-hearted entertainment to relieve stress

When they log off of work, young people are looking to escape from the pressures of their daily lives. Many turn to entertainment, as is evident in the rise of gaming and short-video platforms like **Douyin**.

These platforms provide fun, digestible content in an easy-to-use, full-screen format.

With Chinese users spending an average of 110 minutes per day on short-video platforms, brands have a huge opportunity to use this medium to develop strong relationships with consumers.

Meanwhile, these young people are looking to engage with like-minded creative communities.

NetEase Cloud Music has become a destination where young people can vent their stress and connect virtually with other users. The platform has even latched onto its nickname "NetEase Depression Cloud" via campaigns that encourage users to ask for help.

Escapism manifests through "shoppertainment" and lifestyle products

Consumerism also offers a getaway from Gen Z's daily pressures, emerging through the rise of "shoppertainment" activities such as live commerce and **social commerce**.

Here, young consumers are shopping because they want to relieve pressure rather than buying necessities, influencing the type of items purchased through these methods.

According to a **McKinsey report**, China's Gen Zers are spontaneous buyers, and 47 percent of those surveyed tend to buy products on the go.

In contrast to the past, Gen Z places higher importance on products or services that fit into their lifestyles, while functionality is valued less.

Therefore, brands should follow Apple's example in this regard. It has successfully positioned itself as a lifestyle brand, while Samsung, which sells similar products, is considered a technology company.

Successful products must resonate with Gen Z lifestyles and subcultures

Brands need to consider how they can provide entertainment, or a form of escapism, to young people with intense pressures during the day who want to release them during their time off.

Marketing actions based on trends or buzzwords such as *neijuan* or *tangping* that reflect the problems China's Gen Zers face will not benefit the brand or consumer.

Instead, brands should associate themselves with solutions by appealing to their audience's hobbies, passions or subcultures, such as gaming, **fitness** or sustainability.

In light of this, branding and product/service design will continue to shift to become more consumer-focused.

Brands integrate products into young people's values, lifestyles, interests and communities and become a part of the escapism they so badly need in their daily lives.

Doing that will help spur genres, such as **gaming**, hip-hop or **dancing**, that were not popular or considered professions in the past to become large-scale industries in their own right.

These service-based industries will provide more avenues for China's economy to grow and help Gen Alpha avoid the Gen Z anxiety trap.

Brands must positively integrate themselves into Gen Z conversations

Gen Z anxieties are not going away anytime soon, with demographic challenges and economic pressures becoming more acute.

So, the question brands need to ask is: How do we make more relatable products that will become part of Gen Z conversations?

To answer that question, they should consider focusing on what young consumers do for escape entertainment and shopping rather than reminding them of their ever-growing pressures.

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