

MARKETING

Innovation differentiates this generation of teens: Ipsos

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Teenagers today are creative and contradictory posing a challenge for brands. Image credit: Nike

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Technology has changed how consumers interact with brands as well as each other, but marketers should recognize how online platforms and communities have shaped teenagers.

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During an Ipsos webinar on Jan. 19, retail and marketing executives discussed how teenagers are challenging brands to change how they communicate. Most of Generation Z is in their teenage years but are having vastly different experiences than millennials and Gen Xers did as teens.

"Teens are not a monolith," said Aziel Rivers, senior director of North America marketing at Pepsi. "There are so many passion points that break down everyone's experiences into silos."

Teens' world

As the first cohort of true digital natives, Gen Z has had experiences very different from previous generations due to the advent of social technology.

In many ways, technology has broken down barriers and brought consumers together, creating a different environment for teenagers to grow up in than before.

Deep interest communities thrive online, according to Sara Wilson, founder of digital agency SW Projects. This allows contemporary consumers, including teenagers, to easily connect with like-minded people but it also means that there are more diverse inspirations, interests and experiences among this generation.

The ease of ecommerce and popularity of side hustles also means teens have more financial freedom than previous generations and are less reliant on their parents to make purchase decisions and have more financial freedom than previous generations. This means marketers do not have to be as concerned about striking a delicate balance to appeal to both parents and teens.

Technology has also fueled many of Gen Z's early business ventures, removing obstacles they may have faced in becoming luxury consumers.

"Teens start trends," said Garry Thaniel, general manager of sneakers at [eBay](#), San Francisco. "They're flipping the sneakers in their closet to buy luxury sneakers, instead of waiting to get a job to buy sneakers."

Teen entrepreneurs are making tens of thousands of dollars through passion projects, from flipping sneakers and reselling vintage to creating custom denim.

Tech also empowers these teen titans to find their audiences. As eBay's Mr. Rivers posited, he has likely purchased high-end sneakers from a teenager an online marketplace but he would be less likely to do so in a face-to-face interaction.

Sneakers are also an example of a category that has thrived because it is a specific culture, particularly one that is rooted in urban and Black cultures.

While the panelists considered Gen Z teens to be creative, passionate and influential, they also acknowledged there are contradictions in play within this cohort, especially as they continue to develop their personal beliefs.

For instance, many of these younger consumers value sustainability and have high expectations for brands' corporate social responsibility strategies while flocking to fast-fashion ecommerce brands such as Shein.

Luckily for brands, they have more resources than ever to manage consumer data and segmentation for immensely targeted marketing campaigns.

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