

MARKETING

## How brands can visually engage millennial, Gen Z consumers

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Emma Chamberlain and Charti D'Amelio are Gen Z fixtures. Image credit: Louis Vuitton

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Understanding how the growing divide between millennial and Gen Z consumers manifests in unique visual worlds is essential for brands to authentically connect with those audiences.

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According to a [new report from Kantar](#), 70 percent of U.K. Gen Zers believe it is "extremely" or "very" important to have the freedom to be unique, compared to 61 percent of British millennials. This difference in philosophy may seem minor, but marketers need to be aware that this informs the visual languages of both demographics.

### Generational aesthetics

Visually, millennials tend to gravitate towards "curated perfection" while Gen Z consumers embrace "messy realness."

The millennial aesthetic is hyper-curated, and is dominated by minimalism, cohesion and conventional beauty that presents a polished sense of achievement. This is especially true as this generation grows into adulthood and they can apply these visual principles to their own spaces.



TikTok trainspotter Francis Bourgeois appeared in a Gucci x The North Face ad in a bid for Gen Z shoppers. Image credit: Gucci

Specific visual cues may include product flat lays, sleek finishes, wellness aesthetics such as greenery and glowing sink, soft pastel hues such as "millennial pink" and lilac and hygge interiors including sheepskin rugs, wicker furniture and terrazzo tiles.

The millennial tone of voice is also distinctive, with motivational phrases focusing on productivity or self-referential idioms such as "the struggle is real."

Gen Zers are drawn to the antitheses of this curated millennial taste, and instead have more appreciation for authentic imperfection.

As is the case with their older counterparts, some of this is related to Gen Z's life stage. Many of these consumers are considered CARLYs (Can't Afford Real Life Yet) and live in rentals, student housing or at home making aesthetics such as "cluttercore" as much of a necessity as it is self-expression.

Cluttercore can be exemplified by messy backgrounds in images or social media videos, as well as "photo dumps" rather than the millennial tendency to post one polished photograph on their grid. Colors are bright and clashing and collage-style layering are other visual cues of Gen Z.

These consumers are also interested in blending digital and analog media, leading to a new wave of popularity for film photography, vinyl and zines, as well as more unretouched digital photos.

Nostalgia for Y2K and gender fluidity are also trademarks of Gen Z.

@lilgunky i'm exposing myself in order to share the secrets lol #thrifting #maximalism #fairycore #cluttercore #howsmovingcastle original sound - georgie

*Gen Z has countered millennial minimalism with cluttercore maximalism*

Their tone of voice also tends to be more candid than millennials', blending conversational styles with post-ironic, fatalistic humor.

The different generational aesthetics can inform how brands approach advertising based on who they are trying to reach.

For instance, beauty brands catering to millennials may emphasize natural, healthy looks while more experimental makeup brands or those that highlight imperfections like scarring may resonate more with Gen Z. Minimalist interior design and homeware is to millennials what cluttercore and mood lighting are to Gen Z.

Common ground

Despite these notable differences, there are also similarities between the two cohorts.

The "2021 Millennial and Gen Z Survey" by consulting firm Deloitte found that young people are channeling their energy towards meaningful action by increasing political involvement, aligning spending and career choices with their values and driving change on societal issues that matter to them ([see story](#)).

Another similarity is that these consumers are mobile- and digital-first.

Luxury brands can also win the hearts, minds and loyalty of Gen Z and millennial shoppers by reaching them where they spend time on mobile. For instance, 55 percent of Gen Z use their smartphones for five or more hours daily, and millennials spend 3.7 hours a day on mobile.

Social mobile apps allow luxury marketers to accomplish their earned media goals while saving their ad dollars for other digital platforms that drive that ever-important value creation. Additionally, Gen Z and millennial shoppers want to be sold on brand experience rather than product pitches ([see story](#)).