

What we know about marketing to Generation X

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Generation X is often overlooked by advertisers, however brands must reflect the independent spirit of this demographic in order to engage them, as many Generation X-ers do not recognise their depiction in contemporary advertising.

Definition

Marketers consider Generation X (Gen X) to be people born between the early 1960s and the start of the 1980s. This cohort come after the Baby Boomer generation (defined as those born between 1946 and 1964) and precede Millennials (defined as persons born between 1981 and 2000, or those who are between the ages of 16 and 35).

Key insights

1. Generation X consumes media in the same way as millennials

Brands often consider millennials to be unique and, therefore, create bespoke, innovative communication plans in order to reach them. However, research in the US and Australia has found that millennials and Generation X share very similar media consumption habits.

In Australia, digital media analysis revealed that millennials and Generation X have the same media habits when it comes to online games, weather, finance, search, blogs and shopping. Despite the pervasive view that social media is the domain of the young, millennials spent only an hour more on social media platforms than Generation X across a month. Furthermore, facial tracking technology has found that both groups respond similarly to online videos and banner ads.

Meanwhile, in the US, less than half of online US adults watch linear TV, as younger Baby Boomers and Generation X-ers adopt viewing habits previously associated with millennials. For example, research has found that, like Millennials, half of Generation X-ers who currently subscribe to pay-TV services are considering

“cutting the cord” and, separately, that Netflix is one of the top three most loved brands for both demographics. As a result, brands are urged to look beyond age-gender demographics and look at new data sources. For example, choosing shows based on viewers' product buying habits rather than Nielsen ratings.

Read more in: [5.4m US consumers will cut the cord this year](#), [Amazon, Google and Netflix are the most-loved brands](#), [Yahoo Australia reveals Gen X and millennial media habits](#) and [Linear TV dips below half of US viewers](#)

2. Generation X is cynical and nervous about financial investment

Generation X is at the time of life when pension providers can make the biggest difference in terms of education and encouraging saving – making them a key target for the industry. To create targeted, personalised communications to this and other key generations, UK provider Standard Life researched their differing motivations. They found Generation X-ers to understand the value of saving but with large outgoings and a cynicism about finance based on recent financial scandals. As a result, Generation X-ers are quite pessimistic and nervous about long-term commitments such as pension provision. Communications reflecting these insights have generated higher engagement rates and increased pension contributions.

Read more in: [How Standard Life addressed the ‘niggle factor’ in pensions](#)

3. Generation X is redefining ‘adulthood’

Generation X is subverting preconceptions about middle age. This age group have grown up in challenging economic conditions and, arguably, as a result the traditional milestones of adulthood have been more difficult to achieve than ever before. A quantitative study across 21 countries found that only 39% of this cohort had achieved all three of the main conventional adult goals: buying a home, getting married and having children. Yet, Generation X is far from pessimistic. They have maintained the independent spirit of their youth and have defied cultural lifestage expectations. They are diverse, resilient, tolerant and pragmatic.

Changing attitudes to gender, equality, same-sex relationships and work-life balance have all been driven by this cohort. However, many brands have failed to reflect this in their advertising and are still targeting them with outdated representations of adulthood. Many people in their 30s and 40s simply do not recognise the way their age group is portrayed. Conventional milestones do not define Generation X and brands should, instead, celebrate their independence and individuality.

Read more in: [Gen X Today: My life. My way](#)

4. This cohort is often overlooked by marketers - despite exerting great influence

Generation X is sandwiched between relatively wealthy Baby Boomers and potentially lucrative millennials. Consequently, they are often overlooked by brands. Traditionally, brands have dismissed mid-lifers as boring and out of touch. Yet, their unique positioning means they can be powerful influencers. Generation X not only bridges the gap between old and young but also digital and analogue. Although they mainly grew up without computers and mobile technology, they are very comfortable in the online world. They frequently help older people navigate digital and cultural developments, while raising digitally native Generation Z.

Furthermore, Generation X-ers now hold positions of power in jobs across the world. Many of today's most

successful and influential world leaders, policy makers, business people and entrepreneurs are part of this demographic. Indeed, Gen X-ers created Google, YouTube and Amazon, which has led some to argue that they are the most influential generation of all time.

While brands focus on millennials and, increasingly, Generation Z, they are missing out on valuable relationships with Generation X.

Read more in: [The future 100: Trends and change to watch in 2017](#)

5. Gen X adopts a cautious approach to digital advertising and values online privacy

Generation X prefers traditional media advertising to invasive, interruptive digital ads. According to a survey, conducted in 39 countries, they are comfortable navigating the online realm but do not view digital advertising as positively as print, outdoor, TV and cinema messages. Gen X-ers are mindful of cyber safety and often approach digital advertising with caution. While they are happy to engage with content which persuades them of its honesty and authenticity, they are careful about the information they impart and value their digital privacy.

The vast majority are in full or part time work and are their household's chief shopper. Therefore, they are most receptive to advertising in the evenings.

Read more in: [Kantar Millward Brown: AdReaction - Engaging Gen X, Y and Z](#) and [How to manage consumer data responsibly](#)

6. This generation is savvy, experienced and at their earnings peak

Gen X has endured the recent global economic recession with customary pragmatism and they have reached their peak earning years. They still need furniture and electronics, their children need clothes and toys, their families need medical services and entertainment options, and their portfolios need attention and guidance.

There is an opportunity for brands to forge long-lasting relationships with this audience but they must earn their trust. This means caution and honesty, as this cohort is marketing savvy and they appreciate messages without spin and thinly concealed motives. Consumers do have a willingness to spend, particularly if they are told that a purchase will save them money in the long term. This appeals to Generation X's practical sensibilities.

Read more in: [Don't You \(Forget About Me\) - Marketing to Generation X](#)

7. Brands can engage Gen X with nostalgic reminders of their childhood

For this cohort, nostalgia can be a potent and emotive marketing tool. When MoneySuperMarket, a price comparison website in the UK, wanted to engage the over 35 market, it opted to invoke positive childhood memories.

The brand revived Skeletor, the evil cult classic character from the He-Man cartoons, which resonated with Generation X. His appearance in TV advertising, going from a brooding villain to an ecstatic hip wiggler who can't help but shimmy his way down the street at the thought of having saved money with MoneySuperMarket, engaged a valuable audience that had previously been overlooked.

Read more in: [MoneySuperMarket: It takes more than a feeling to transform a brand](#)

8. Generation X is serious about skin care and their choices are enduring

Despite the beauty industry's perceived focus on youth, Generation X considers skin care to be a high priority. They are well informed about the potential damage of UV rays and this cohort is most likely to apply sunscreen daily.

Skin care regimes become more important as people age and are most sophisticated in the second half of a consumer's 30s, when investment in facial cleansers and moisturisers peak. A survey of 1,000 online consumers in 20 developed and emerging markets, has found that shoppers seeking targeted solutions are more likely to trade up and try premium options. Analysis of Generation X and Baby Boomers' skin care habits reveals that once a routine has been established, it remains largely constant.

Read more in: [Beauty survey: Evolution of beauty routines becomes a key innovation driver](#)

9. Gen X'ers with children are influenced by family

Brands should not underestimate the influence of family on Generation X. More adults are having children later in life and attitudes to parenting have changed. Australian research reveals that the influence of children is no longer merely 'pester power'. They are invited into conversations about entertainment, food, groceries, restaurants and holidays. Moreover, the growth of multi-generational homes and close relationships with grandparents means that Generation X considers many opinions in the decision making process.

Read more in: [Who's the boss? Kids influence household purchase decisions](#)

More on this topic

WARC Topic Page: [Segmenting Consumers](#)

WARC Topic Page: [Marketing to parents](#)

WARC case studies: [Case Finder](#)

WARC Data: [Media Consumption](#)

Further reading

[Generational snapshot: A look at Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials in the US](#)

[The end of lifestage marketing?](#)

[Post-demographic consumerism](#)

[Automotive in the UK: Are the wheels coming off for Generation Y?](#)

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