

# What Everyone's **Getting** **Wrong** About Gen Z

What does Gen Z value?

# Our Team

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# the three

# big C's

# of gen Z

**LGBTQ+  
DIGITAL**

a framework for understanding Gen Z Values



CONTRADICTIONS.

CONSTRAINTS.

CRAVINGS.

“

**It's hard when you think of Gen Z; there's  
so many different types of people. I don't  
know how you can clump it into one.**

”

*21, Biochemistry*



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# Contradictions.

Gen Z's Inner Conflict

## We Hear These Buzzwords:

Sustainability

Privacy

Authenticity

Equality

Diversity

Inclusivity

Transparency

Advocacy

## But Here's What Gen Z is Actually Doing:

“

We're all fighting for the environment,  
but then we're shopping on Shein.

”

– 24, Animal Science

“

I go to Starbucks ... and I don't  
support any of those values.

”

– 23, Pre-med

“

I haven't posted to support a single  
Jewish thing, and I'm the Vice  
President of Hillel.

”

– 21, Biochemistry

**What We Say**

**vs**

**What We Do**

(All real Gen Z contradictions)

“

I support LGBTQ+ rights.

But I wouldn't not get Chick Fil A  
because of that.

”

– 21, Biochemistry

“

I don't support the big corporations that exploit their workers.

I have an Amazon Prime subscription and currently have something on the way as we speak. ”

– 21, Advertising

“

I support and value the environment's health.

I use Chat GPT every day.

”

# Stats

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Temu is the **most downloaded shopping app** for Gen Z, but **91%** of Gen Z says they want to buy from sustainable companies.

(PDI, 2023)

**77%**

of Gen Z say they care about **brand ethics**.

**38%**

of Gen Z say ethics actually impact their **purchasing decisions**.

(Campbell, 2022)

We're not hypocritical.  
We're human.

To reach us, brands must acknowledge the contradiction  
between **who we want to be** and **how we actually live**.



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# C onstraints.

Morality is a Luxury

# Constraints

Morality is a Luxury

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Oftentimes, the limits we face financially and socially can override our values.

- Convenience and price trump values
- Brands lose us when they forget that not every Gen Zer can afford to be idealistic

## Walmart



- Cost effective
- Higher number of US stores (4,605)

VS



## Sprouts

- More expensive
- Less common (457 US stores)

“

**There's a fine balance; it depends on the situation, how dire the demand is, and if there are viably cost-effective alternatives.**

”

*23, Pre-Med*

“

I would love not to shop at these places [businesses that don't align with values] if I could.

”

*18, Media Management*

Constraints Morality is a Luxury

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# Affordability → Convenience

In an ideal world, we would buy the most **organic and ethically sourced** products.

# Constraints Morality is a Luxury

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	Ideal	Reality
Affordability	Purchasing the most organic and ethically sourced products	As product quality increases, so does the price, leading many Gen Z consumers to turn to buy-now, pay-later services. <sup>1</sup>
Convenience	Having quick and easy access to stores with a wide variety of products	Stores that carry high-quality products that are sustainably sourced are less common and require you to travel far or go out of your way. • McDonald's is affordable and accessible, which is why it's so popular. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup><https://www.foodandwine.com/>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.worldbenchmarkingalliance.org/>

“

The problem is that SHEIN is the **more affordable option**, especially for those looking for plus size clothing.

”

*23, Pre-Med*

“

**So if it's cheaper and just easier to get, people are more likely to buy it no matter what they believe.**

”

*21, Social Media Content Creator*

**69%**

of Gen Z consumers say they are living paycheck to paycheck.<sup>2</sup>

Gen Z had the **highest poverty rate** in recent decades.

Gen Z consumers: **lowest income, highest economic pressure.**

<sup>2</sup><https://www.pymnts.com/>

We don't always have  
the luxury to choose  
values first.

Brands must recognize the gap between what we want  
and what we can have.



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Cravings.  
Image is everything

# CRAVINGS

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Gen Z's craving for **connection**, **identity**, and **belonging** often turns into something tangible.

**57%** of Gen Z feels constantly *judged* on social media.

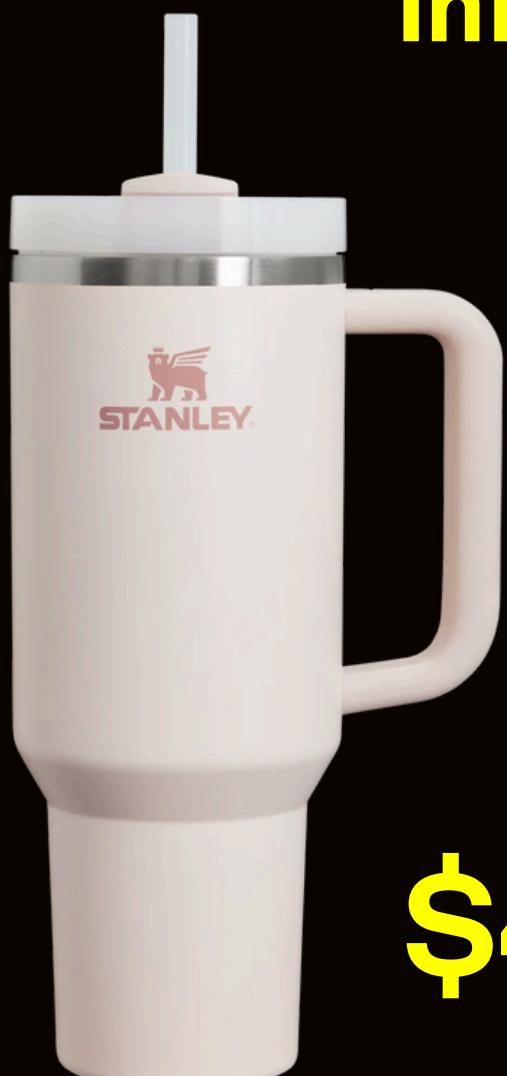
**48%** of Gen Z feels *left out* because of social media.

**Products become more than just items, they become tools for self-expression and social signaling.**

## Influencers don't just sell products, they sell a lifestyle.

- They live the life we crave, so we buy what they endorse because we want to be like them- even if our values say otherwise.

**Influencer culture turns products into personality traits.**



### STANLEY CUP

Signals “clean girl,”  
“TikTok wellness,”  
or “I’m in the know.”

**\$45**



### AIRPODS MAX

Not just functional,  
but also a fashion  
statement

**\$549**

“ I literally will **only buy something if either a friend has bought it, my mom, or an influencer**. Influencer marketing is huge. ”

*21, Social Media Content Creator*

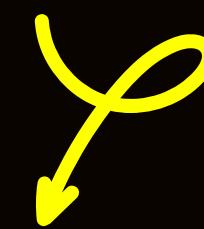


**Influencers live the life that we want, but they have resources we don't.**

Owning the **exact item** matters for image

- But when it's inaccessible, Gen Z turns to unethical *dupes*\*

\*Dupe: a “duplicate” or copy of a product.



**84%** of Gen Z say they often make impulse purchases online, especially on mobile platforms.

**It's less about owning something and  
more about being seen having it.**

We don't just buy products – we buy what they say about us. To win us over, brands need to sell a story,



# Key Takeaways



**Be Real About the  
Contradictions**

**Design With  
Constraints in Mind**

**Lean Into  
Craving Culture**

**Contradictions • Constraints • Cravings**