

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

What does Gen Z value?

# Our Team

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the three

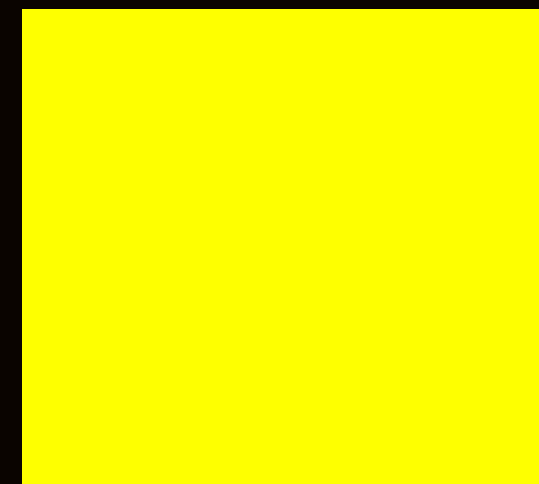
G's

of gen Z

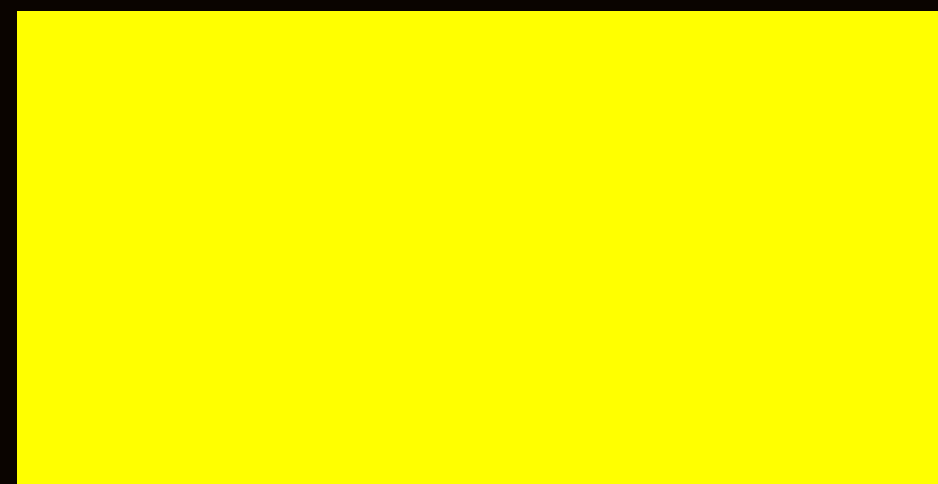


a framework for understanding Gen Z Values

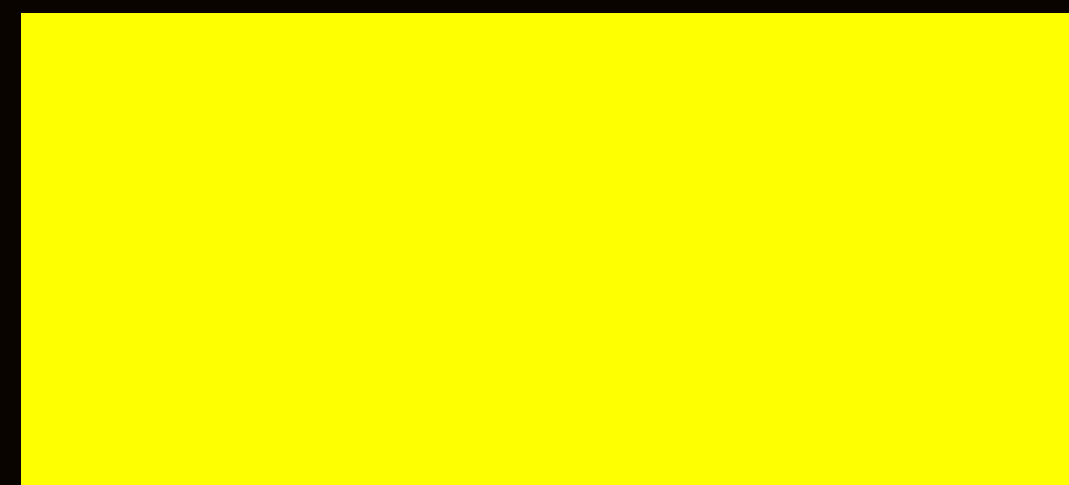
**CONTRADICTIONS.**



**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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# **C**ontradictions.

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. ”

“

I support and value the environment's health.

I use Chat GPT every day.

”

# Stats



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
<b>Affordability</b>	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>
<b>Convenience</b>	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. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• McDonald's is affordable and accessible, which is why it's so popular.<sup>2</sup></li></ul>

<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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**C**ravings.  
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.**

# CRAVINGS

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**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*



# CRAVINGS

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**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,



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# Key Takeaways

**Be Real About the  
Contradictions**

**Design With  
Constraints in Mind**

**Lean Into  
Craving Culture**

**Contradictions • Constraints • Cravings**

# CRAVINGS

lululemon softstreme Search

**\$34 Amazon vs \$118 Lululemon**  
Softstreme Perfectly Oversized Cropped Crew

Black

Lululemon

Effect · Hazel Eyes

11.5K

49

3,850

282

idi & Tara · 2024-1-18

6 | Lululemon orrrr amazOn!  
lulemon #crewneck #lululem... more

original

Make You Mine - @Madison E

Playlist · Sweatshirts

peppermayo Search

"peppermayo" but make it shein

186.9K

441

52.6K







8,626

iriana · 4-18

20 | all linked in my LTK  
sheinhaul #sheinsummerhaul ... more

Contains: Missing - Todd Terry

Playlist · top videos

REAL	DUPE
	
	
	

My moral values don't pop up when I'm thinking about brands. They're just not connected in my head.

**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.**

We believe in equal rights but still support brands that don't.

## **Market to both head and heart.**

Gen Z wants to do the right thing, but we're still emotional, impulsive, stressed, and broke. If your campaign only appeals to our values and not our behavior, we'll keep scrolling.



*aerie*

**Glossier.**

## Make values affordable.

If you want Gen Z to care about your ethics, your price point has to let us participate. Do the work to make sustainability and accessibility go hand-in-hand.



**Make your brand effortless and everywhere.**

We don't want to be targeted. We want to stumble on your brand in the wild – through influencers, moodboards, or unboxing videos – not banner ads.

**SKIMS**

**owala**



# Brands That Get Us

**BAGGU**



Makes sustainability stylish and accessible. A brand Gen Z uses without having to overthink it.



Doesn't pretend we're all high-achieving learners – they lean into messy motivation and inconsistent effort with humor.

elf



Offers cruelty-free, ethical, trendy makeup at a very affordable price.

**“ People like to say that they were cooler than everyone else and liked something first... ”**

**“ People get bored super quickly, and they want to imagine themselves in any other place but where they are. I think being able to romanticize your life gives you an out from that – a place that you might not necessarily be happy in. ”**

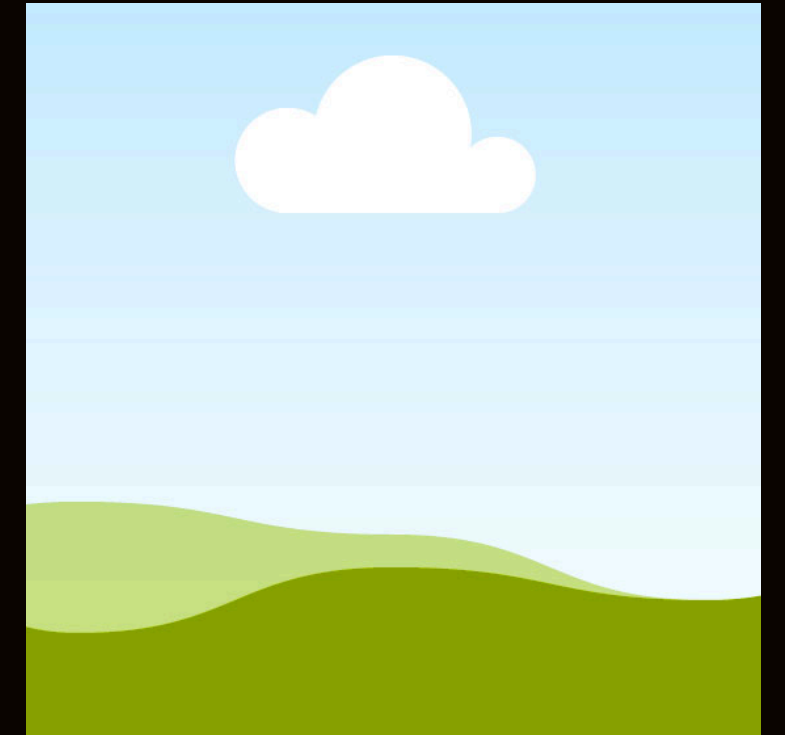
*21, Social Media Content Creator*



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# Burson, What Does This Mean For You?

qr code



Tone: friendly, inclusive, supportive – like an equal.

“Sustainable, not out of reach.  
Caring shouldn’t cost more.”

“Impulse buys happen. Let’s  
make sure the ones you do make  
feel a little better—for your closet  
and your conscience.”

“You want to support  
workers. So do we. That’s  
why every purchase supports  
fair labor without asking you  
to stretch your budget.”

# Primary Research

23, Pre-Med

24, Animal Science

25, Physics

21, Biochemistry

21, Advertising

21, Social Media Content Creator



# Brands That Get Us



Feels aspirational but is practical – known for fun collabs, inclusive sizing, and a vibe that's attainable.



Offers cruelty-free, ethical, trendy makeup at a very affordable price.



Leans into what Gen Z is actually watching and talking about, from mental health docs to dating shows. Real, unfiltered, and bingeable.