

SAME SH!(F)T, DIFFERENT AGE

A UK and US 2024 report
by FleishmanHillard's Retail,
Sports and Lifestyle's Culture Unit

Exploring generational shifts and misconceptions,
do things really come back full circle and what do
brands need to consider?



TALKING GENERATIONS IN 2024 — WHERE ARE WE AT?

We have been plagued by intergenerational divides and conflict for decades, with the media often exacerbating false narratives and negative stereotypes.

Older and younger generations are often portrayed as having little in common — or being at odds — especially when it comes to the workplace. The “OK Boomer” meme is an example of how Millennials and Gen Z have been pitted against an older cohort. But the reality is, that in many ways, these generations are more united than ever before and have far more in common than we realize.

Although we’ve seen some of the traditional narratives around older audiences being overhauled, there is still a lack of understanding when it comes to these hugely diverse groups. For example, many of those in their 50s — who are part of Gen X — may be enjoying the highest disposable income they’ve had for years, as their children leave home, they pay off their mortgage and potentially inherit too. As a result, many have money to spend — whether that’s on fashion, luxury brands, experiences or travel adventures. This cohort is keen to see creative comms that surprise and delight them, yet these needs simply aren’t being met.

* [LinkedIn \(2024\)](#)

1 IN 5*

Gen Z workers reported that they haven’t had a single direct conversation with someone over the age of 50 in their workplace in the last year.



THE TIDE IS TURNING FOR PEOPLE OVER 60



Culturally, we're seeing a huge shift. The rise of golden gap years coupled with how people in their 50s and 60s are now portrayed in popular culture.

E.g. Jennifer Coolidge, 62, has emerged as not only a gay icon but also as a brand spokesperson. Kylie Minogue's (56) "Padam Padam" became the unexpected anthem of Pride. Vogue even recreated its iconic cover of 30 years ago with the original supermodels. Older audiences are increasingly being recognized as a much more colorful and exciting subset.

We're seeing a mutual understanding between generations. Brands and businesses should do more to harness and nurture this interconnection.

BOOKENDING THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

When we look at creativity, it would be remiss to dismiss an audience that have not only created some of the biggest cultural movements, but have also continued to inspire subsequent generations. Creativity doesn't simply fall off a cliff when you hit 60 and it's not simply the sole right of the young either. Creative stalwarts such as Paul McCartney and Bruce Springsteen, David Hockney, Madonna, Kazuo Ishiguro, Margaret Atwood and Ridley Scott are driving the creative economy as much as younger creatives. The entertainment industry is flooded with inspiring people who are defying stereotypes: from Tom Cruise doing his own stunts and Pamela Anderson turning her back on beauty ideals to RuPaul, a pioneer of drag culture, once on the fringes, now a mainstream theme in entertainment and identity, adopted and reimaged by younger generations.

The UK's new Prime Minister turned 62 in September, and promises an "age of national renewal," and although he wasn't necessarily Gen Z's candidate of choice, there are high hopes that he can galvanize the country.

All of these examples got us thinking about what these people have in common. They've all managed to unite audiences despite differences, and what's clear is that we're seeing a mutual understanding between them, and brands and businesses should do more to harness this power.

Going one step further, we're seeing more and more evidence that generations are learning from each other, adopting the same behaviors and/or taking to new platforms in surprising territories.

CULTURE AND ENTERTAINMENT DOESN'T NOSE DIVE AT 60

Gaming levels up

As of April 2023, there were 52.4 million people in the U.S. aged 50 and over who play video games at least once a month, compared to 24% in the UK.

According to research by AARP, gamers over 50 cite gaming as beneficial to their lives, helping them have fun, relax, stay mentally sharp, and be challenged. In addition to family and online friends, children rank highest as gaming partners.

Communities such as Grand Dames, a group of older women who play a variety of video games and meet virtually once a month to record a livestream tea party for their collaborative channel, have generated a cult following who see their age not as a novelty but a feature of their identities. Grand Dames have their own merchandise, including branded teacups, and bring a huge amount of life experience to their content and aren't afraid to speak their minds.

Ageless style

With trends like "Cottagecore" and "Old Money Core," fashion has made its way back around to those of our grandparents. From sweater vests to long skirts and volumed hair, grandma-core never goes out of style.

And with TikTok trends reflecting on the nostalgia of the 2010s, from boy bands to crazy cut crease eye shadow, we too love to reflect on growing up. By embracing these trends, brands can connect emotionally with consumers, blending the past's timeless appeal with modern innovation.



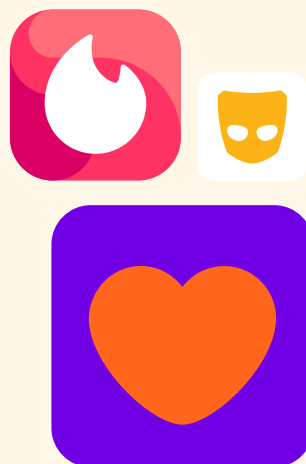
📍 Love & gender ideals are changing

Similar to young audiences being **celibate** and **pushing back on dating apps**, older cohorts are reevaluating their relationships and navigating dating life with limited success too.

Midlife couples are renegotiating their relationships, led by middle-aged women who feel that "after putting everyone else first for 25 years [because of raising children], this is my time." Perhaps fueled by this, update to divorce rates among the over 50s in the U.S. have doubled since 1990 and some expect them to triple by 2030. More positively, marriages amongst the over 65s are also on the rise, according to the UK Office of National Statistics.

- Senior sex is going mainstream with forward-thinking brands giving it as much consideration as younger generations. American brand Lion's Den's Valentine's 2021 campaign featured a real couple in their 50s alongside two younger couples, all explaining their fearlessness regarding experimenting with sex toys.
- Interestingly, this isn't limited to Western Gen X women though, as Korean women are making waves with the 4B movement, a radical feminist movement. Opting for shaven heads and no makeup, they have collectively chosen a life of celibacy and more.

- Some Gen Z women have championed "Tradwife," a 1950s lifestyle with outdated gender ideals, new discussions on what new feminism actually looks like, and what should and shouldn't be championed. However, this has been met with mixed responses.
- Influencers such as [Nara Smith](#) and [Alexia Delarosa](#) are currently dominating this conversation on TikTok, with Gen Z housewives supporting their decision by saying they are still working women.



Employers are now offering the same level of support to their older employees as they do to their younger staff.

Organizations eager to hold onto their experienced staff are responding to the challenge in a similar way to how they're supporting their Gen Z coworkers. While they may offer student loan assistance and mental-health support to appeal to Gen Z, employers are increasingly focusing benefits on midlife staff too — ranging from menopause support, eldercare assistance, health screenings and more.

Gap yah to golden gap years

Students are no longer the only ones taking gap years before they embark on their next phase of life.

There is a growing demographic of travelers aged 60-plus who are jetting off to see the world for months (or years) at a time. **New research** reveals a growing interest in serious travel following retirement, a trend referred to as the **"Golden Gap Year"** — a version of the pre-university staple of a year traveling for exploration and self-discovery.

Lifelong learning

When it comes to work, in the last 5 years, more than 1 in 10 people over age 50 have disappeared from the workforce as a result of being made redundant. Some choose not to return to work and for those over 50 who are currently employed, approximately 90% say they want a career change, and 59% are retraining for a new career.

Reentering the workforce after redundancy or finding work after deciding to change careers is incredibly challenging. However, there has been a steady increase in the number of mature students studying at universities and colleges across the UK — with the most popular courses being linked to sectors with the largest skills gaps including health and social care.

While it's vital for people in their 50s, 60s and beyond who want (or need) to keep working to keep their skills and behaviors up to date, employers need to flex too. For example, older workers may need or want to work part-time.

The [Harvard](#) Business Review confirms that “older employees bring a collaborative spirit to the workplace and enable organizations to benefit from the diversity of intergenerational teams — blending the energy of youth and the experience of age.”

And some are even taking to social media platforms to document their studying — for example, 79-year-old TikTok star, [@Grandmagreat](#) who went back to university after taking a 40-year break to work and raise her family.



90%

of those over 50 want a career change



You're never too old to party

Festivals are no longer the “scene” for Gen Zers, many of whom are shunning traditional drinking experiences. Today, more than one-third of people over the age of 50 go to more music festivals compared with when they were younger, a study has found.

Music lovers over 50 in the UK have caught the so-called “festival bug,” with data from Saga showing 39% over 50s had been to a music festival or rave, and 36% said they had been to more festivals since turning 50 than in their youth.



Healthcare gets frank

Publications like *The New York Times* have mentioned “generational trickle-up,” where Gen Z’s candidness about previously taboo topics such as period health is encouraging older generations to overcome their discomfort about hormonal changes and be more open about subjects like menopause. This radical honesty is also being embraced by older generations.

Menopause, a stigmatized and often ignored stage of life, is gaining fresh attention thanks to startups like [Plenapausa](#). The femtech company is the first in Brazil to address menopause care holistically — offering in-depth learning resources, support meetings, products and customized care journeys. With [92%](#) of women in the UK feeling unprepared for menopause, Plenapausa is a company that aims to start a more open conversation about the physical, mental and emotional symptoms that come with it, and we’re seeing more companies adopt similar strategies.

Loneliness is a shared experience

When it comes to loneliness and connectedness, it’s become too easy to think this is just something that affects older generations. The widely held belief is that younger generations are always connected, constantly on social media and through gaming. In fact, recent research suggests that Gen Z is more lonely and feels more disconnected than any other. The closest group? The over 65s. [Forbes](#) recently covered this along with many others, demonstrating that even loneliness is an experience these generations can [share](#).



92%

of women in the UK feel unprepared for menopause

Research by Tena (October 2022)

A GEN Z POINT OF VIEW

At our core we’re all humans who crave connection and look for it in different ways. Whether we find it through creative arts and craft hobbies, fun fashion or video games, we use these hobbies to nurture those connections. For myself personally, I’m a big vinyl collector and have used this hobby to bond with my grandparents over music. Gen Z also feel the pain of the cost-of-living crisis, the tricky ways of dating and the overwhelming loneliness of life at times. However, in those moments of difficulty, that is when we look to the over 60s and their life experiences. When society tells Gen Z to speed up, Gen X remind us to slow down. It’s no wonder we’re such hardcore advocates for healthy mental health practices — we got that tenacity from them! Brands should learn from those over 60, that life doesn’t stop when the retirement plan kicks in, but instead engage and encourage them to embrace their youthful spirits. That life doesn’t stop when the retirement plan kicks in, but instead

engage them to embrace their youthful spirits.

From golden year gap holidays to getting that degree later in life, they have shown Gen Z that life is limitless. In fact, I’m far more likely to buy a skincare product recommended by a Gen X woman because she is living proof that it works long term. Brands underestimate the trust we place in Gen X but we really do value everything they share with us.

Remember, it’s both Gen X and Gen Z’s first time at life. We still learn the same life lessons, love the same hobbies and want connection. Regardless of age, we all have that invisible string tying us together.



Roann Gutierrez
Junior Account Executive
Gen Z Retail, Sports and Lifestyle team

THE GEN X PERSPECTIVE

What keeps Gen X awake at night? Many are worried about their work: they are looking for promotion and development, and not sure if they will be able to get another job if they lose theirs. They are worried about housing — an increasing number are still renting, for example. And, of course, they are dealing with health concerns — from menopause to mental health challenges.

Caring responsibilities are still an issue — albeit, perhaps, for aging parents, rather than children.

Beyond these, the perennial stresses of making ends meet and navigating relationships with loved ones, family and friends haven’t gone away.

In short, the concerns of a typical Gen Xer, don’t look very different from those of younger generations. There really is more that unites us than divides us.



Ian Williams
Director in FH’s Financial Services team, and a member of its Experience group that focuses on older audiences

In conclusion

THE FUTURE OF COMMUNICATION IS INTERGENERATIONAL

Imagine if generations influenced each other's preferences and purchases, thanks to brands offering products and services that appeal to all ages. To stay competitive brands must bridge generations and nurture interconnection.



BRANDS SHOULD CHALLENGE THEMSELVES BY ASKING

What preconceived notions do they carry about the audience?

Who else fits into the category that they're not thinking about?

How does the audience's experience differ in society with the products or services the brand offers?

Need help with uniting social, cultural and generational shifts
in your brand communications?

Get in touch at thecultureunit@fleishman.com



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