# LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEDICINE

How understanding generational differences in comedic sensibilities can help connect your ads with the right people

An Ipsos Point of View

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Ipsos

## Almost everyone wants brands to be funny, but few think brands are getting it right.

Over the past few years, the entertainment landscape has evolved alongside the shifts in the political and social climate. People are hungering for lighter entertainment as we near an endemic state (as we found previously in our report on languishing). That sentiment has continued to rise in recent years as tensions have increased across multiple vectors.

Three in four (77%) participants in a recent Ipsos online community study* indicate that comedy is the most-watched entertainment genre, demonstrating a nearly universal appeal. But the *specifics* of sense of humor are highly personal—and often influenced by outside factors such as age, income level and political ideology.

It makes sense, then, that a sizable majority of people like it when brands use humor to connect with them. But people also feel that few brands are doing it right, making it crucial for brands to pay close attention to their target audience's tastes if they hope to be successful. Here's what brands need to know.

*Fresh Lab (Ipsos syndicated community), n = 603, fielded March 23, 2022 – March 28, 2022

## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Brands have a massive opportunity to connect with their target by using comedy, but almost none are currently doing so successfully

- The preferred comedic attributes vary by generation, with Millennials and Gen Z preferring dark humor more than others and Baby Boomers preferring political comedy

- "Big name" comedians still hold mass appeal, with some slight nuances in the strength of affinity by generation and some trends toward comedic content creators for younger demographics

- Political ideology has a strong connection to the role people expect comedians to play in the social landscape

- Generational cohort has a large influence on the channels they're using to source their comedy—81% of Gen Z get their comedy from TikTok

## 81% of consumers like when brands use humor, but only 28% say brands connect with their comedic sensibilities

People are clear about humor: brands should use it when communicating. And beyond the pure enjoyment of comedy in ads, about 80% indicate they would also see the brand in a more positive light if they partnered with their favorite comedic content producer. This is even more true for younger generations, as 90% of Gen Z and Millennials would perceive the brand more favorably.

But it's critical to get the tone right. Despite this openness and expectation surrounding the use of humor, community members cite few brands that deliver. Progressive's "Unbecoming Your Parents" and Allstate's "Mayhem" are some of the only examples that resonate across demographic divides.

In diving deeper, Millennials are particularly fond of Match.com's "Match Made in Hell" campaign, while Gen X appreciates FTX's Super Bowl commercial with Larry David. On the other hand, Gen Z sparked to the humor provided by Wendy's Twitter account and called out a recent Dunkin' At Home commercial with Rapunzel as resonating with them.

*People are clear about humor: brands should use it when communicating*

## People connect most with comedy that's clever, non-political or tells a story
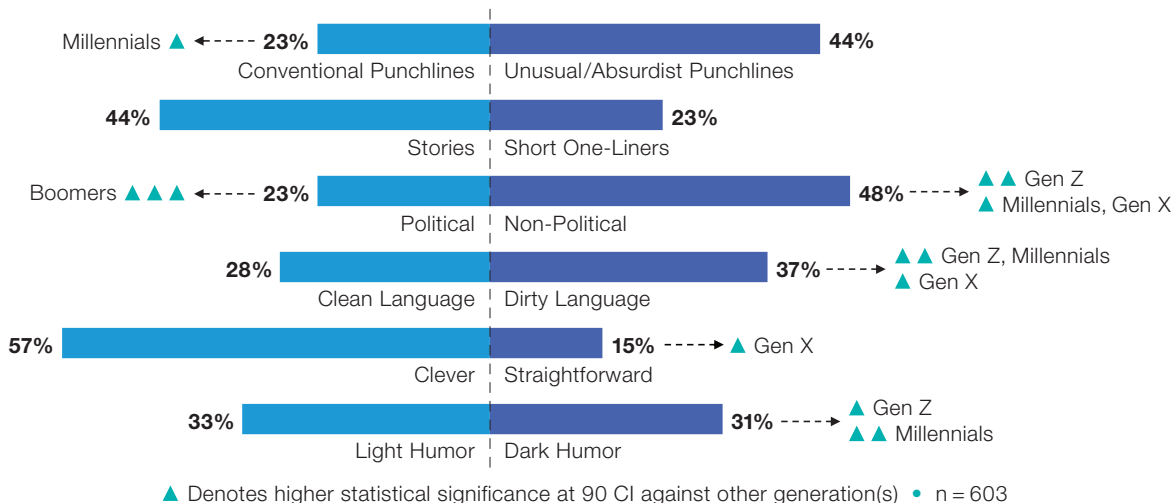
Preferences for unscripted comedy lean toward genres that are more commonly represented in movies, television spots and stand-up performances from some of the most popular names— Dave Chappelle, Kevin Hart and Amy Schumer topped the list, followed closely by Jerry Seinfeld, Robin Williams and Chris Rock (this study was conducted before the Oscars).

It's worth noting, however, that George Carlin holds a special place in the heart of Boomers and Gen Xers, while Eddie Murphy jumps out for Gen Z.

In looking at the comedians they favor, younger audiences tend to "share the wealth" and are inclined to highlight both big-name comedians (as showcased above) as well as comedic content creators from social media and the world of podcasting as their favorites. In this group, you'll find statistical significance in preference for names like Ali Wong and Aziz Ansari alongside Avery Monsen, Brittany Broski and Alex Cooper.

### What type of unscripted comedy do you identify with most?

Though they often agree with the majority, Millennials and Gen Z display stronger preferences for certain types of comedy, such as dark humor, while Boomers uniquely prefer political comedy. Gen X stands out for their preference in straightforward humor.

Millennials ▲ ◄ - - - - **23%** | **44%**
Conventional Punchlines | Unusual/Absurdist Punchlines

**44%** | **23%**
Stories | Short One-Liners

Boomers ▲▲▲ ◄ - - - - **23%** | **48%** - - - ► ▲▲ Gen Z / ▲ Millennials, Gen X
Political | Non-Political

**28%** | **37%** - - - ► ▲▲ Gen Z, Millennials / ▲ Gen X
Clean Language | Dirty Language

**57%** | **15%** - - - ► ▲ Gen X
Clever | Straightforward

**33%** | **31%** - - - ► ▲ Gen Z / ▲▲ Millennials
Light Humor | Dark Humor

▲ Denotes higher statistical significance at 90 CI against other generation(s)  •  n = 603

## 74% of respondents say comedians should be forgiven for past jokes

Beyond even age or gender, political ideology has the strongest influence on opinions related to comedy's place in the world. Those who self-identified as leaning left politically are more likely to agree with statements like "Comedians have a duty to prevent the spread of misinformation" (54%, 10 percentage points higher than the average) whereas those who identify as more right-leaning are likely to agree that "Cancel culture is a problem in comedy" (78%, 19 percentage points higher).

Similarly, those who lean left are more likely to agree with the idea that "Comedians have a responsibility to comment on social/political issues" (40%, 4 points higher than average). Meanwhile, those on the right agree more strongly with the idea that "Comedians should be forgiven for past jokes that are now seen as offensive" (84%, 10 points higher than average).

That isn't to say that demographic components have no impact—for example, men are statistically more likely to display a preference for comedy that "pushes the envelope or is borderline offensive" (72%, 10 percentage points higher than average) while less than 60% of women would say the same.

> *"TikToks and Facebook reels are the ones I use the most and they are well suited because you can scroll and watch and they make it easy to laugh at them when they are funny."*
> —Female, Gen Z

# How I feel when I have to scroll down to the year I was born:

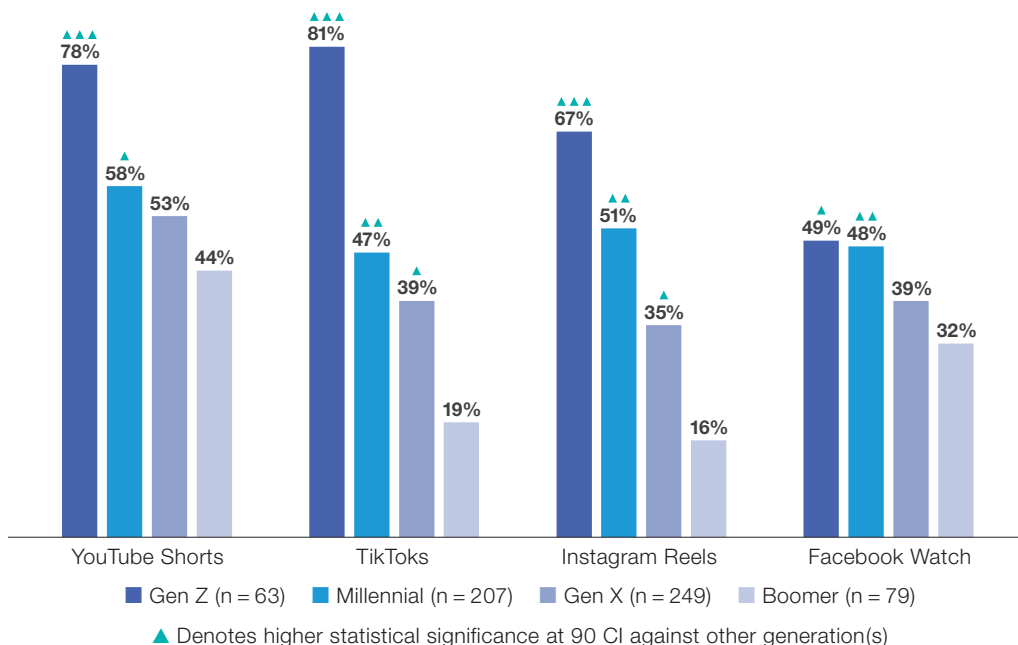# Young people say social media connects them to comedic content

While all age groups tap into video streaming platforms, younger groups often turn to social media such as YouTube, TikTok and Instagram for a quick laugh: especially Millennials (64%) and Gen Z (79%). They enjoy the platforms' reels (short and compelling snippets of content that automatically provide a continuous content feed), and value them for their ease of access, quick punch and authentic creativity that can be absent in more polished formats like the network television preferred by older generations.

These younger groups also express an affinity for memes that cleverly encapsulate a shared experience, feeling, or cultural event often in a dark or unexpected way, through the pairing of well-known images with short captions.

## Social media formats used by generation

Gen Z connects with comedy through social media more than other age cohorts and shows the strongest affinity toward TikTok.

**YouTube Shorts**
- ▲▲▲ 78%
- ▲ 58%
- 53%
- 44%

**TikToks**
- ▲▲▲ 81%
- ▲▲ 47%
- ▲ 39%
- 19%

**Instagram Reels**
- ▲▲▲ 67%
- ▲▲ 51%
- ▲ 35%
- 16%

**Facebook Watch**
- ▲ 49%
- ▲▲ 48%
- 39%
- 32%

■ Gen Z (n = 63)   ■ Millennial (n = 207)   ■ Gen X (n = 249)   ■ Boomer (n = 79)

▲ Denotes higher statistical significance at 90 CI against other generation(s)

**Popular among the young, these member-submitted memes provide a quick injection of levity on social media and often become their own form of short-hand responses in daily communication.**



me showing my mom
a funny meme

my mom:
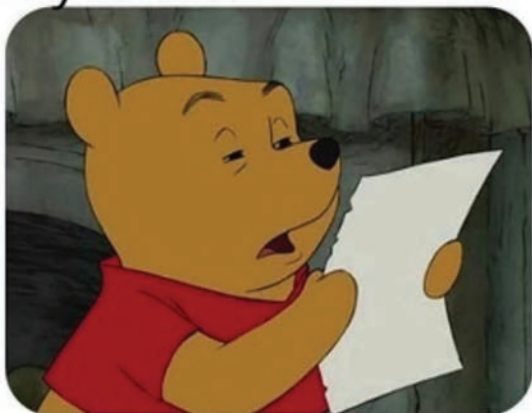


ME: I WANT TO TRAVEL
BANK ACCOUNT: WHERE? TO WORK?



WHEN PEOPLE ASK ME

HOW LIFE IS GOING



The therapy
dog after I
share all my
problems

*"[Memes] are simple and very varied. I love it because a single meme can have several interpretations."*
—Male, Gen Z

**NEXT STEPS:**

1. Brands cannot be all things to all people—those who try risk stumbling into a sticky spot and not reaching anyone

2. Don't be afraid to use different messages on different channels: If your audience is younger, tap into their desire for dark humor on TikTok but consider utilizing satire on Facebook Reels, where your older audience is likely to be found

3. Comedy has become politicized in recent years, but that doesn't mean it has to be deeply polarizing—if brands can target their audiences correctly, they can also leverage the appropriate humor

4. Diversify your comedic talent, both in the sense of demographic diversity and in the types of comedy represented

# Netflix: "Are You Still Watching?" Me:

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