

THE PANDEMIC MADE GEN Z GROW UP.

Here's how brands can help them thrive.

An Ipsos Point of View

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GAME CHANGERS



KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- After coming of age amidst stress and tumult, the oldest Gen Zers are entering their adult lives in search of an antidote to recent disorder.
- They are now looking to thoughtfully build out stable, balanced lives, with a sense of control.
- This shift in outlook creates new opportunities for brands to support Gen Zers on a path to financial stability and help them establish routines that meet their mental and physical needs.

Gen Z is at an inflection point as the oldest of this generation transition to adulthood. To learn more as this cohort enters a new stage, Ipsos generated insights about U.S. Gen Zers based on qualitative and quantitative input, including a 2-week discussion board with eight Gen Zers aged 20 to 24.

New objective: stability

This conversation represents a shift: In previous years, we heard more about [passion for causes](#) and [interest in non-traditional paths](#). Today, amidst inflation, 62% of Gen Zers agree that “things in my country are out of control right now,” according to the December 2022 Ipsos Inflation Essentials study—an indication that their tone today is more pragmatic and measured.

After coming of age amidst disruption, these Gen Zers are focused on mapping a path to a stable future. A 2022 Ipsos survey for [Bank of America Better Money Habits](#) found “when it comes to success at work and in life, Gen Z is driven by the desire to achieve financial peace of mind (74%);” with top priorities including further education (40%), and advancing career/salary (32%). As one qualitative respondent detailed his plan, “In 5 years, I want to be in HR. This would either be as a Learning and Development coordinator or an Onboarding Specialist. In 10 years, I would love to be an HR manager, in 15–20 a Director of HR. To get there I plan to do my own learning through mentorships, seminars, and getting extra certifications.” — Ipsos Gen Z respondent [Male, 24].

When it comes to finances, Gen Zers do not like feeling “at risk” with their money and 64% agree they “need to cut back on spending” (December 2022 Inflation Essentials tracker). Many have taken steps to become financially stable, starting savings accounts and/or tracking expenses. One panelist explains, “I don’t have a hard budget, but I am conscious of what I am spending on certain things. I try not to spend a ton of money and try to save when possible. I am not saving for anything in particular, just trying to be conscious of money.” [Female, 22]. While they do sometimes splurge, it can [lead to regret](#) for some. Our Gen Z panelists tell us they use online shopping as a tool to curb impulse buying, sticking to the list and/or leaving items in the cart for further consideration.

Growing up during a global pandemic has put [mental and physical health at the forefront](#) for Gen Zers. 8 in 10 of Gen Zers aged 16–24 (82%) feel they need to do more to look after their mental well-being, [according to the 2023 Ipsos Global Trends report](#)—on par with the average across all age groups of 80%.



In Search of a Healthy Balance

So how is Gen Z dealing with the challenges of mental health amid a pandemic and an economic crunch? Our participants are working on designing a schedule that leaves room for enjoyment and rest.

These Gen Zers manage stress in their own ways, spending time outdoors, and relaxing with video games and streaming services; they are 1.7 times more likely than the average adult to shop for in-home entertainment, and 1.6 times more likely to shop for out-of-home entertainment (Ipsos Essentials December 2022, past 2 weeks shopped). As one Ipsos Gen Z respondent explained, “To help my mental health [I] play video games, watch a favorite TV show of mine, or even clean. Getting something accomplished, even if it’s small, is typically very helpful” [Male, 24].

Connecting with others is a stress reliever; in the wake of COVID isolation, many Gen Zers put a premium on in-person interactions, cultivating hobbies or joining activities that give them a sense of connection. 41% of U.S. Gen Z adults socialized outside the home within the past week, compared to roughly a third of Millennials (Ipsos Global Trends 2023). One panelist explains, “After becoming a part of this community... I could go to any of my favorite places, run into at least one person I knew and share a friendly hello. There is a sense of inclusion in community that is comforting to have.” [Female, 22].

Self-care is another component: Listening to your body and trying to stay healthy makes you feel accomplished and satisfied. On the other hand, going on a diet and constantly monitoring activity levels feels stressful. As Ipsos Gen Z respondent [Female, 22] told us, “Taking care of myself by cooking my own meals, staying active, keeping up with skincare, etc. are things that make me feel good in my daily life.”

The desire for balance guides daily schedules, in a life stage where they have more freedom in their daily lives. Structuring days and weeks helps to maximize time, reduce stress, and achieve goals. “I rarely work late, and I try my best to maximize my “free time” by organizing and being productive with my work time. I also like to keep the two as distinct as possible so that I don’t worry about work during my free time.” —Ipsos Gen Z respondent [Male, 20].

Ipsos Behavioral Scientist Emily Powell, Ph.D., explains, “For both their current life stage and global context, Gen Z is dealing with uncertainty—lack of control in areas including career and health. [Compensatory control](#) theory explains that, rather than being upset about all of these things I can’t control, I’m going to take control in another domain. For example, I’m going to be super healthy and mindful in how I choose to eat. I’m going to have a daily routine to give me structure. All of that is giving people the comfort of being back in control.”



Through our analysis of social conversations via Ipsos' Synthesio platform, we observed that mental health conversations grew by 44% (H1 2021 vs H1 2022) while physical health conversations grew by only 10%. Mental health topics are particularly important among younger generations; Gen Z Twitter mentions are most correlated with "anxiety" and "depression" topics (vs. the 65+ age range, for example, whose mentions are more correlated with "health/medicine" (aka COVID vaccine mentions) and "loneliness/isolation").

Top conversation clusters in Gen Z wellness conversations (named by AI): "diet and food," "suffering from depression," "anxiety," and "take prescription medication." On social, Gen Z are the most vocal about their struggles with mental health and are destigmatizing conversations around topics like anxiety/depression medications. Other topic clusters include "isolation" and "social anxiety"—related to the aftereffects of COVID.

Social conversations reflect stressors



How brands can help

Brands can deeply understand Gen Zers' driving functional, social, and emotional needs in their categories using methods like Ipsos' Censydiam framework, and take action to support Gen Zers on their journey to adulthood.

- **Support their mental health.** Products and services from personal care to entertainment can provide escape, comfort, and help them to de-stress or filter out negativity.
- **Encourage them on the path to stability.** In the financial services, education, CPG and retail sectors, brands can give Gen Zers a sense of control over their finances—both daily and big picture. Brands should consider how to maximize value perceptions, including loyalty or discount programs.
- **Brands can help Gen Zers achieve balance and control** by supporting everyday lifestyle choices related to nutrition, exercise, and schedule management.
- **Help them connect.** Brands of all kinds can provide opportunities to connect with others, whether it's via a shared meaningful cause or via brand communities that meet up online or in person.



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