



Gen X – The OG Harbingers of Change in India

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This article is inspired by The Generation Myths and Demographic Realities thinking shared by Ipsos India recently at their client event Ipsos After Hours. It seeks to explore the dynamics and contributions of Generation X and builds a case of how brands could leverage the potential of this critical age cohort.

Introduction

Jagruti Desai is an advertising professional. She heads her agency and is among the leading lights of her industry. She draws an annual seven-figure salary. The family owns 3 cars, each not more than 3 years old. She takes at least 2 holidays each year to destinations in India and abroad; and multiple short-stay vacations as her time permits.

She likes to own the latest mobile phone with the latest productivity features, and price is not a constraint. She likes to be surrounded by technology whether it is her laptop, her television or gadgets in the kitchen. To her, technology is an enabler of simplicity, speed and convenience which allows her to spend quality time with her family. She participates in social media to the extent that it allows her to catch up on what is happening in the lives of friends and family. But she is not dependent on it for her identity.

Jagruti has made elaborate investments for when she and her husband retire. The objective is to naturally provide for her children but also to ensure that she and her husband can afford a similar lifestyle as today once they retire. At the same time, she does not hesitate to spend on things that she wants. She recently splurged her large bonus at Tanishq, buying jewellery she had been eyeing for a while.

The natural conclusion is that Jagruti Desai is a Millennial or perhaps even a Gen Zer. But wait,

Jagruti is 55 years old. She belongs to Gen X! Surprised? How can someone so old be so tech-friendly or have such a cool lifestyle? After all, she is the parent of a Gen Zer and those are supposed to be so boring and traditional!

But that is the crux of the matter. Gen X is often ignored as it has been overshadowed by the Millennials or Generation Y, who turned into a new millennium fueled by rapid technological advances and prosperity, and the more current Gen Z. If the Indian equivalent of the Baby Boomer Generation is referred to as the Silent Generation, then Gen X must surely be the Forgotten Generation. Even the Silent Generation has been vaunted in popular culture for its nation-building efforts, its sacrifices, and as upholders of Indian customs and traditions. But it can be strongly argued that Gen X were the original harbinger of the changed Indian society we see today.



So, What is Unique About Gen X?

Gen Xers like Jagruti have been witness to epochal changes in Indian society and economy.

- 1. Frugality vs. discretionary spending on self:** Gen Xers grew up in homes where frugality was the mantra and drilled into consumption and saving patterns. Yet, today, they have seamlessly transited to the consumption of premium luxuries. In that sense, this generation understands the true value-for-money equation – and that is not always about buying cheap. Premium goods and experiences can provide better value.
- 2. Shaking the tradition-bound core of India:** Gen Xers have driven many changes that we take for granted today – nuclear families, full-time career women, and mums, balancing the tightrope walk between family traditions with personal aspirations, joint decision-making in the household ... and many other such changes. They negotiated these changes by gently questioning the status quo rather than pulling away the rug from underneath the traditional way of doing things.
- 3. Living with nationalization as well as privatization and globalization:** This generation saw international brands like Coca-Cola and IBM being pulled out of India and making do with relatively sub-standard Indian brands but come the 1990s, they were expected to suddenly don more modern avatars – be it in their style of dressing, the foods they ate, the content they consumed or the brands they bought. And they negotiated

this transition with aplomb. Jagruti chuckles when she recalls the Indian khadi kurta-Levi's jeans-kolhapuri chappal attire that was her favourite at work. This generation was the first to define the Indo-Western fashion trend that is so prevalent today.

4. **From no-tech to high-tech and beyond** Jagruti thinks back to her early days as an Ad Executive. She laughingly recalls that her earliest presentations were done on flip charts and then acetates via overhead projectors. And how her family ran to her aunt's house to receive and make calls. PCs entered her workplace in the early 90s and laptops became more commonplace about a decade later. Ditto with mobile phones. She got her own laptop and mobile phone almost 15 years after starting work. Despite technology entering their lives when they were already in their 20s and 30s, Gen Xers like her have embraced it and are celebrating how their lives have been made life simpler and easier – whether it is online shopping, digital payments or even the potential of AI to reduce the need for mundane tasks at work.



In many ways, Gen X has paved a smoother path for future generations, like the Millennials, Gen Z and perhaps even Gen Alpha. Their nuanced respect for tradition while being progressive-minded has led this generation to be more accepting of challenging and pushing of social norms. They are more accepting of their children in live-in relationships and are even opening up to their children expressing more fluid gender identities. They have grown up with a spirit of rebellion (remember, the Angry Young Man trope gained currency in this generation) and are in a position to better understand the angst of the younger generations. They are more accepting of diverse views and perspectives and are probably helping to pour balm over troubled waters in these toxic times. Gen Xers will remain the eternal optimists – after all, they saw the darkest of times (riots

after Indira Gandhi's assassination and Babri Masjid demolition) and also the dawn of new hope post-liberalization of the Indian economy and the technological revolution. Their parents may not have had much by way of savings, but they are ensuring that their children will not be found wanting for the best education and access to opportunities, besides having a "worthy" lifestyle.

The Untapped Potential

Despite all these contributions, their experiences and where they are in their lives now, Gen X continues to remain ignored by brands and marketers. They represent an annual spending power in the range of 200 billion dollars and are by all means a highly attractive segment to focus on. They showcase resilience, have better mental and physical well-being, and are game for new experiences. They are optimistic and well-prepared for the future. And, they have the propensity to spend on a wide range of categories – fashion, home décor, durables, automobiles, holidays, personal care and beauty.



Ipsos Global Trends, 2023 clearly indicated the growth of trends such as nostalgia, authenticity and simplicity among Digital Indians which include people like Jagruti. There is an opportunity to leverage these trends when targeting Gen Xers. These dimensions bring a certain amount of balance that is so typical of this generation.

How Can Marketers Target Gen X?

Widening the target group definition to include Gen X is a good start. The essence of marketing efforts then is to strike the right balance for this generation – e.g. premium yet value-for-money (premium skincare which delivers guaranteed results), modern/technological yet nostalgic (Marshall Bluetooth speakers, vinyl, Caravaan Radio), balancing modernity with tradition (the NMACC is the most recent example that blends a top-class international experience with Indian traditions).

Gen Xers can also help brands promote greater inclusivity messages. Remember Arpita who was Arpit in the recent Starbucks ad? Her open-minded parents belong to Gen X. Ditto for the Share the Load Dad or the *Daag Achche Hain* mum. Remember the Red Label parents who walk into their son's apartment to see that he is in a live-in relationship? Those parents are Gen X too. Thus, brands could create a more powerful role for Gen X protagonists and age inclusivity. Challenging our biases about older generations is a key imperative here. What would also help is to bring on board Gen X perspectives for context as well as more inclusive thinking.

In the end, Gen X presents too much heft and opportunity to remain ignored by marketers. It is time to recognize the OG harbingers of change!

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