

# Ministering to Gen Z: Understanding and Engaging the Next Generation

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**GOD OUR  
PROVIDER**

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

CMCA 2026 SUMMIT | MAY 14 - 16, 2026 | WHEATON COLLEGE

**My GOAL:**  
Help you serve with  
greater effectiveness  
in the field to which  
you are called.



# Diversity Wheel

We are shaped  
by more than  
our age.



WHY DO YOU SAY 'HANG UP YOUR PHONE'?

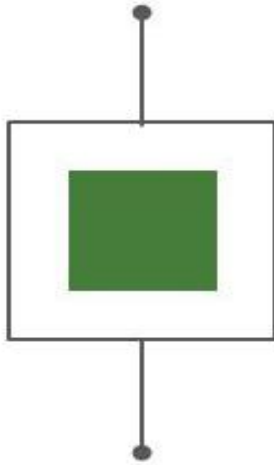


www.gocomics.com

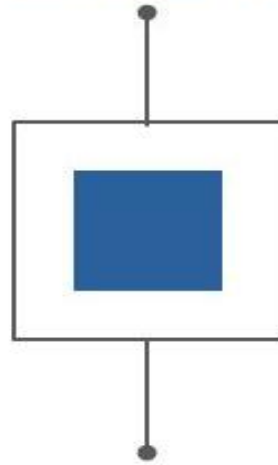
2020  
2023  
2025



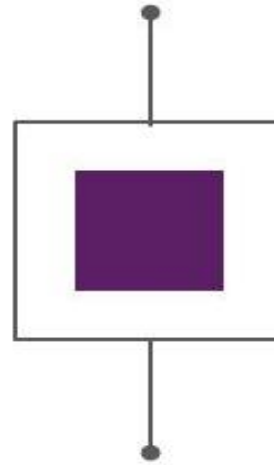
TRADITIONALISTS



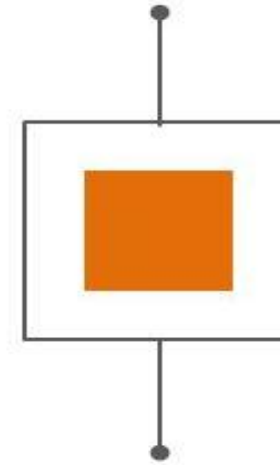
BABY  
BOOMERS



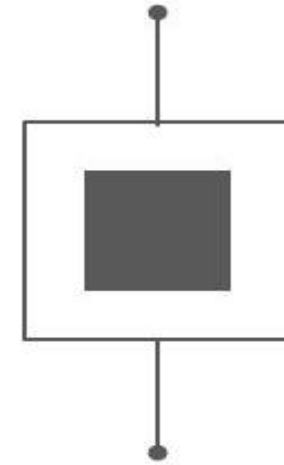
GEN XER



GEN YERS



GEN Z

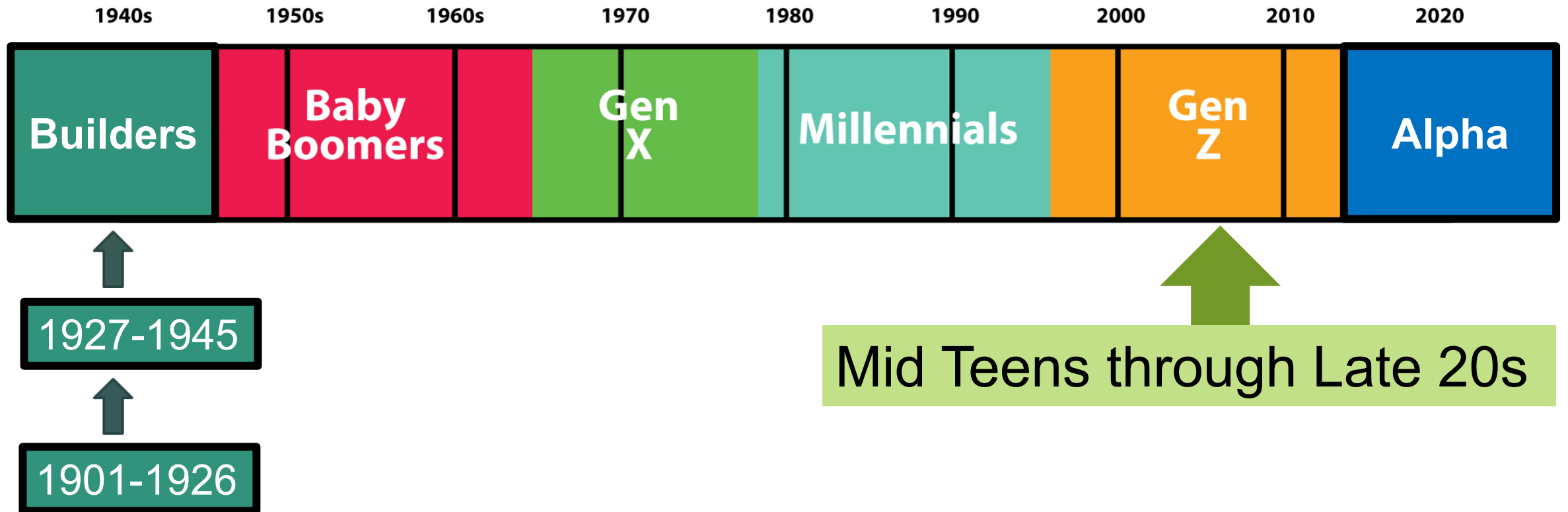


**Generational differences.**

Not good. Not bad.

Just different.

# Generation Groups



# Stereotype vs Generalization

- ▶ ~~Stereotype: Assuming all members of a group are the same without exception.~~
- ▶ Generalization: Making observations based on patterns of behavior.

# Generation Z Descriptors

- ▶ Self Learners
- ▶ Entrepreneurial
- ▶ Pragmatic
- ▶ Curious
- ▶ Individualistic

- ▶ Anxious
- ▶ Fearful
- ▶ Risk Averse
- ▶ Uncertain
- ▶ Isolated

# Key Topics

- **Connectedness with Others**
- **Life Strategies**
- **Fear and Mental Health**
- **Faith and Religion**

# 1. Connectedness with Others

- ▶ Fewer tribes. Fewer labels. Unique identities.
- ▶ Personal identity is often built independently of relationships, not in relationships.
- ▶ Spending more leisure time alone.
- ▶ Frequent Outcome? Minimal experience solving problems and dealing with inter-personal conflict.

# ACTIONS: Connectedness



- When you see a young person working hard, accomplishing a task, or doing well—let them know.
- Take every opportunity to offer *specific* praise and affirmation.
- Words are powerful (+/-) for Gen Z.

# ACTIONS: Connectedness



- Don't wait for them to reach out to you. Take the initiative.
- Model interpersonal connections.
- Gen Z wants face-to-face conversations.
- Learn about them by asking questions.

**“Three Before Me.”**



~~“They will come to me when  
they need help.”~~

**They might not.**

# Gen Z Speaks



“My encouragement to those in ministry is to provide spaces for my generation to wrestle through their questions and their faith. We want to look to you to help provide clarity, but we want you to listen first.”

**If you are willing to listen, Gen Z is willing and open to sharing personal struggles.**

# Listening



“The act of listening is inconvenient. It means slowing down or pausing. It is readjusting our brain, our emotions, and even our physical body to move into a posture of listening; listening in a way the young person in front of us feels heard...

...We must become still and listen. When we listen to Gen Z – really listen – we learn to see them. And when we see Gen Z, we can begin to identify where our knowledge intersects with their questions, experiences, and lives. We must start with them, not us.”

Young Life Relate Project (2025)

## 2. Life Skills

- ▶ Gen Z are often unfamiliar with social norms and expectations (“manners”).
- ▶ Generally poor planners. They often need assistance figuring out how to get from point “A” to point “B.”
- ▶ Delayed maturity due to the “Covid bubble.”
- ▶ Uncertain and fearful about their future.

# ACTIONS: Life Skills



- ▶ Provide rudimentary career planning.
- ▶ Provide examples of effective planning (how to get from “A” to “B”).
- ▶ View Gen Z as eager and willing learners.
- ▶ Set clear expectations for performance.
- ▶ Set high expectations, then help them build a ladder.

# 3. Fear and Mental Health

Generation Z is showing an increase in loneliness, depression, anxiety, self-injury, suicide attempts, and suicidal ideations.

*“Gen Z look happy online, but are on the verge of the most severe mental health crisis for young people in decades.”*

# Sources of Fear/Anxiety

Climate Change	Racial Violence
Active Shooters	Economic Uncertainty
Social Justice	COVID-19
Global Unrest	Sexual Harassment/Assault
Suicide Rates	Social Media Judgment
Political Discord	Employment Uncertainty

*Everything*

# ACTIONS: Fear/Anxiety



## **1. ASK, 2. LISTEN, 3. ASK (again)**

- ASK: What areas of your life are causing anxiety?
- ASK: What strategies do you use for working through that anxiety?
- ASK: What type of assistance would be most helpful to you right now?

# ACTIONS: Fear/Anxiety



- ▶ Collaboratively develop strategies for dealing with anxiety and adversity.
- ▶ Assure them that they are strong and resilient.
- ▶ **Model resilience, responsibility, and accountability.**

ACTIO

# RESILIENCE



- ▶ Help  
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adver
- ▶ When  
helpin  
strate

re·sil·ience | \ ri- 'zil-yən(t)s

"an ability to recover from or  
adjust easily to misfortune or  
change"

- Merriam-Webster Dictionary

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essors.

# ACTIONS: Fear/Anxiety



- Model the peace and hope that comes from a relationship with God.
- Many Gen Z are lonely, fearful, anxious, stressed, and struggling. Give them true hope.

*Behold, the eye  
of the Lord is on  
those who fear  
him, on those  
who hope in his  
steadfast love.*

**Psalm 33:18**

## 4. Faith and Religion

- ▶ Trust in religious institutions is generally low.
- ▶ Gen Z wants to see the gospel in action.
- ▶ Gen Z are hungry for more than what culture has to offer.
- ▶ Gen Z are curious and thoughtful. They want answers. They are searching for truth.

# Faith, cont.

- ▶ Gen Z is more likely than Millennials to question the relevance of orthodoxy and faith traditions.
- ▶ Most Gen Z are open spiritually, but skeptical of organized religion.
- ▶ Gen Z shows interest in faith situations that exemplify true worship, honest faith expression, and relevance (address cultural issues).

# Faith, cont.

- ▶ Religiously unaffiliated.
- ▶ Less likely to regularly attend religious services.
- ▶ Low Biblical literacy: As a generation, Gen Z possesses less knowledge about the Bible and religion than previous generations at the same age.

**Result?** They lack a clear and accurate understanding of who God is, who they are, and what their purpose in life is.

# ACTIONS: Faith and Religion



- Demonstrate how faith influences your daily actions, service to others, and overall life purpose.
- Avoid jargon. Clearly define common terms within the Christian tradition.
- Assume Gen Z is interested.
- Prioritize individual conversations/ministry over group activities.

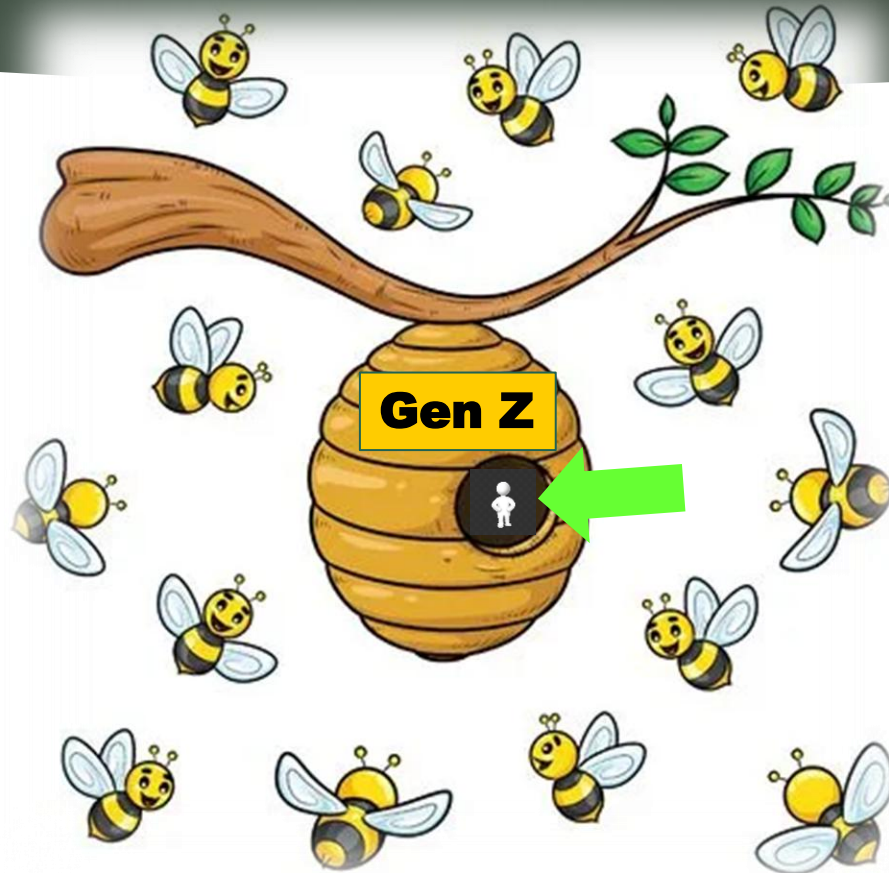
# ACTIONS: Faith and Religion



- ▶ Be intellectually vibrant. Be able to speak intelligently about topics of faith and culture.
- ▶ Demonstrate integrity and steadfast conviction combined with an openness for conversation.
- ▶ Weak suggestions or lukewarm commitment are not appealing to Generation Z.

# If Gen Z shows up at your gathering...

**Often by themselves**

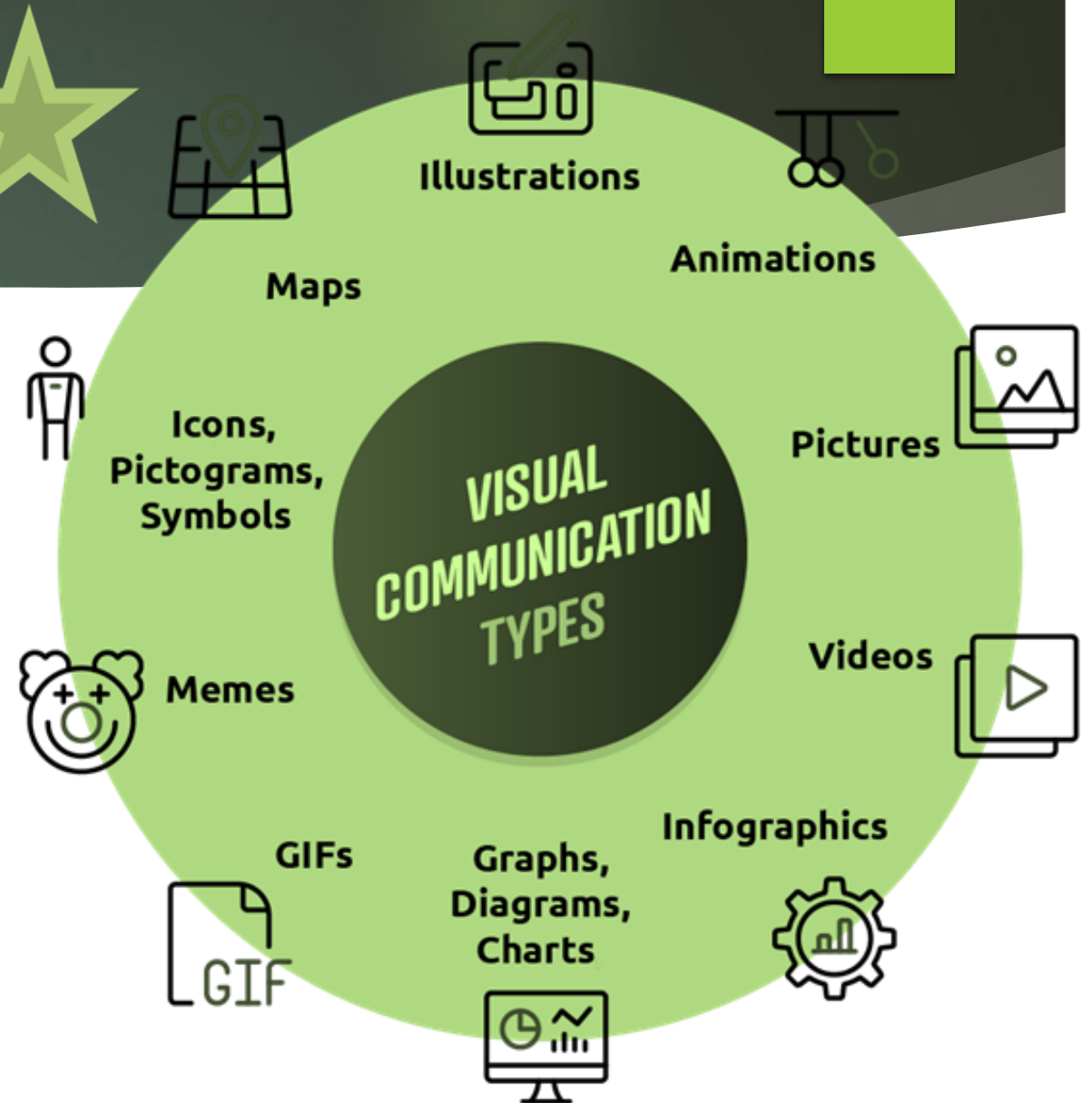


**Bee rigorously welcoming**

# ACTIONS: Media

## Gen Z are visual learners

- ✓ Reduce the amount of text.
- ✓ Increase the use of visuals.



# In Summary...

Generation Z needs you to understand:

- They are searching for something different than the culture in which they live;
- They want a safe place to ask questions about faith and orthodoxy;
- They will be quick to measure the level of care you have for them;

# In Summary... Generation Z needs you.

- Possess very little knowledge of the Bible;
- Uncertain about their future;
- Lonely, fearful, anxious, stressed, and struggling;
- Want to talk with you face to face;
- Searching for authentic truth and peace.

*Thank  
You!*

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# ACTIONS: Connectedness



- When you see a young person standing alone looking at their phone, ask “*Do you mind if I interrupt?*” or “*What are you working on?*”
- Their phone often acts as a security blanket - a shield from the awkwardness of being alone - and a way to avoid the discomfort of interacting with others.

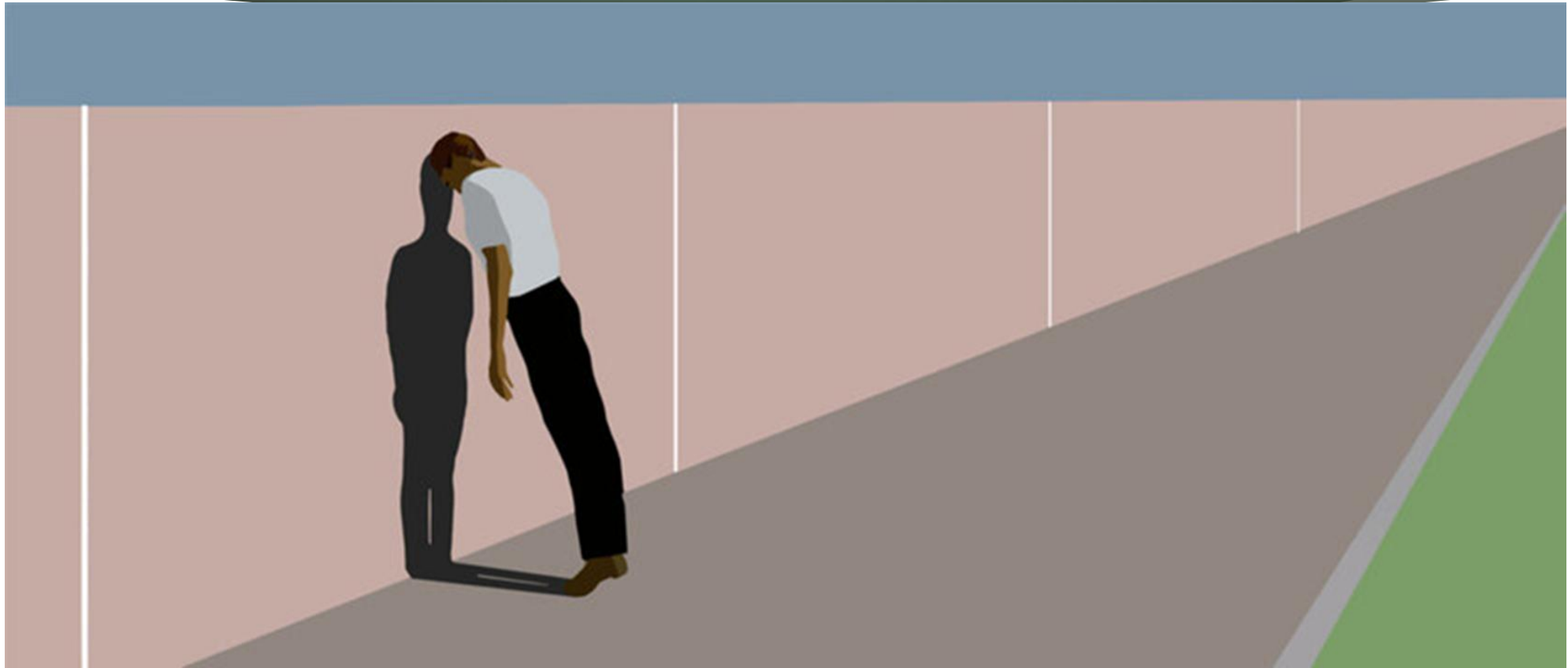
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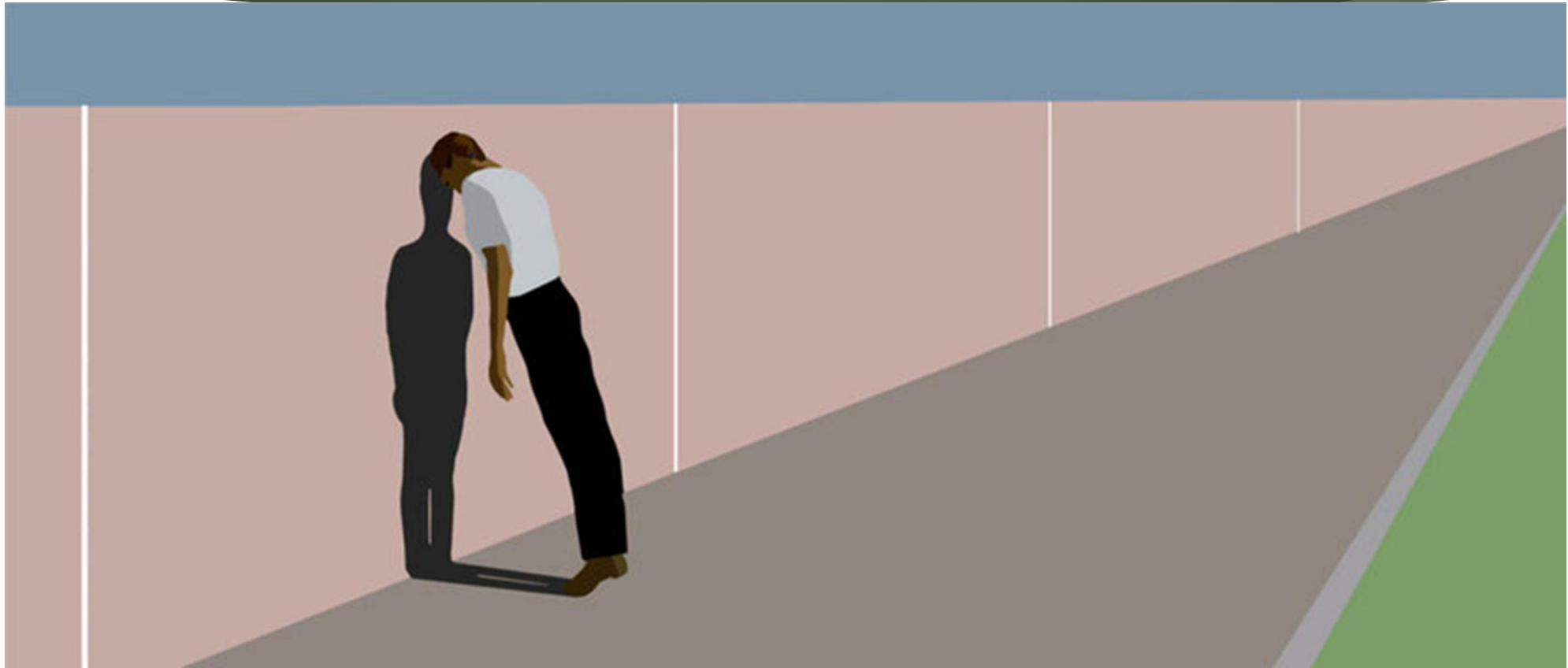
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Coming up... Strategies for Success!



# Roundtable Discussions



# Gen Z Characteristics that Might Complicate Relationships with Older Generations [Handout]

1. **Short attention span** – Gen Z struggles to stay focused on tasks for prolonged periods.
2. **Heavy reliance on technology** – Gen Z has faced very few challenges in which digital tools were limited or unavailable.
3. **Preference for instant results** – Gen Z may show impatience, low persistence, or inability to formulate a success strategy when working toward long-term objectives.

# Common Intergenerational Friction Points

- 4. Underdeveloped face-to-face communication skills –** Some Gen Z find it difficult to initiate interpersonal connections absent technology.
- 5. Willingness to share mental health strategies –** Many Gen Z view sharing personal mental health struggles as normal.
- 6. Unrealistic job expectations –** Gen Z may become disillusioned and disengaged when confronted with the demands of entry-level roles and the gradual nature of career advancement.

# Common Intergenerational Friction Points

- 7. Resistance to traditional work structures** – Gen Z tends to clash with rigid workplace hierarchies and inflexible processes.
- 8. High dependence on feedback** – Gen Z relies heavily on frequent reassurance and validation, leading to uncertainty or self-doubt when immediate feedback is unavailable.
- 9. Aversion to repetitive tasks** – Gen Z often struggles to stay engaged and motivated when assigned routine or monotonous responsibilities.

# Common Intergenerational Friction Points

- 10. Low resilience** – Gen Z frequently demonstrates lower levels of perseverance when facing setbacks, which may affect their ability to recover and grow from workplace adversity.
- 11. Limited financial literacy** – Many Gen Z possess underdeveloped skills in budgeting, saving, and investing, which can hinder long-term financial planning and stability.

# Common Intergenerational Friction Points

12. **Limited understanding of workplace etiquette** – Many Gen Z employees may lack exposure to professional norms related to attire, communication, privacy, and appropriate workplace behavior.
13. **Low workplace loyalty** – Many Gen Z view career planning and employment secondary to personal interests, making long-term commitment to a single job or career path unlikely or unappealing.

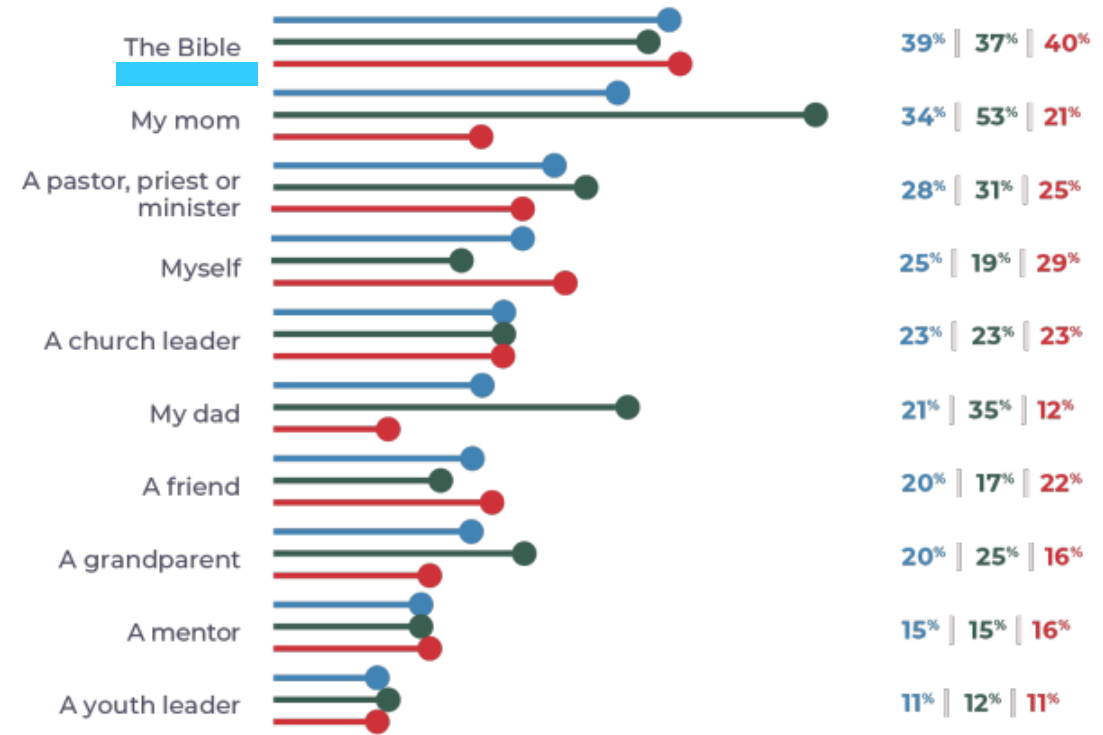


STATE OF THE CHURCH

**Top 10 Sources Gen Z Trust with Their Spiritual Questions**

If you had questions about your faith or spirituality, who or what would you consider a trustworthy source?

● All Gen Z ● Ages 13-17 ● Ages 18-24

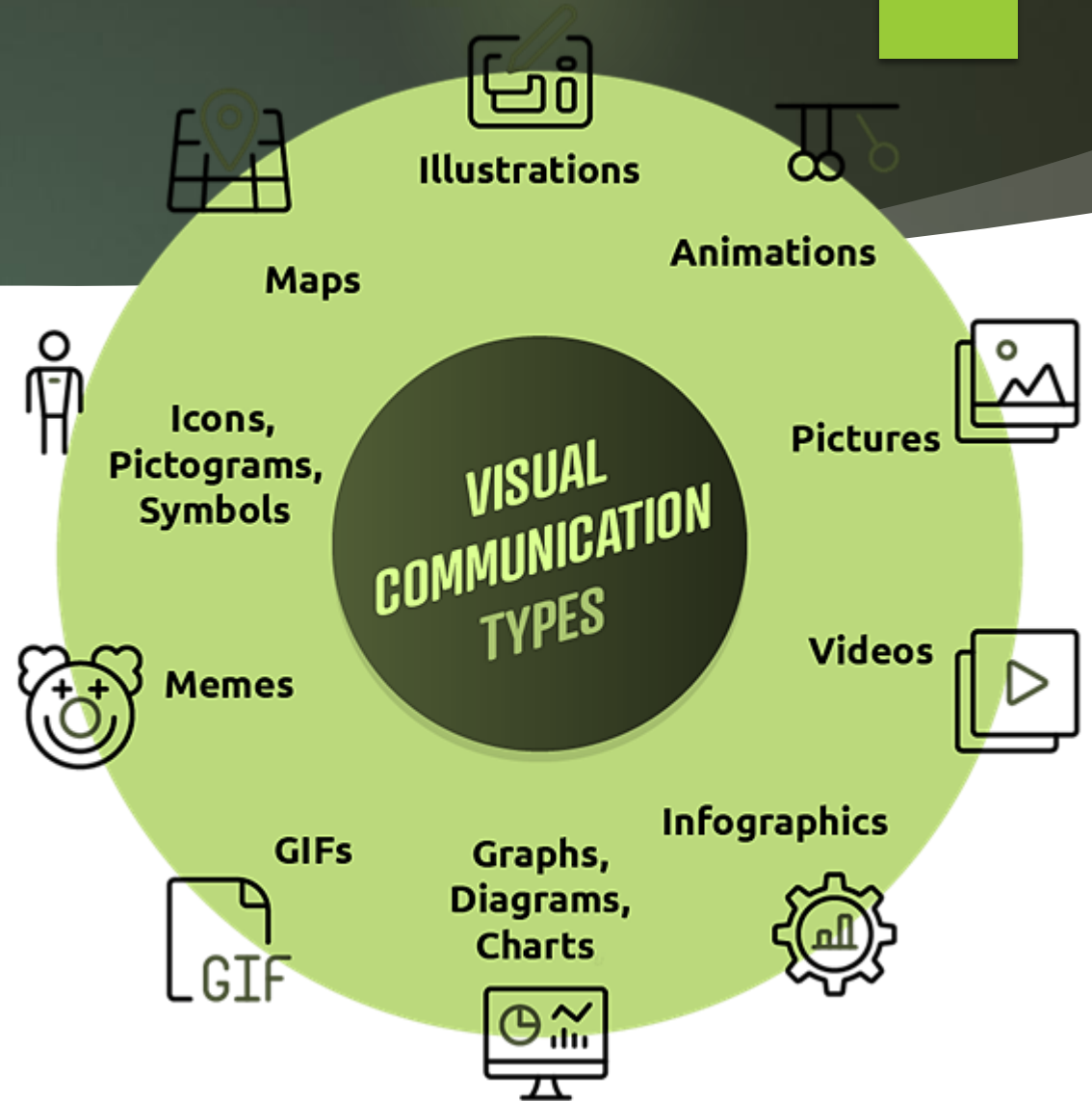


n=2,000 U.S. teens and young adults ages 13-24, August 23-30, 2023.

Who Gen Z Trusts With Their Spiritual Questions



# Gen Z Are Visual Consumers



# AI Companions

“AI companions ingratiate themselves with their human users by mirroring the user and not pushing back.”



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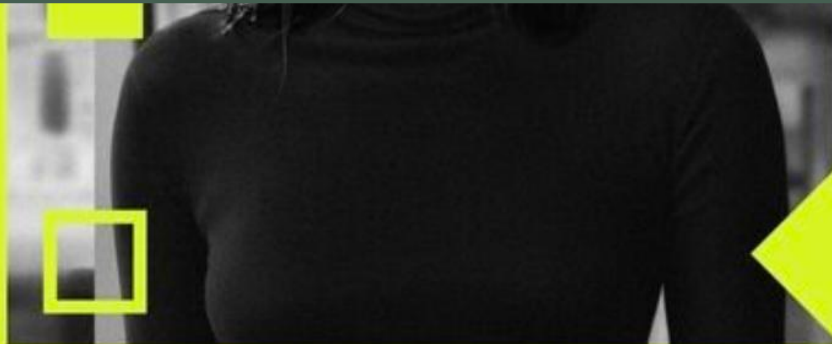


Photo illustration by The Verge / Photo by Replika

## marrying AI chatbots

The head of chatbot maker Replika discusses the role AI will play in the future of human relationships.

By Nilay Patel, editor-in-chief of The Verge, host of the **Decoder** podcast, and co-host of **The Vergecast**.

Aug 12, 2024 at 10:00 AM EDT

# Choose your plan and start chatting

Provide Email, then...



1 week

~~\$19.80~~ \$9.90

~~\$2.82~~

\$1.41  
per day



1 month

~~\$39.50~~ \$19.75

Popular

~~\$1.31~~

\$0.65  
per day



1 year

~~\$139.26~~ \$69.63

~~\$0.38~~

\$0.19  
per day

Get my plan

You will be automatically charged \$19.75 after the payment confirmation. The subscription will then be auto-renewed monthly after a 1-month intro offer at the full price of \$39.50. Payments are charged in USD, excluding taxes. To learn more, visit our [Terms of Use](#) or contact us at [help.replika.com](mailto:help.replika.com)

# Gen Z Speaks About the Church

“Many church services are so crammed with programming that there’s no room to think, breathe, pray, reflect, or find God ... It’s just a wall of noise.”

# Gen Z Speaks About the Church

“Traditionally, questioning anything from the Church is stigmatized as questioning authority, so we often resort to outside sources like news outlets, social media, and friends for answers.”

“We just wish the Church understood our generation better and allowed us to wrestle through our cultural worldview within a faith framework.”

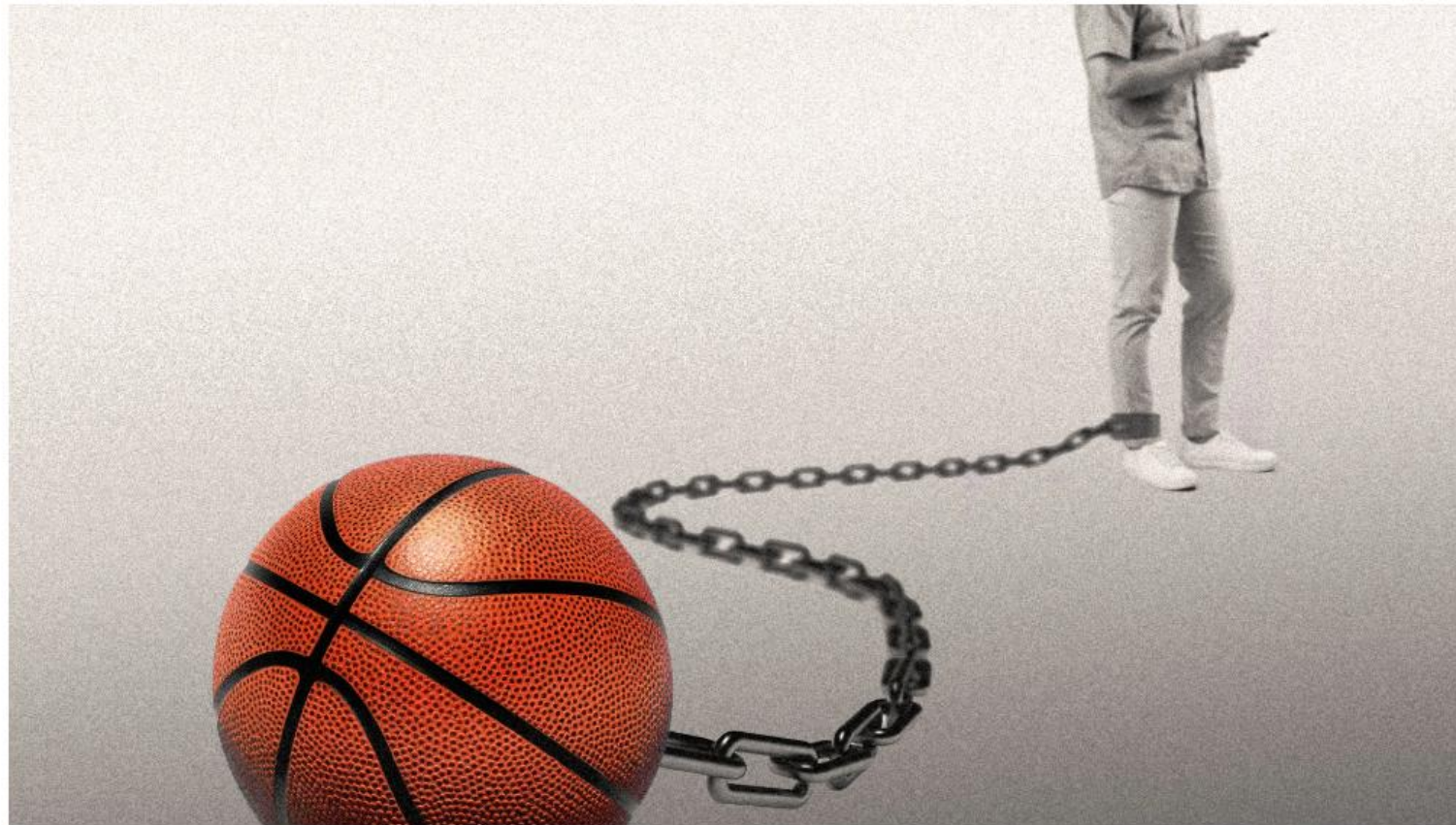
Social  
Online



03-17-2025 | NEWS

## March Madness highlights Gen Z's skyrocketing sports betting addiction

As March Madness begins, a new study reveals the staggering financial, mental, and relationship consequences of sports betting.



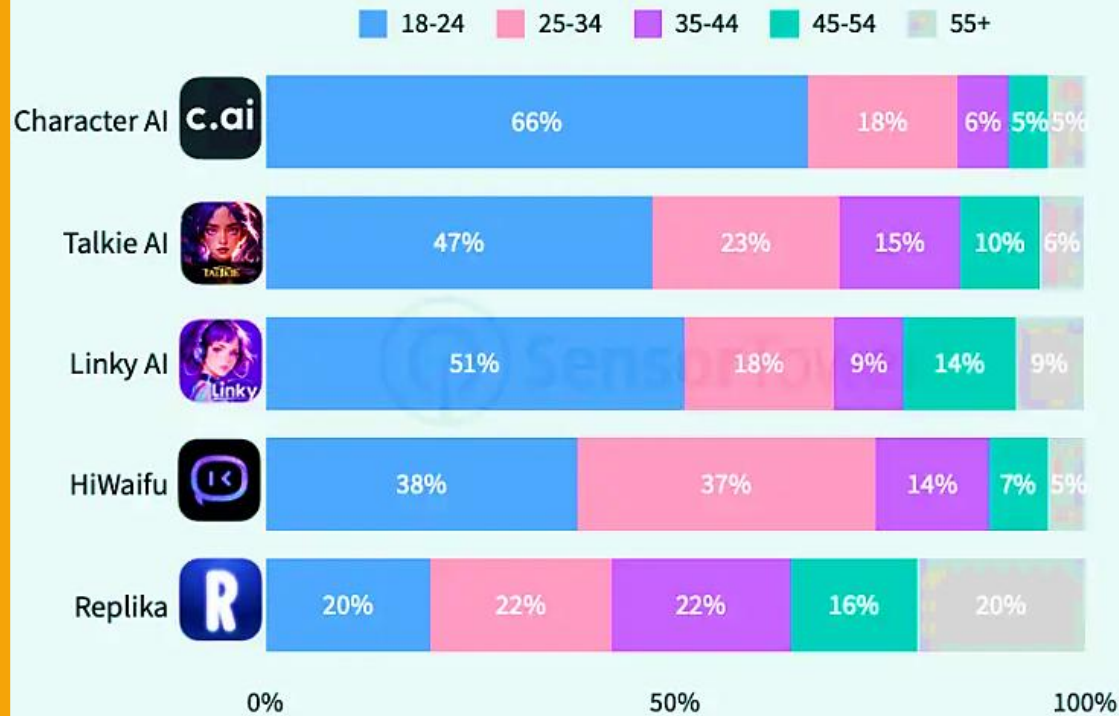
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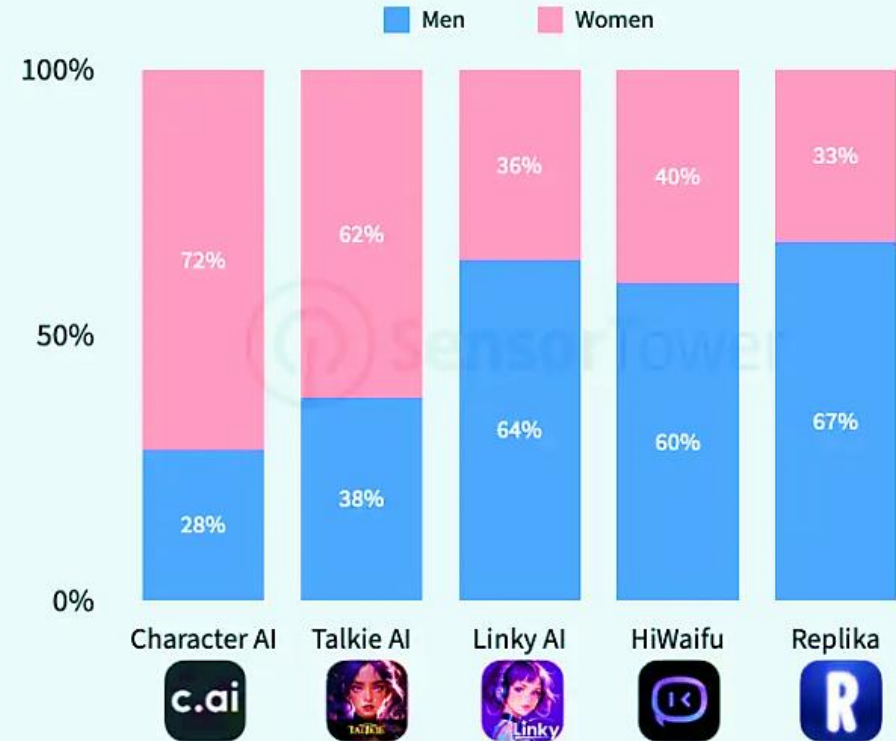
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# AI Companions

Age Distribution of Users for Top Companion AI Apps in the U.S. Market, Q2 2024



Gender Distribution of Users for Top Companion AI Apps in the U.S. Market, Q2 2024



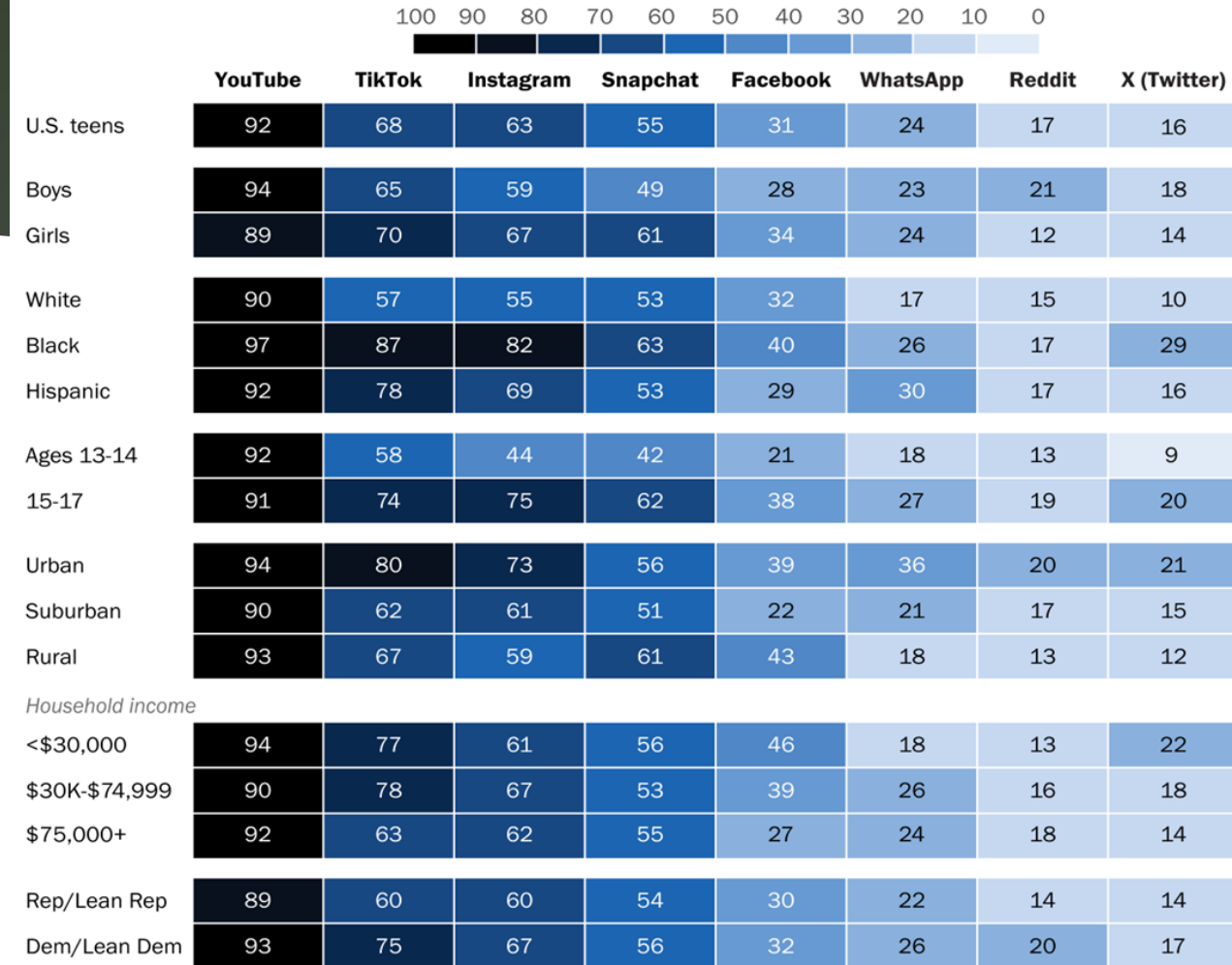
# In case you were wondering...the **COVID Pandemic** didn't help.

- ▶ Delayed maturation.
- ▶ Decline in literacy skills.
- ▶ Decline in critical thinking skills.
- ▶ Decline in stress management skills.
- ▶ Decline in decision-making skills.
- ▶ Chronic absenteeism.
- ▶ Increased levels of anxiety and stress.



## Teen use of some online platforms varies by age, race and ethnicity, and gender

% of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 who say they ever use the following apps or sites



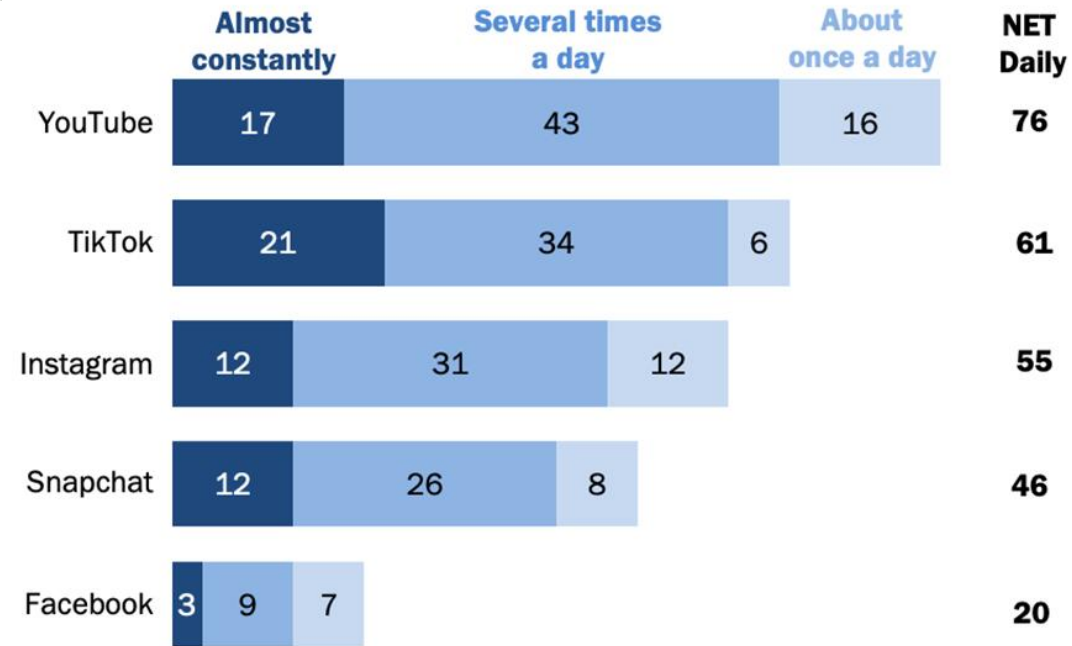
Note: Not all numerical differences between groups shown are statistically significant. White and Black teens include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanic teens are of any race. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. teens conducted Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2025.

"Teens, Social Media and AI Chatbots 2025"

## Most teens visit YouTube and TikTok daily, including about 1 in 5 who say they do almost constantly

*% of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 who say they visit or use the following apps or sites ...*



Note: Figures may not add up to NET values due to rounding. Those who did not give an answer or gave other responses are not shown.

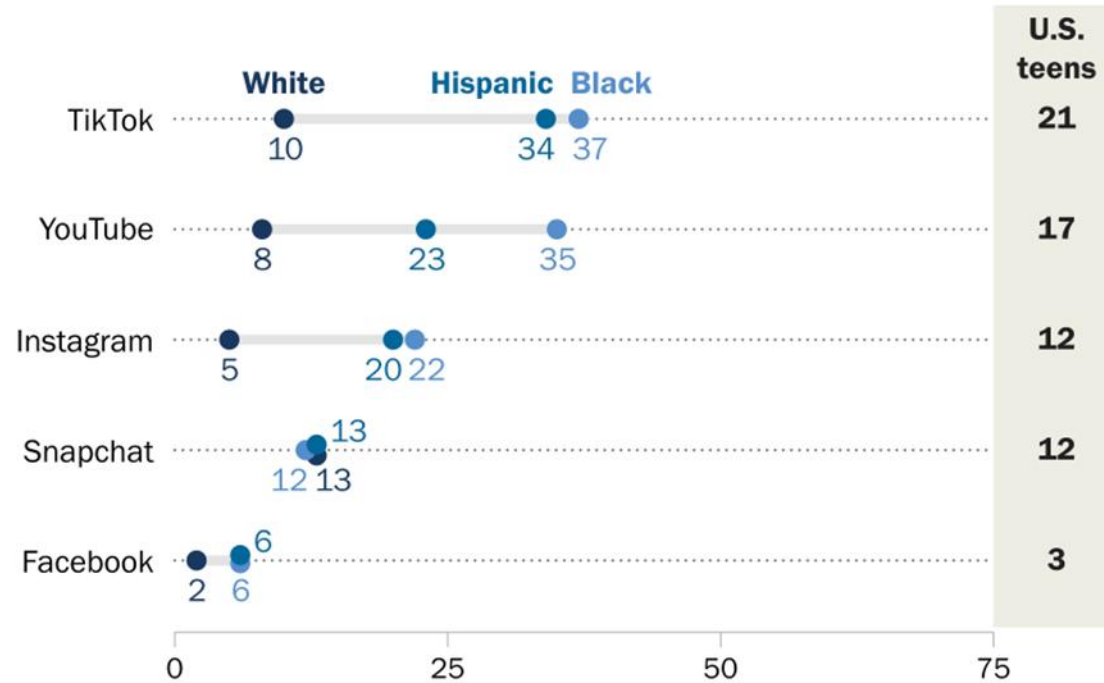
Source: Survey of U.S. teens conducted Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2025.

"Teens, Social Media and AI Chatbots 2025"

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

## Black and Hispanic teens are far more likely than White teens to say they use TikTok, YouTube and Instagram almost constantly

% of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 who say they visit or use each of the following apps or sites *almost constantly*



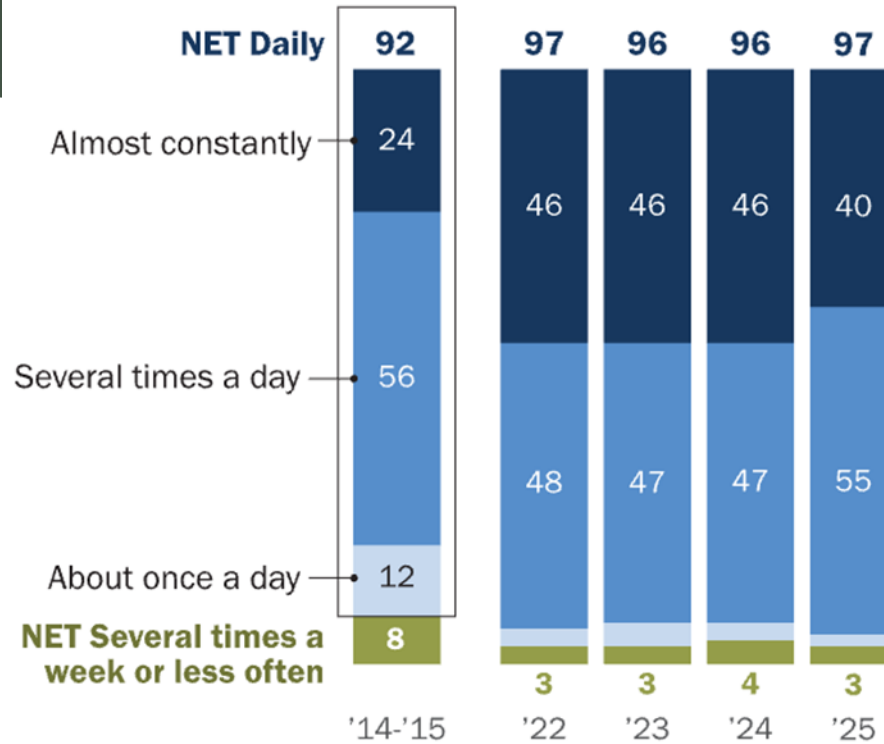
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Source: Survey of U.S. teens conducted Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2025.

"Teens, Social Media and AI Chatbots 2025"

## 4 in 10 teens say they're online 'almost constantly,' up from 24% a decade ago

% of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 who say they use the internet ...



Note: Figures may not add up to NET values due to rounding. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

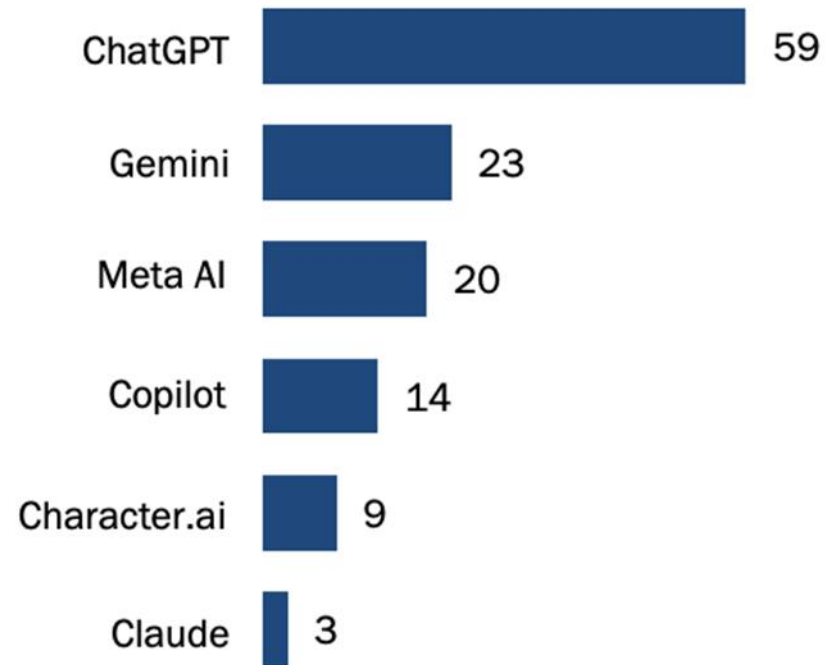
Source: Survey of U.S. teens conducted Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2025.

"Teens, Social Media and AI Chatbots"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## ChatGPT by far tops the list as the most widely used AI chatbot among teens

*% of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 who say they ever use the following artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots*



Note: Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. teens conducted Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2025.

"Teens, Social Media and AI Chatbots 2025"

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**



# 1. Connectedness with Media

Many in Generation Z:

- Spend an average of 4-6 hours a day online.
- Switch between tasks on their electronic device every three to five seconds.
- Have a short attention span.

# The Difference



# Connectedness (Media)

- ▶ Gen Z spends very little time on websites.
- ▶ Gen Z is online, but is not typically reading.
- ▶ Eye tracking research.
- ▶ What are they doing online?
  - ▶ Watching short-form videos



# Connectedness (Media)

- ▶ Online media use exceeds traditional media consumption (print, radio, linear television).
- ▶ Primary information source for everything?
- ▶ Tik Tok is the new Google.
- ▶ Tik Tok is their source for all news.

**Social Media**

# US Adults' Social Platform Use, by Demographic Group



% of US adults who use:	YouTube	Facebook	Instagram	TikTok	Snapchat	X (Twitter)	Threads	Bluesky	Truth Social
Total	84%	71%	71%	71%	25%	21%	8%	4%	3%
Men	86%	71%	71%	71%	22%	25%	8%	4%	4%
Women	83%	71%	71%	71%	28%	16%	9%	3%	3%
White	83%	71%	71%	71%	24%	18%	6%	4%	4%
Black	85%	71%	71%	71%	29%	26%	18%	2%	2%
Hispanic	88%	71%	71%	71%	31%	23%	10%	4%	2%
Asian*	92%	71%	71%	71%	19%	32%	12%	3%	6%
Ages 18-29	95%	71%	71%	71%	58%	33%	15%	6%	1%
Ages 30-49	92%	71%	71%	71%	31%	25%	10%	5%	3%
Ages 50-64	85%	71%	71%	71%	18%	18%	8%	4%	5%
Ages 65+	64%	71%	71%	71%	11%	11%	5%	3%	4%
HHI: <\$30k	77%	71%	71%	71%	18%	18%	8%	3%	3%
HHI: \$30-70K	84%	71%	71%	71%	20%	20%	9%	3%	3%
HHI: \$70-100k	87%	71%	71%	71%	20%	20%	9%	4%	4%
HHI: \$75k+	89%	71%	71%	71%	20%	20%	9%	4%	4%
High school or less	78%	71%	71%	71%	18%	18%	8%	3%	3%
Some college	87%	71%	71%	71%	20%	20%	9%	5%	5%
College+	89%	71%	71%	71%	20%	20%	9%	5%	5%
Urban	85%	71%	71%	71%	20%	20%	11%	4%	2%
Suburban	87%	71%	71%	71%	20%	22%	9%	5%	4%
Rural	79%	71%	71%	71%	18%	17%	4%	2%	4%



1. YouTube
2. Instagram
3. TikTok

Published by MarketingCharts.com in 2025 | Data Source: Pew Research Center

Based on a February-June 2025 survey of 5,022 US adults (18+) | \*Representative of English speakers only

# ACTIONS: Connectedness (Media)

- ▶ Create a mobile-friendly version of your website.
  - ▶ Gen Z will search for you on their phone.
- ▶ Know the social media preferences of your target market.
- ▶ If you have a contact form embedded in your media, check it (at least) three times a day.

# One Source of Anxiety



“Growing up slowly, raised to value safety...they have to come to adolescence in a time when their primary social activity is staring at a small rectangular screen that can like them or reject them...”



“We’re fully aware of the mental health crisis, and that being on social media all day doesn’t help, but our phones are too good to give up. The rewards of the internet outweigh the risks for us.”

“Every day on social media it’s like you have to wake up and put on a mask and try to be somebody else instead of being yourself and you can’t ever be happy.”



# Important Perspective

## Gen Z Needs Your Influence

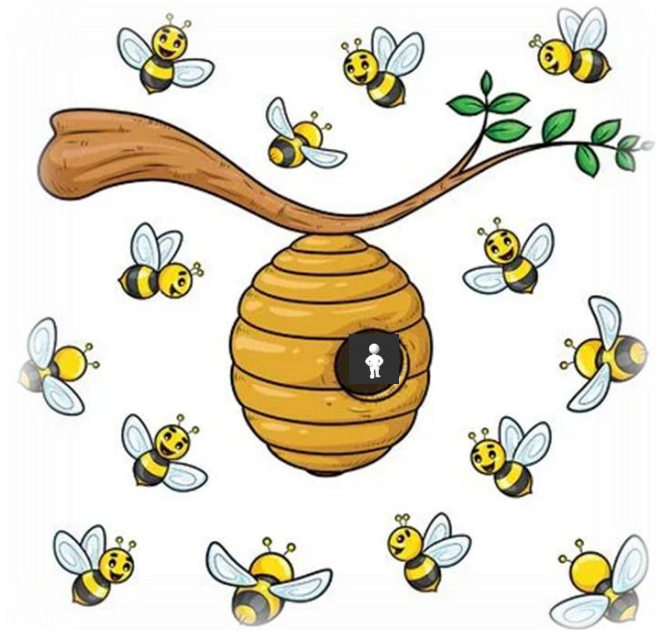


# When Gen Z Shows Up...

Everyone should be prepared to engage young visitors.

Leave seating open at the back of the room.

Explain the familiar: Bible readings page numbers, what book to use, what to do when praying, etc.



# Gen Z Speaks.

“One of the biggest gifts you can give us is a safe place to ask questions, express doubts, and process what we interact with every day, because our life experience is being shaped by culture, social media, and Netflix.”

In case you were wondering...

Chaplain

“If I saw my ~~pastor~~ dancing on TikTok tomorrow, I would be concerned and embarrassed...

**...We don't need you to be like us, we just need you to like us.”**

# Ministry and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

INVESTMENTS   PLANNING   RESOURCES   TUTORIALS   CAREERS   🔍

