

Taking a generational approach to brand purpose effectiveness

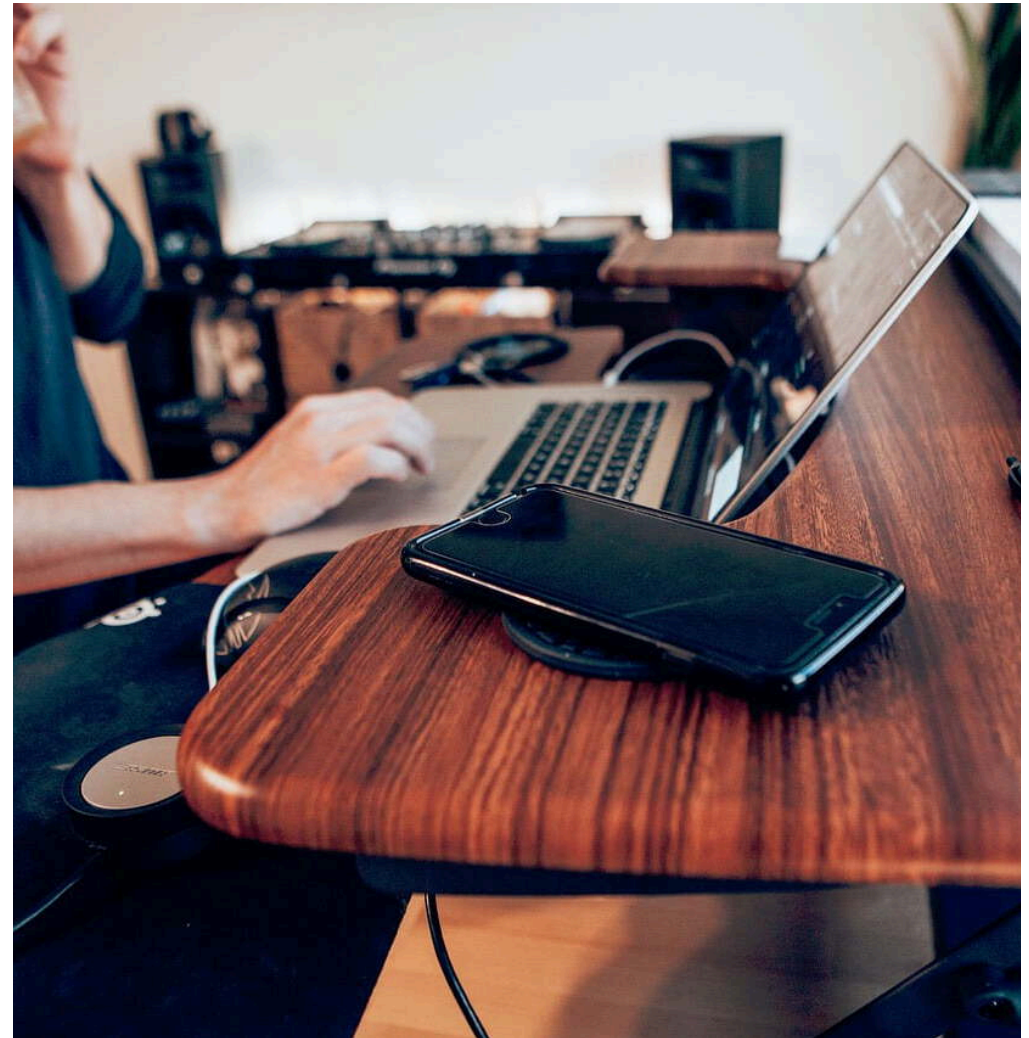
Tailoring cause messaging
and campaigns to today's
key age groups

The purpose/generation continuum

The word is out to marketers everywhere – today's consumers expect more from brands than pretty packages and smart slogans. In the past two years, concerns that might have seemed distant to many Americans have leapt to center stage. From social justice to climate change to the pandemic, these priorities demand immediate attention and action, and for-profit brands no longer get a pass when it comes to compassion.

How consumers react to these issues – and how they want brands to respond – often varies dramatically by a host of factors, from gender to region to income group. But one of the strongest influences is generation; shared experiences across a lifetime, combined with the needs and perspectives of different life stages, make generations a powerful lens for understanding consumers and their feelings about causes.

While Millennials and Generation Z generally get credit for being the most socially aware generations today, brands seem to just be scratching the surface when it comes to targeting their purpose-driven efforts. Are cause-related brand messages resonating equally with different age groups? Do responses vary depending on the product or category? And do certain causes connect with Baby Boomers versus Gen X versus other generations?



Making sense of purpose effects



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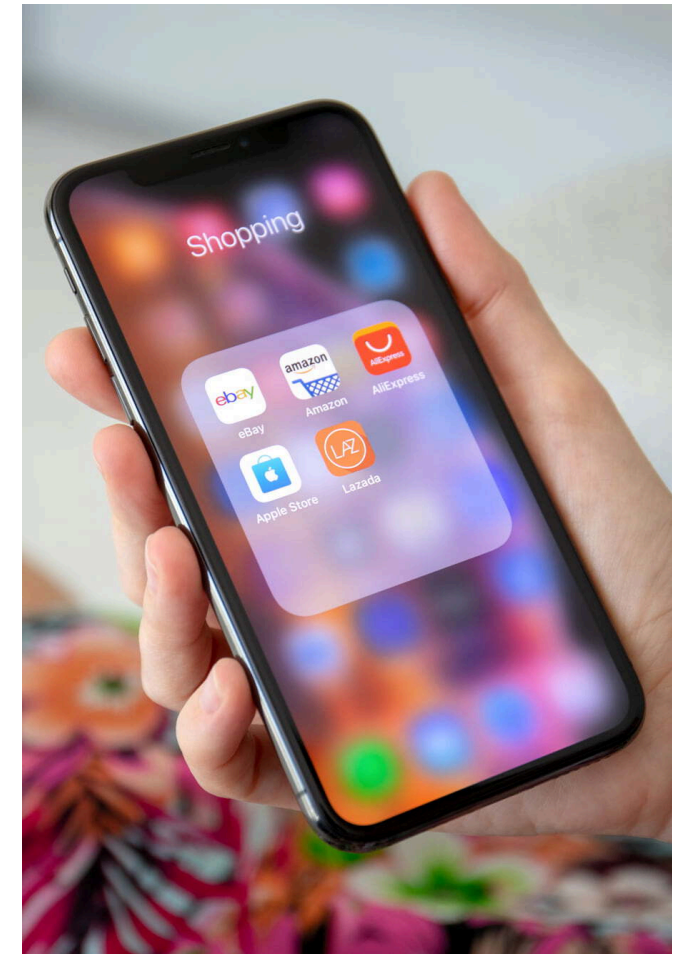
To begin to understand these complex questions, GfK created The Purpose Impact Monitor, an ongoing research program to determine the real-world effects of cause-related marketing. Our first study – conducted in partnership with Thomas Kolster and Goodvertising Agency – focuses on 20 purpose-themed ads by a variety of major brands, from Toyota to Dove to TOMS. Using GfK's Ad Fit Optimizer (AFO) system, we defined each spot's ability to Fascinate, Imprint, and Trigger viewers, as well as capturing a range of practical and emotional brand affinity metrics.

The notion of transformational purpose ads was first advanced by our partner Thomas Kolster in his book *The Hero Trap*; there he asserts that purpose marketing has already grown predictable, and that brands need to shake up their purpose strategies and creatives to have any kind of impact today. Transformational approaches can deliver this innovative punch to cause campaigns.

The ads we studied fell into two broad categories:

- **traditional purpose ads** – those that focus on the brand's own beliefs and achievements, and
- **transformational purpose ads** – a newer breed that celebrates what consumers have done or can do, with less emphasis on the brand itself

In May, we released top-line results from the first Purpose Impact Monitor study – but a deeper dive into that data has shed light on sometimes-surprising learnings about generational and other effects. It turns out that the generations sometimes have dramatically different reactions to purpose-driven advertising, which is essential intelligence for marketers. A few specific ads also tend to perform above average across generations; once an aspect draws viewers in, they simply get more out of these ads.



Takeaway

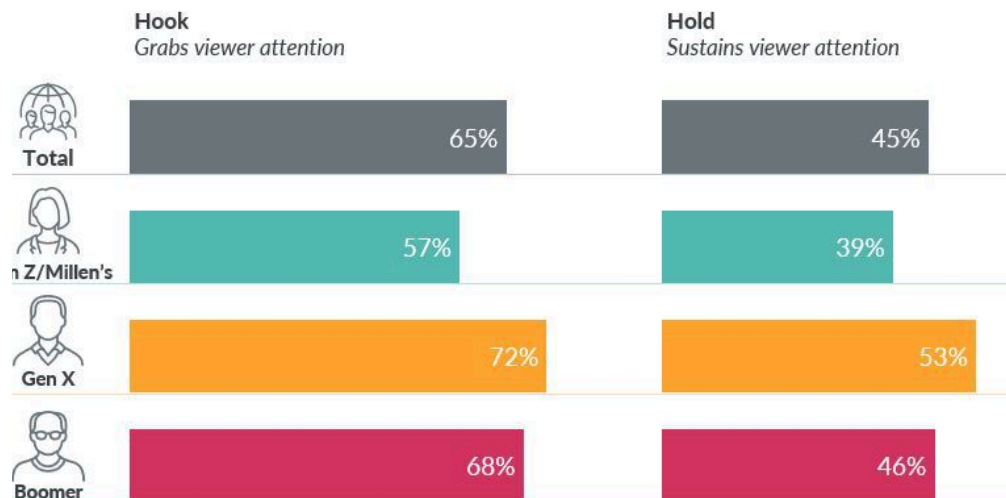
Remember the difference between
getting noticed and inspiring action



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Our research shows that Generation X (ages 41 to 60) is most likely to notice and then continue watching a purpose ad – followed closely by Baby Boomers (ages 61 and above). (See Table 1.) Generation Z (18 to 24) and Millennials (25 to 40) scored much lower on these basic metrics of attention to the ads.

Table 1. Hook and hold of purpose ads, by generation



Ads that broke through

Within each age cohort, some ads showed clear effectiveness. The “goodness of fit” between the brand and the message likely make it easier to connect with consumers and grab attention.

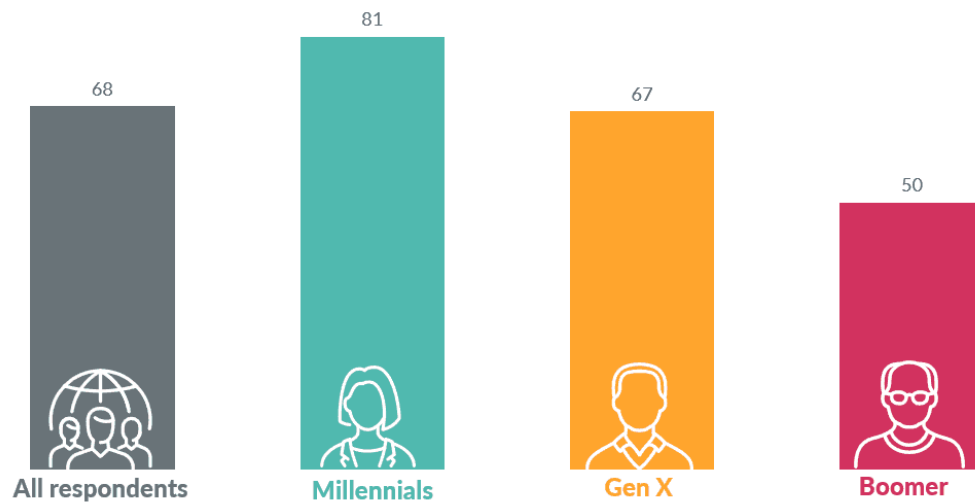
Gen Z & Millennials: Dove – and to a certain extent Colgate and Patagonia – are better able to engage these younger viewers.

Gen X: More ads break through and engage for this group, including Toyota, Hiring Chain, Dove, Seventh Generation, H&M, Fed Ex, Patagonia, and Soda Stream.

Boomers: Hiring Chain, CleanCut, Seventh Generation, H&M, and Starbucks stand out amongst Boomers in their ability to break through.

But when comparing only viewers who had noticed and stuck with the ads, GfK found that Gen Z and Millennials were more likely to say that the creatives made them want to “talk, learn or do something” about the subjects of the ads. ([See Chart 1.](#))

Chart 1. More likely to want to talk, learn, or do something about what they viewed – all purpose ads by generations

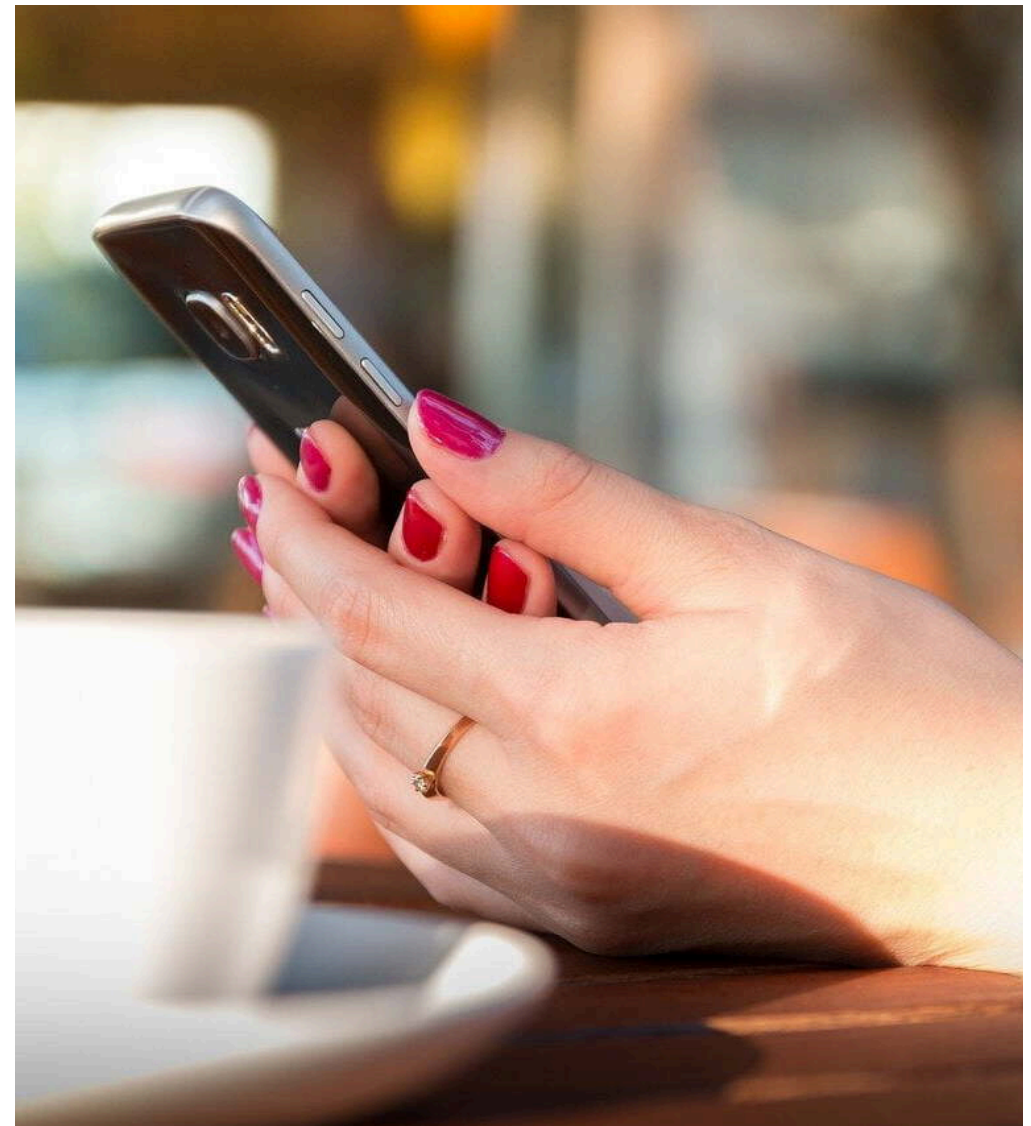


Ads that created action

Gen Z & Millennials: Dove, Colgate, FedEx, Patagonia, and Pepsi

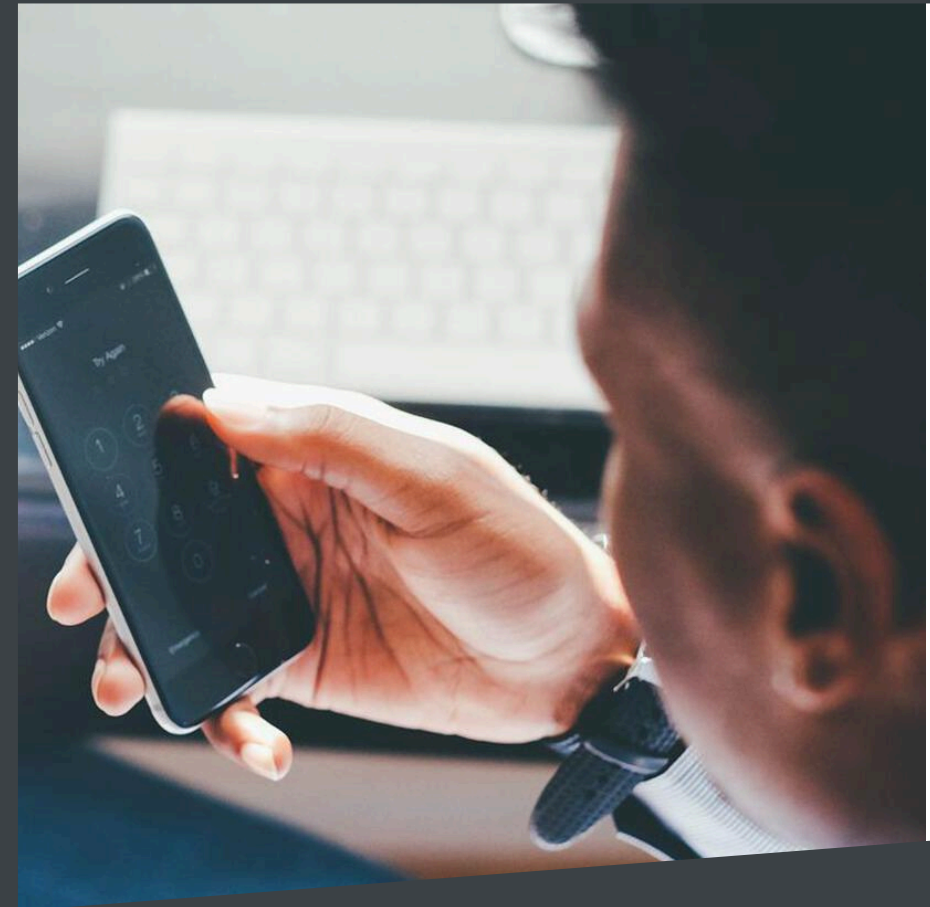
Gen X: Toyota, Hiring Chain, CleanCut,, and Seventh Generation

Boomers: Hiring Chain, Colgate, H&M, and FedEx



Takeaway

Getting your message across is not a given



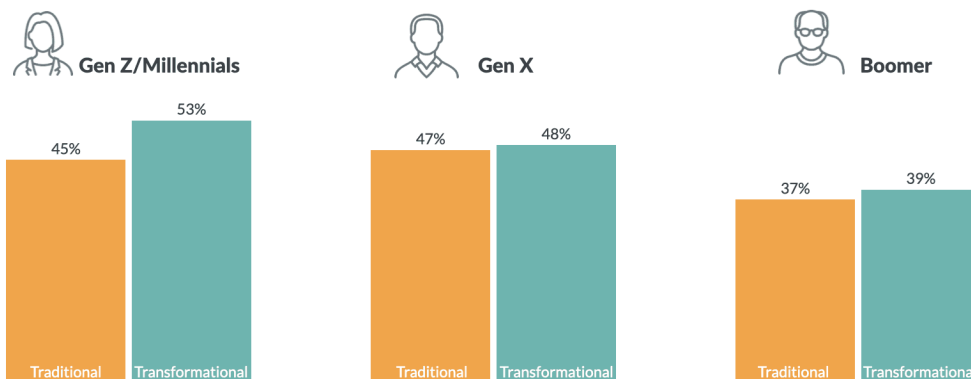
Getting your message across is not a given

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hile Baby Boomers are more likely to pay attention to purpose ads, this group does not have a clear understanding of the messages. Only 4 in 10 (38%) Boomers grasped the ad messages – with little difference between traditional and transformational purpose creatives – while the proportions were closer to one-half for Gen X (47%) and Gen Z/Millennials (49%). (See Table 2.)

Interestingly, the youngest age group was more likely to understand the messages in transformational purpose ads – those that celebrate consumers' actions and downplay the brand – than “traditional” ones.

Table 2. Purpose message clarity across the generations



Ads that delivered the message

All generations: Hiring Chain

Gen Z & Millennials: Dove Colgate, Tula, Ben & Jerry's, Chipotle, and Patagonia

Gen X: Toyota, Colgate H&M, Soda Stream, and FedEx

Boomers: Toyota, Ben & Jerry's, and H&M



Takeaway

Younger consumers lead with their hearts

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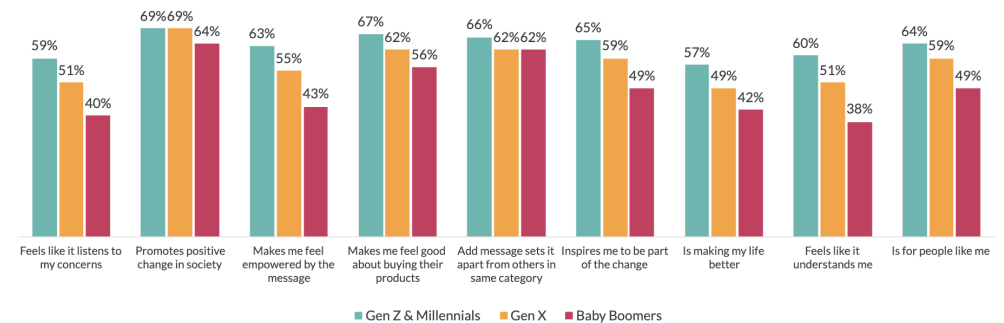


Overall, our research showed that, the younger the viewers, the more likely that purpose ads will have an emotional impact and create connections. (See Table 3.) Gen Z and Millennials, in general, responded more strongly than either Gen X or Baby Boomers across a range of reactions to the purpose ads, from “Feels like it listens to my concerns” to “Is a brand I love.”

The gaps between the youngest (Gen Z/Millennials) and oldest (Boomers) consumers were especially dramatic, at times reaching 20 percentage points. One notable response that was significant across generations – “promotes positive changes in society.”



Table 3. Emotional reactions to purpose ads, by generations



Ads that created strong emotional reactions

All generations: H&M, FedEx

Gen Z & Millennials: Dove, Colgate, Chipotle, Starbucks, Patagonia, and Soda Stream

Gen X: Toyota, Hiring Chain, and Seventh Generation

Boomers: Toyota, Hiring Chain, and Ben & Jerry's

Takeaway

Transformational creatives
empower, differentiate

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At a time when purpose marketing needs a shake-up, transformational messaging can provide a welcome jolt of authenticity. We found that “transformational” purpose ads – those that focus on consumer achievements and empowerment, rather than the brand’s own heroism – had a stronger emotional impact across a number of key questions. (See Table 4.)

GfK found clearly significant differences on statements such as “makes me feel empowered by the message” and “message sets it apart from others in the same category.”

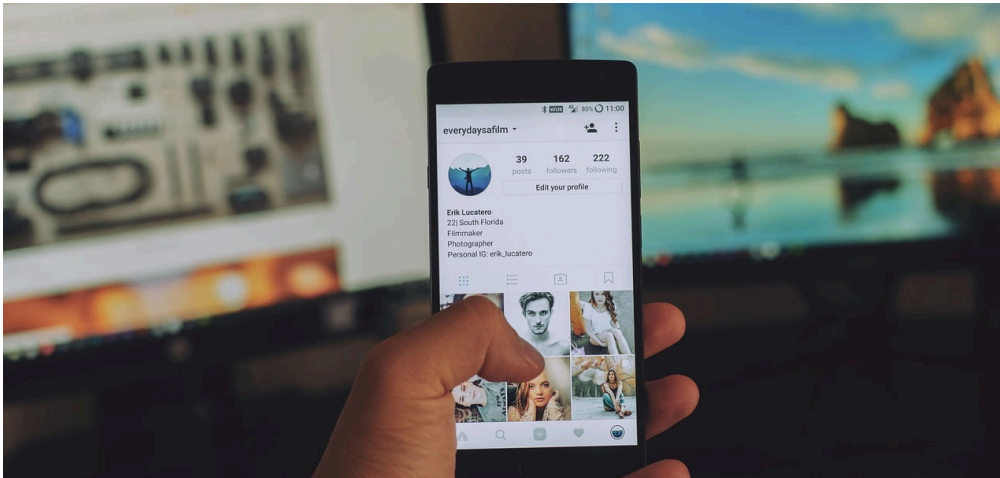


Table 4. Impact statements: Traditional vs. Transformational purpose ads

	 Gen Z/Millennials		 Gen X		 Boomer	
	Traditional	Transformational	Traditional	Transformational	Traditional	Transformational
Promoted positive changes in society	68%	71%	66%	71%	64%	65%
Makes me feel empowered	61%	64%	52%	58%	40%	46%
Ad message sets it apart from others in category	63%	69%	59%	66%	59%	66%
Inspires me to be part of the change	63%	67%	57%	60%	47%	52%
Is making my life better	55%	59%	49%	50%	42%	42%
Feels like it understand me	58%	62%	50%	52%	37%	40%

Ads with a transformational difference

All generations: Hiring Chain, Dove, Colgate, and Ben & Jerry's

Gen Z & Millennials: H&M

Gen X: Toyota and P&G

Boomers: Toyota, P&G, and Patagonia

Takeaway

It's simple: Brand cues deliver brand effects

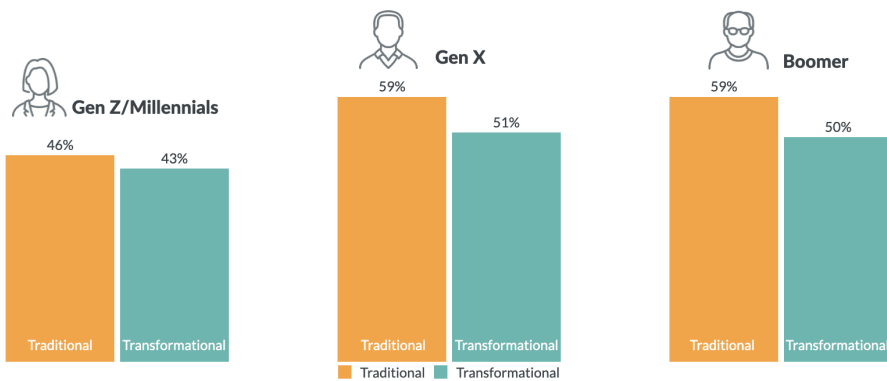


Transformational creatives empower, differentiate

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hile transformational approaches can deliver positive emotional effects, “traditional” purpose ads – where the brand is hero – do elevate branding recall among viewers. (See Table 5.) This is less true for Millennials and Gen Z, but more so for Gen Z and Boomers.

Table 5. Branding effects: Traditional vs. Transformational purpose ads



Ads that created strong branding

All generations: Colgate, H&M, Tom's, FedEx, Pepsi, and Soda Stream

Gen Z & Millennials: Dove

Gen X: See above brands

Boomers: CleanCut, Seventh Generation, Ben & Jerry's

Across generations, gender has little effect on purpose reactions

In their responses to purpose ads, very few differences exist between genders when all of these ads are viewed together. These creatives struggle to grab and hold attention across both genders. Some ads have predictable differences due to the obvious nature of the brand and message; Dove, for example, skews toward female viewers. Branding seems to register slightly more positively among female viewers in our new study; but message clarity and direct response as a result of watching the ads are generally the same across gender.



The power of purpose & generations



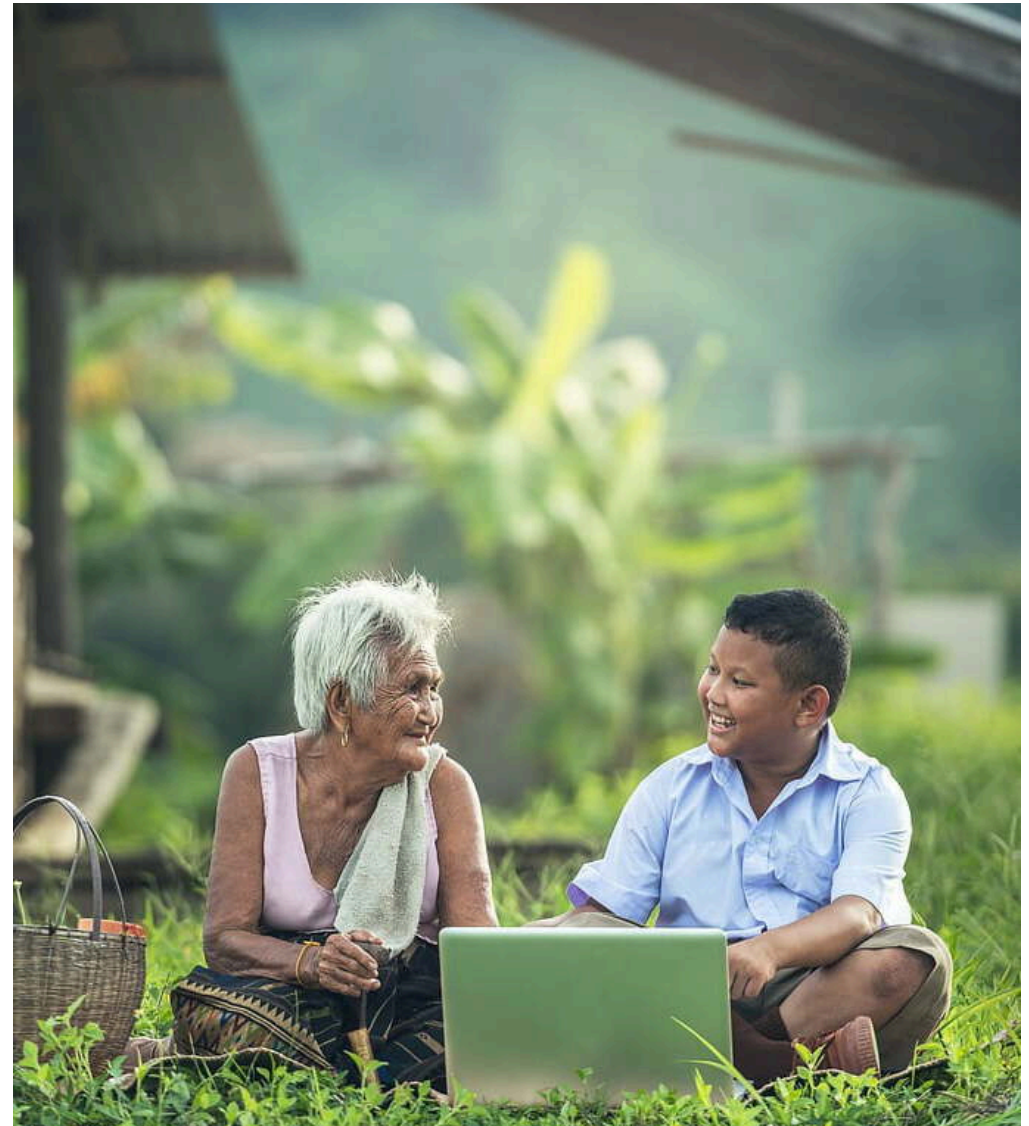
The power of purpose & generations

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hile cause marketing can change opinions and drive action for consumers of any age, our Purpose Impact Monitor research shows that different generations can move almost in opposite directions in terms of ad response. Again and again, Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Z/ Millennials showed significant differences – in noticing and viewing ads, understanding their messages, recording emotional responses, and taking real-world actions based on the creatives.

As purpose messages become more common, and viewers grow de-sensitized, the need to craft more targeted and nuanced ads will grow – and defining how those targets respond will be essential.

Brands need to continue to monitor generational responses to purpose marketing to be sure they are addressing the best causes in the right ways – and then sharing those efforts effectively. Only through this sustained attention can they make their million-dollar purpose investments achieve maximum impact.



Thank you for reading

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