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- 8
- ♻️
- 📺
- GENERATIONS IN PLAY
- ♻️
- 🕒
- RPSP
- OX
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IGN Entertainment

GENERATIONS IN PLAY

2026 AUDIENCE INSIGHTS REPORT

THE ENTERTAINMENT LANDSCAPE HAS CHANGED

Thirty years ago, IGN was founded in a media landscape defined by scarcity. Access was limited, discovery was linear, and entertainment was something audiences consumed, not shaped.

Today, entertainment is infinite, participatory, and always on. Hundreds of millions of people engage with games, film, television, and creators across IGN Entertainment's ecosystem each month, spanning platforms, formats, and culture around the world. Gaming is now the largest entertainment medium globally. YouTube functions as search. Social platforms drive discovery at cultural speed and audiences move fluidly between watching, playing, sharing, and optimizing their experiences.

As this landscape has evolved, IGN Entertainment has evolved with it. We don't just measure entertainment behavior, we sit inside it. Across our sites, channels, social platforms, and Game Help tools, we see how intent forms, how discovery happens, and how audiences move from awareness to action in real time.

This Generations in Play study was designed to capture that reality. Rather than focusing solely on demographics or time spent, this report explores how different generations discover, engage with, and participate in entertainment today, and what those behaviors mean for brands navigating an increasingly complex ecosystem.



Karl Stewart
SVP, Marketing
& Head of IMAGINE AI.



Tate Fiebing
Sr. Director
Business Intelligence





INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1

THREE GENERATIONS, THREE AUDIENCES

Chapter 2

CONTENT FOLLOWS INTENT, NOT PLATFORMS

Chapter 3

THE RESIDENT & THE UTILITY

CONCLUSION



GENERATIONS IN PLAY



METHODOLOGY



Between August and November 2025, IGN Entertainment conducted Generations in Play, our largest research initiative to date. In partnership with Kantar and UC Berkeley, we surveyed over 6,250 respondents across the US, UK, and Australia.

The study focuses on a highly engaged entertainment audience, defined by sustained participation rather than casual interest. All respondents qualified through meaningful weekly engagement, including 10+ hours spent gaming, streaming, watching YouTube, or using social platforms, or four or more movies watched in a single week.

Findings were enriched with IGN Entertainment's first-party behavioral data and synthesized through IMAGINE, our audience intelligence platform.

The objective was to understand how generational context shapes discovery, engagement, and participation, not just how much content is consumed. Rather than revealing differences in volume, the study surfaces distinct attention systems, where similar audiences can behave very differently depending on how intent is formed and acted on.

RESEARCH PARTNERS: **KANTAR** UC Berkeley

AUDIENCE SIZE:

6,250 US / UK / AUS

RANGES:

Z Gen Z **M** Millennials **X** Gen X

QUALIFICATIONS:

To participate, respondents had to meet at least one of the following high-consumption criteria:

10
GAMING
Hours/Week
or more

10
STREAMING
SHOWS
Hours/Week
or more

10
WATCHING
YOUTUBE
Hours/Week
or more

10
BROWSING
SOCIAL MEDIA
Hours/Week
or more

4
WATCHING
MOVIES
Hours/Week
or more

1996

2006

2016

2026

The Anchor

The Evolution

The Expansion

EVERYONE ELSE CALLED IT GAMING. WE CALLED IT THE FUTURE.

When gaming emerged as a medium in the mid-nineties, a new generation was born with it. Not just players, an entirely new kind of audience, one that engaged with entertainment, discovery, and culture in ways the industry had never seen. The category was young. The audience was still forming. The brands that would eventually want to reach them didn't yet have the language, the tools, or the understanding. But we believed in it. And more importantly, we understood it.

From day one, IGN didn't launch a website. We launched a network, five platform-specific destinations simultaneously, each built around how gamers actually lived inside the medium, not how the industry wanted to talk at them. While others built single destinations for single audiences, we were already thinking in ecosystems.

That instinct, to follow the audience rather than define the category, has guided every decision we've made in the thirty years since. It's what brought us here. Not as a gaming media company that survived, but as the only entertainment media company to successfully serve every generation of the digital era.



GENERATIONS IN PLAY



1996

2006

2016

2026

The Anchor

The Evolution

The Expansion

ONE ECOSYSTEM EVERY SCREEN EVERY GENERATION

470 million monthly visits, 90 million social followers, content distributed across 46 platforms and a presence in over 100 countries. These numbers don't describe a gaming media company, they describe the connective tissue of modern entertainment culture. And what thirty years of following audience behavior builds is something no media company can manufacture overnight: pattern recognition.

We don't just observe how audiences discover, trust, and engage with entertainment, we understand why, across every generation, simultaneously. That understanding lives inside everything we build, from our sites and social channels to our utility tools, commerce platforms, and audio network, each one designed around a specific audience intent, each one part of a single connected ecosystem.



470

MILLION MONTHLY VISITS

90

MILLION SOCIAL FOLLOWERS

100+

COUNTRIES

- ♻️
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- ℋ
- 8
- Ⓜ
- 📺
- GENERATIONS IN PLAY
- Ⓜ
- 📍
- RPS
- OX
- VG
- 📺



WHY GENERATIONS MATTER MORE THAN AGE

For 30 years, IGN Entertainment has evolved alongside multiple generations shaped by different ways of discovering, trusting, and engaging with entertainment.

Age tells us how old someone is. Generations reveal how audiences learned to navigate culture. Each generation formed its habits inside a distinct media environment, from appointment viewing and early digital discovery to algorithmic and utility-driven experiences. These environments created the default systems audiences still rely on to find, evaluate, and commit to entertainment today.

Because we've lived through each of these shifts, we understand not just who audiences are, but how their expectations were formed.



GENERATIONS IN PLAY



THE WORLDS WE GREW UP IN SHAPES HOW WE DISCOVER TODAY



X Gen X

The Appointment Generation

Born	Teen Years	Age Range
1965 - 1980	1979 - 1993	45-60

Gen X earned their entertainment.

You saved for the game, planned around the TV schedule, bought the magazine to get the guide. The internet was a tool, not a lifestyle. Trust was institutional, built through consistency and expertise over time. These habits didn't disappear, they became the blueprint.



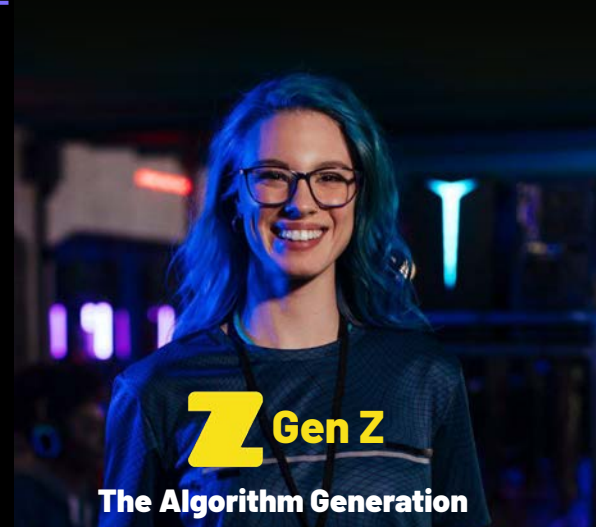
M Millennials

The Bridge Generation

Born	Teen Years	Age Range
1982 - 1996	1994 - 2004	29-44

Millennials grew up at the exact moment everything changed.

Old enough to remember the pre-internet world, young enough to make the digital one their own. They were the first to discover through YouTube, queue at midnight for a launch, and move fluidly from ownership to access. They didn't choose between two worlds, they mastered both.



Z Gen Z

The Algorithm Generation

Born	Teen Years	Age Range
1997 - 2012	2010 - 2025	13-28

Gen Z has never known a world without infinite content.

Discovery arrives without effort. The creator is the authority. Entertainment and social experience are the same thing. Games aren't finished, they're inhabited. Shows aren't watched, they're experienced collectively. For this generation, utility, community and identity are inseparable.

Chapter 1

THREE GENERATIONS. THREE AUDIENCES.

Generations run on Different Operating Systems

Generations don't differ in what they love. They differ in how they assign value, trust, and urgency before content is even chosen. Each cohort developed its own operating system, shaped by the media environments of their formative years. These systems dictate how attention is earned, how relevance is signaled, and how identity shapes engagement.

Understanding modern audiences is no longer about demographics. It is about understanding the system through which attention is processed.

Covered in this section:

Interest
Attention

C1: Three Generations, Three Audiences

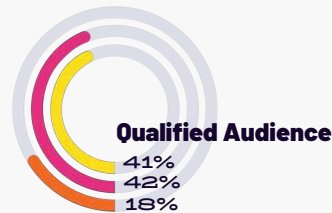
FIRST THINGS FIRST

Our study captures an audience defined by sustained, high-intensity engagement with entertainment, not casual interest.

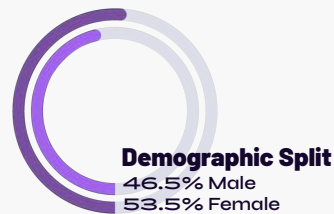


This isn't a study of casual interest; it's a deep dive into high-intensity residents. To participate, every respondent had to meet strict criteria, such as 10+ hours of weekly gaming, 10+ hours of streaming, or watching 4+ movies a week. We are looking at the power users who define the current entertainment landscape.

With a near-even gender split and 70% of the audience fully employed, these behaviors are foundational to how people unwind, regardless of age or responsibility. By focusing on these high-intensity users, we can surface the distinct "operating systems" that dictate how the most influential fans in the world process relevance today.



Gen X
Millennial
Gen Z



GENERATIONS IN PLAY



RPS

OX

VG



C1: Three Generations, Three Audiences

ATTENTION SHIFTS, IT DOESN'T DISAPPEAR

Time is reallocated across formats, not
away from entertainment.



While generational identity shapes how audiences describe themselves, time spent shows how those identities play out in practice. What emerges is not a decline in engagement with age, but a redistribution of attention.

As life stages change, audiences reallocate where and how they invest time, shifting formats without abandoning entertainment altogether.

Interactive content

Gen Z spends the most time gaming, on social platforms, and on YouTube, reflecting a highly interactive, always-on media diet.

13.9 Hours per week

Streaming

Millennials begin the transition, and **Gen X** completes it, allocating the largest share of attention to long-form viewing.

14.4 Hours per week

Movies

Regardless of age, all cohorts watch roughly the same number of movies each week, making cinema one of the few truly generational constants.

3.5 Movies Per week



GENERATIONS IN PLAY

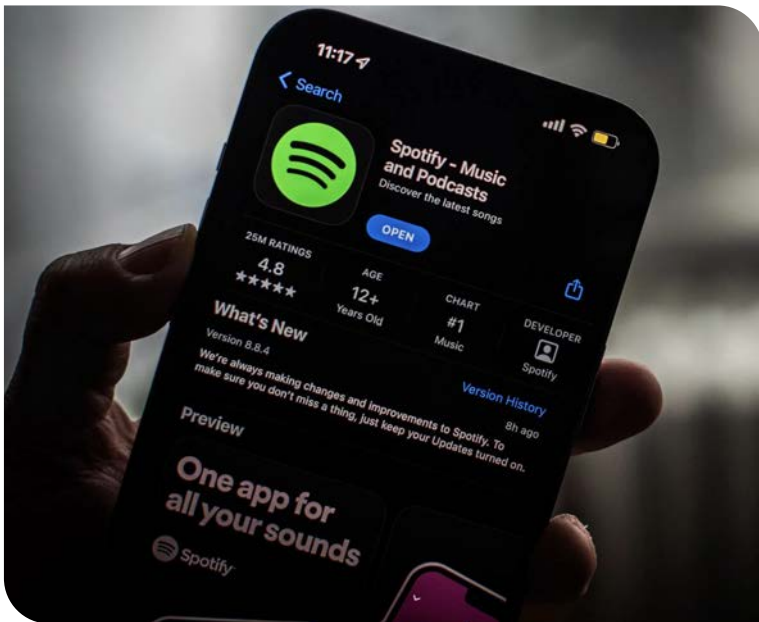


THE ATTENTION ECONOMY: HOBBIES AS INTENT SIGNALS

How Generations Allocate Focus Beyond Primary Entertainment



GENERATIONS IN PLAY



To understand how entertainment fits into everyday life, we also looked at the activities audiences choose outside of just games, film, and TV. These hobbies reveal distinct generational "operating systems" for attention, prioritizing focus, routine, and emotional layers in fundamentally different ways.

Hobbies reveal the "why" behind the time spent. Whether it's a social layer (**Gen Z**), a routine tool (**Millennials**), or a structured event (**Gen X**), how audiences spend their attention is the true indicator of their intent.

Music as a Constant Companion

Gen Z over-indexes on listening to music, reflecting a generation that uses audio as a continuous social and emotional layer.

+6%

Podcasts as Long Form

Millennials stand out as the largest podcast audience. This reflects a generation comfortable integrating long-form audio into daily routines.

+16%

Sports as Appointment Viewing

Millennials and **Gen X** over-index on watching sports, reinforcing a preference for scheduled, event-driven entertainment rooted in shared moments & tradition.

+7%

THE CINEMA EQUILIBRIUM

This dynamic also extends to the cinema.

While **Gen Z** treats movies as an active social event, indexing highest on the 'In Theater' experience, **Gen X** leans into the convenience of the home, preferring to wait for titles to arrive on Streaming or Physical formats.

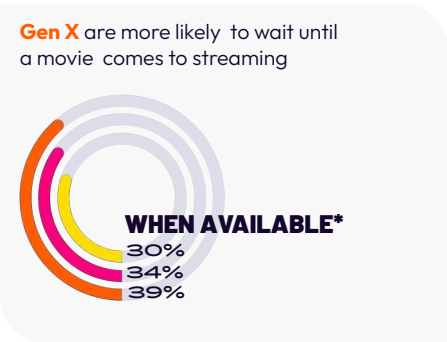
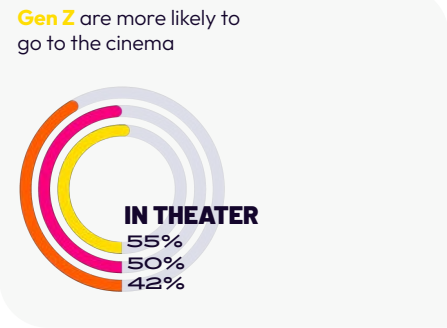
Once again, **Millennials** occupy the critical middle ground. They possess the urgency to show up at the theater but have adapted to the flexibility of digital release windows.

They don't choose between the big screen and the living room, they navigate both, supporting the theatrical window while also investing in the convenience of home viewing.



Image courtesy of Universal Pictures. All rights reserved. Used for illustrative purposes only.

Gen X
Millennial
Gen Z



GEN Z & THEATRICAL

+13%

more likely to see movies
specifically during opening
weekend.



GENERATIONS IN PLAY



SAME INTEREST, DIFFERENT MEANING

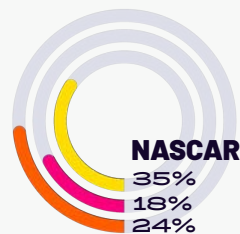
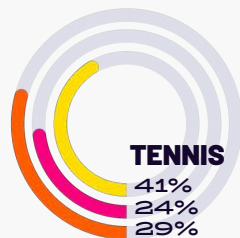
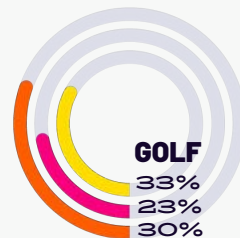
Our research revealed a recurring pattern:
Surface-level alignment can mask deeper behavioral differences.

Gen X and **Gen Z** may show similar interest in legacy sports like golf, tennis, or motorsports, but they engage with them in fundamentally different ways.

For **Gen Z**, their passion is filtered through the Creator. Sports become personality driven, contextualized, and culturally reframed. Competition matters, but it is secondary to commentary, relevance, and participation.

For **Gen X**, their passion centers around the Event. Engagement is driven by scheduled broadcasts, professional leagues, and official competition. Value comes from the structure, stakes, and narrative of the sport itself.

This signals a broader shift in fandom from access to interpretation. Audiences may follow the same sports, but they experience them through entirely different lenses.



Gen X
Millennial
Gen Z



GENERATIONS IN PLAY



SAME INTEREST, DIFFERENT MEANING

GOLF

The Broadcast:

Watching the final round of a PGA Tour event on Sunday afternoon. Focused on leaderboard movement, legacy, and professional achievement.



TENNIS

The Grand Slam:

Watching the Finals at Wimbledon or the US Open. Engagement centers on prestige, match results, and historic significance.



NASCAR

The Race:

Watching the Daytona 500 live, following team standings, rivalries, and manufacturer performance within a structured season.



Gen X (The Event)

Gen Z (The Creator)

The Challenge:

Watching creators like Good Good or Bryson DeChambeau on YouTube or TikTok, where golf becomes casual, competitive, and personality-led. The sport is experienced through format-driven challenges rather than formal tournaments.



The Lifestyle:

Engaging with "Tenniscore" culture, behind-the-scenes vlogs, and influencer content that showcases the lifestyle around the tour. The player's persona often matters more than the match score.



The Culture:

Watching sim-racing streamers, drifting competitions, or creator-led events like Cleetus McFarland's Freedom Factory, where motorsport becomes participatory, experimental, and entertainment-first.



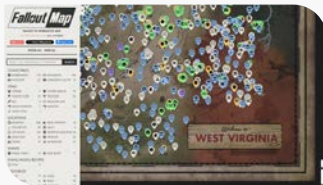
SAME INTEREST, DIFFERENT MEANING

X Gen X (The Information)

FALLOUT

The Guides:

When the show landed, engagement was driven by high-intent utility. GenX fans turned to interactive Fallout game guides and structured maps to master the world of West Virginia.



RES EVIL

The Review:

Interest centers on the institutional review. Engagement was driven by expert editorial analysis and structured critiques of the core experience.



THE GAME AWARDS

The Aggregation:

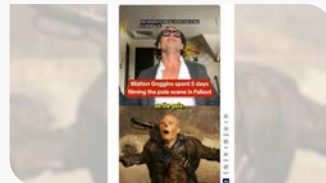
Engagement centers on the professional outcome and historic significance. Value comes from structured aggregation.



Z Gen Z (The Moments)

The Celebrity:

During the shows release window, engagement centered on millions of views for creator-led interviews and behind-the-scenes vlogs featuring the show's talent



Devs React:

Fandom is participatory and culturally reframed. Gen Z over-indexes where the focus is on shared interpretation.



The Event:

Gen Z engagement centered on watching live reactions and creator-led social streams, where the "hang-out" and cultural discourse often matter more than the results.



THE PODCAST GENERATION

Millennials lead in podcast engagement as audio becomes a daily habit, not a passive channel.

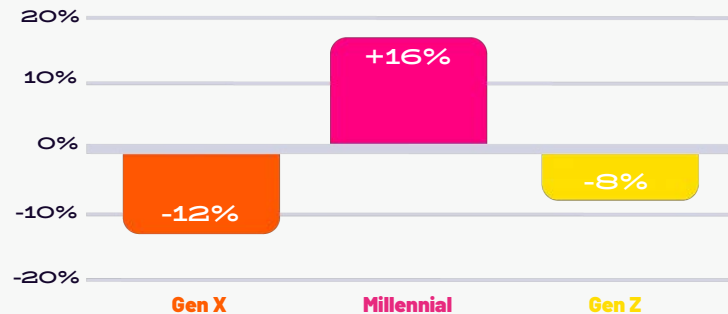
In 2025, podcasting solidified its move from niche curiosity to a mainstream daily habit, with **Millennials** cementing their role as the primary generation normalizing on-demand audio. In our study, this group treats podcasts as intentional, high-attention moments woven into commutes and workouts rather than passive background noise.

This behavioral shift is reflected in broader trends reported by Nielsen*, where 40% of all time spent listening to spoken-word audio in the US is now dedicated to podcasts. This mirrors the engagement seen across our Geek Media portfolio, where opted-in listening drives deeper trust and recall than traditional interruptive formats.



[* Nielsen Research 2/24/26](#)

Listens to a Podcast



- **Millennials** are the only generation to significantly over-index on podcast listening in our study.
- Podcast engagement reflects intentional, repeat behavior rather than passive consumption.
- Audio remains a high-trust, high-attention environment within the IGN ecosystem.

GEEK MEDIA: AUDIO ACROSS GENERATIONS

Seven weekly shows reflecting how different generations engage with gaming culture.

Audio plays a distinct role in how gaming audiences consume culture. In our study we see that **Millennials** over-index on podcast listening, reinforcing their position as the generation that normalized on-demand audio as a weekly habit. Within the IGN Entertainment ecosystem, Geek Media provides a live expression of that behavior.

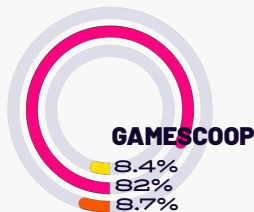
Across seven weekly shows and more than 35 million annual listens and views, our portfolio reflects how different generations engage with gaming conversation. Geek Media does not simply distribute podcasts. It reflects the evolving ways audiences listen, identify, and participate in gaming culture.



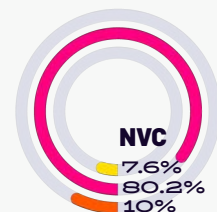
Game Scoop live @ IGN Live 2025

TOP 4 GEEK SHOWS

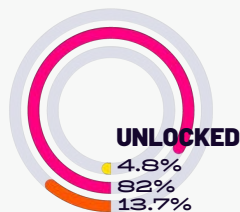
Gen X
Millennial
Gen Z



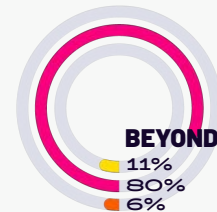
Strong **Millennial** core, reflecting long-form weekly analysis as a habitual format.



Multi-generational Nintendo fandom, anchored by **Millennial** loyalty.



Millennial-dominant Xbox audience with smaller but steady **Gen X** presence



Story-driven, personality-led format attracts a comparatively younger cohort

HOW DO THESE GENERATIONS ENGAGE WITH IGN ENTERTAINMENT?

We built platforms for intent, not just content.

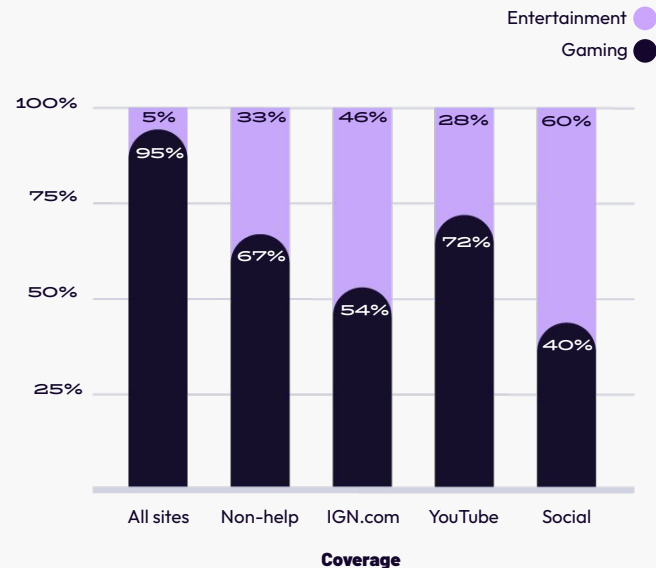
Our ecosystem serves three distinct "operating systems" through two specialized engines. The Utility Engine (IGN.com/YouTube) anchors the **Gen X** "Intent Generation," who visit for surgical expertise like Fallout game help. Conversely, our Discovery Engine on social caters to the **Gen Z** "Feed-First" mindset.

While they love the same franchises, **Gen Z** experiences them through a cultural lens, discussing the Fallout TV show. Bridging these are **Millennials**, who fuel utility via podcasting while remaining embedded in social conversations.

By designing for both mastery and participation, we ensure every generation finds exactly what they need.



Gaming and Entertainment



Section takeaway:

THE STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE

Generations Run on Different Operating Systems

Generational differences are not about taste. They are about how value, trust, and urgency are assigned before content is even chosen. **Gen Z**, **Millennials**, and **Gen X** may love the same games, films, or sports, but they discover, validate, and engage with them through entirely different attention systems. Strategy can no longer scale through demographic targeting alone. It must align to how each generation processes relevance.

Target the operating system, not the age.

Build media and creative strategies around how audiences assign trust and urgency, not just how old they are.

Millennials:

+16%

over-index on podcast listening

Design for the role, not just reach.

Some platforms function as validation engines. Others drive discovery. Others reinforce loyalty. Treat them differently.

IGNE Social:

60%

Entertainment (Movies & TV)

Expect surface alignment, plan for behavioral divergence.

Similar interest levels can mask radically different engagement mechanics. The difference is in meaning, not preference.

Gen Z:

+13%

more likely to see movies opening weekend

Chapter 2

CONTENT FOLLOWS INTENT, NOT PLATFORMS

Understanding Content Consumption

The shift toward accessing content over owning it has become a defining trend, yet how audiences use that access varies by context. While many prioritize the "infinite library" of subscriptions, others still seek the commitment of spending time in a new world or the event of a theatrical release.

Audiences don't expect every platform to serve the same purpose; success happens when content aligns with the intent of the moment, whether goal-driven or discovery-led, rather than just the size of the library

Covered in this section:

Seek to Feed

Possession to Access

SHIFT FROM SEEK TO FEED

The generational divide is not what we watch.

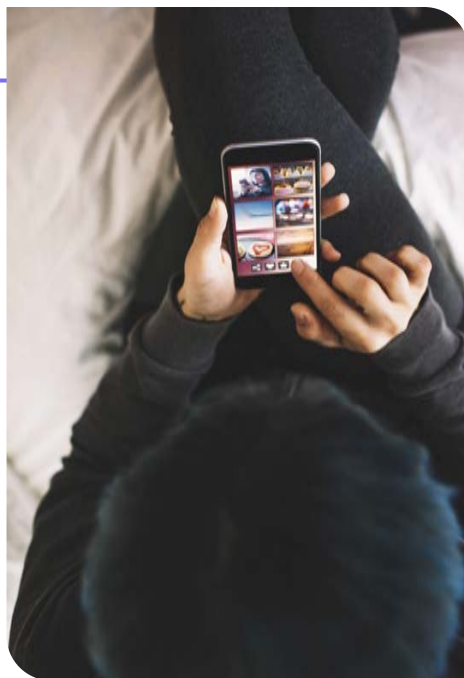
It is how we find it.

We are observing a fundamental inversion of digital discovery and engagement: the shift from Active Seeking to Algorithmic Assistance.

Our research identifies **Gen X** as the 'Intent Generation,' defined by a distinct preference for manual search, specific queries, and a notable skepticism toward AI curation.

Millennials are the last generation "Googling it" as a default, but the first to adopt the Feed, this generation lives for YouTube.

In contrast, **Gen Z** has embraced a 'Feed-First' mentality, willing to offload the labor of discovery to social algorithms and automated tools. The trend represents a clear movement away from user-driven search toward platform-driven recommendation.



INTENT BASED VIEWING

Gen X approach their search for entertainment with a destination in mind.

+10%

More likely to search for a categories of videos

+6%

More likely to search for a specific type of video

THE PASSIVE RECEIVER

For **Gen Z**, discovery happens to them. Primary discovery happens on YouTube and Social.

+10%

More likely to browse through recommended videos on YouTube

+16%

More likely to subscribe to and browse specific YouTube Channels

SHIFT FROM SEEK TO FEED

The Great Discovery Inversion



GENERATIONS IN PLAY



RPS

o x

VG



Digital discovery has moved from active seeking to algorithmic assistance. Older cohorts lean on manual search, while younger audiences adopt a feed-first mindset, relying on social algorithms and automated tools.

This shift shapes generational behavior:

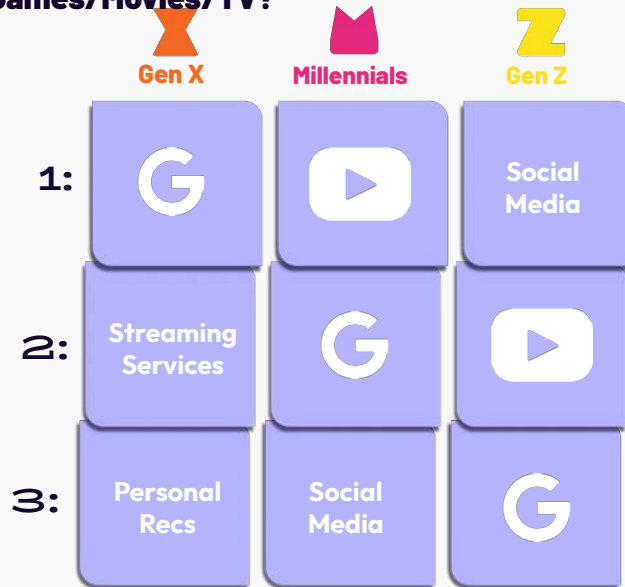
Gen X (The Intent Generation):
Destination-driven, prioritizing Google search and skeptical of AI curation.

Millennials (The Bridge Generation):
Blending traditional search with strong adoption of video-first platforms like YouTube.

Gen Z (The Algorithm Generation):
Discovery is passive, with social media and online communities serving as primary inspiration sources.



How do you discover new Games/Movies/TV?



C2: Content Follows Intent, Not Platform

IGN ENTERTAINMENT AS A NEWS SOURCE

When audiences want to know what matters,
they turn to IGN.

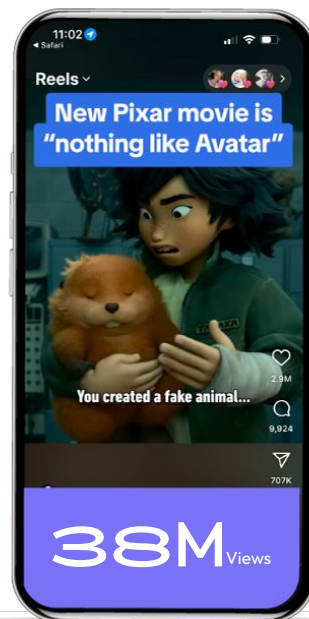
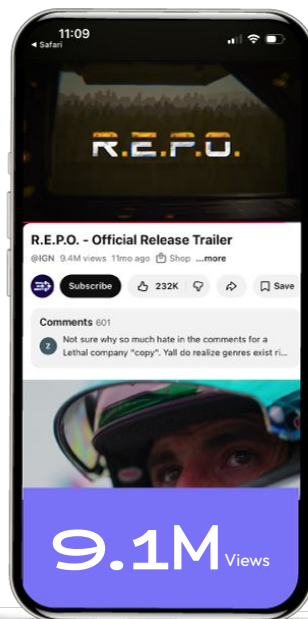
 **STREAMING NEWS**

 **CONSOLE NEWS**

 **GAMING TRAILER**

 **MOVIE NEWS**

 **GAMING NEWS**



GENERATIONS IN PLAY

FROM POSSESSION TO ACCESS

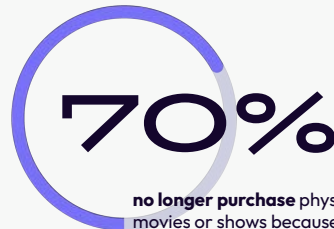
Audiences no longer collect. They rotate.

The rise of the subscription economy has driven a universal shift in how audiences assign value to entertainment. Across music, film, television, and gaming, ownership has been traded for access. The unit of value is no longer the individual album, movie, or game, but the infinite library behind a subscription.

The shift itself is structural. How audiences behave within it is generational. Access is now the default expectation, shaping how audiences sample, abandon, and re-engage with content across every category.

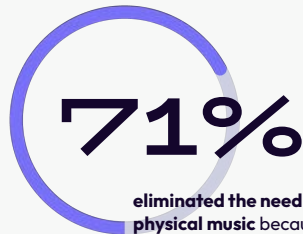


Movies & TV



no longer purchase physical movies or shows because of having streaming options

Music



eliminated the need to purchase physical music because of streaming

Gaming



no longer purchase full price games



GENERATIONS IN PLAY



FROM POSSESSION TO ACCESS

Commitment within the streaming subscription economy has become increasingly fluid and generational.



GENERATIONS IN PLAY

Subscriptions are no longer expressions of loyalty; they are tools activated by intent.

Stacking Services:

- o **Gen Z** and **Millennials** maintain the largest subscription stacks, averaging 3.51 and 3.27 active services respectively. This reflects a high tolerance for managing overlapping libraries to ensure constant variety.

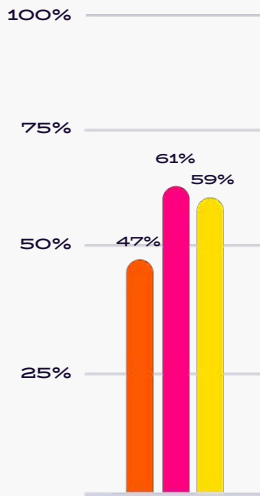
Intent-Based Subscribing:

- o Nearly 6 in 10 younger viewers will subscribe and unsubscribe to a service specifically to watch a single movie or season.

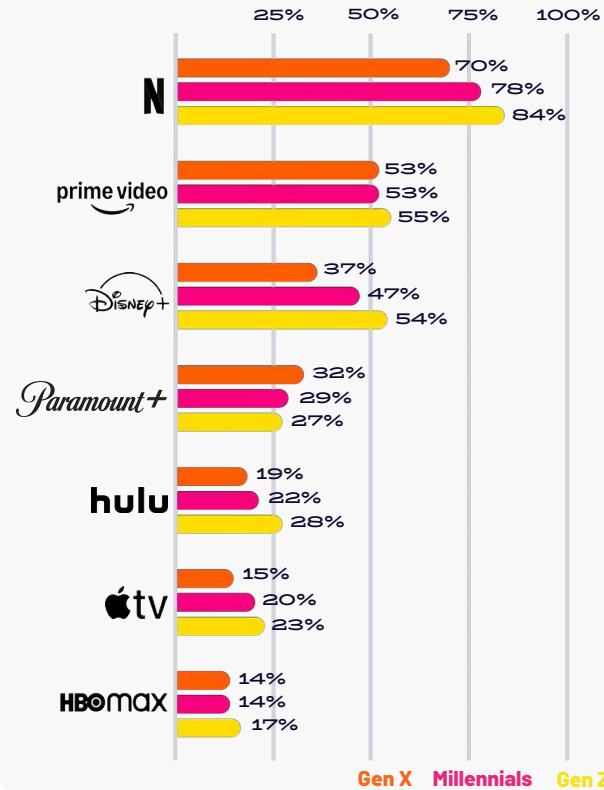
Value Over Platform:

- o Content, franchises, and cultural moments now matter more than platform loyalty.

Would you unsubscribe from a platform in order to watch other shows?



Active streaming subscriptions



BINGE WATCHING

71%

of all interviewed prefer to
binge-watch TV shows.



GENERATIONS IN PLAY



THE GAMES SUBSCRIPTION FLYWHEEL

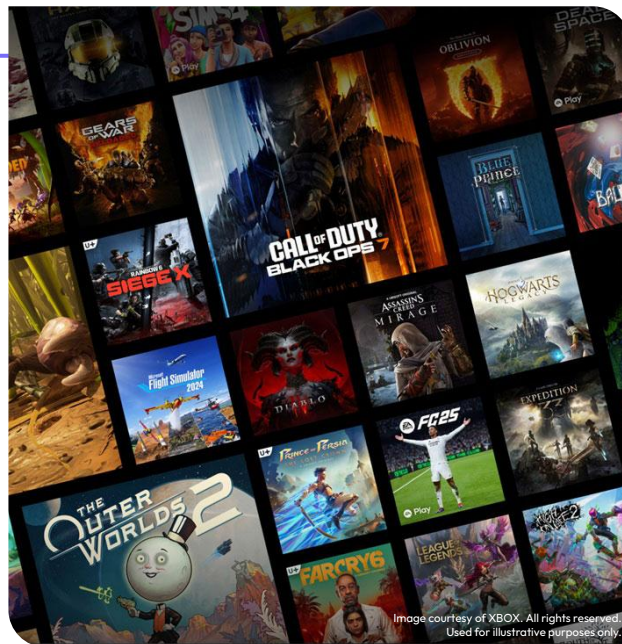
From Owning Titles to Inhabiting Worlds.
Try before you buy.

Our research shows subscriptions aren't replacing sales; they are fueling a "discovery engine". Players use libraries to sample worlds, using access to determine where they want to spend their time and, ultimately, their investment.

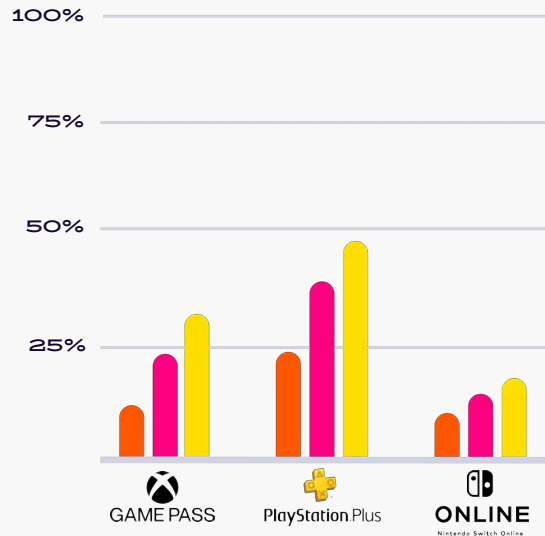
From Access to Investment: Subscriptions remove initial friction, allowing players to explore until they find a community worth their "residency". This time spent is the critical bridge between discovery and commitment.

The Residency Premium: Once committed, spending shifts from software to identity. These "Resident" players over-index on collectibles and in-world status.

The Ecosystem Model: Mirroring hits like Stranger Things, subscription access builds the massive audience required to sustain high-margin licensing and merchandise ecosystems.



Active gaming subscriptions



THE PLATFORM AS A DESTINATION

How generational hardware preference dictates the depth and duration of play.

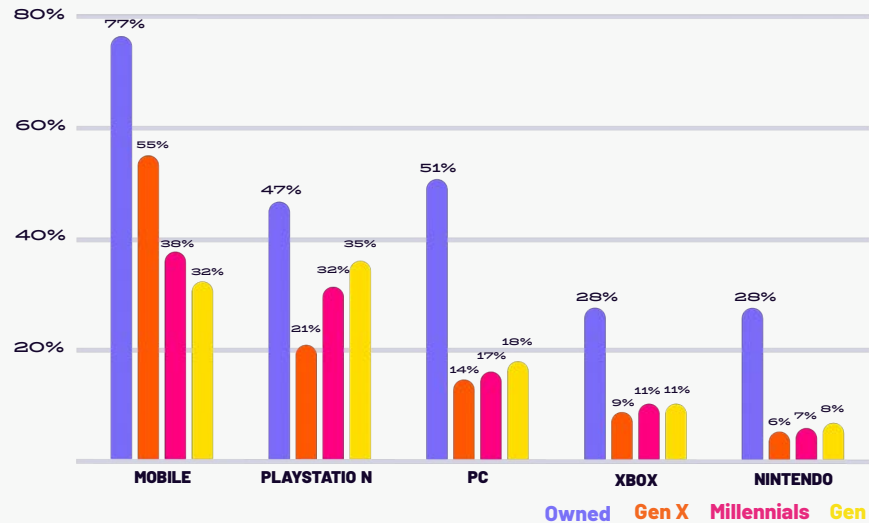
Ownership is no longer just about the device; it's about the environment it enables. While **Gen X** leans into the accessibility and individual mastery of Mobile and PC, **Gen Z** gravitates toward the high-fidelity, social "town squares" of Console and integrated platforms.

For the modern player, the platform is the primary filter for how they discover, share, and ultimately remain within a game's ecosystem.



Owned & Preferred Platforms

Top category Games on IGNE 2025



VALUE FOLLOWS ACCESS

When everything is available, commitment becomes selective.



GENERATIONS IN PLAY

The subscription economy has reshaped how entertainment is consumed and valued. Across categories, audiences increasingly favor inclusion over ownership, lowering the barrier to entry and raising the bar for differentiation.

Full-price purchase signals commitment. Subscription play signals experimentation. Free-to-play signals optionality. Each reflects a different intent state, not just a different price point.

In an access-driven environment, content must compete within a library, not on a shelf. Discovery accelerates. Abandonment accelerates. Re-engagement becomes part of the life cycle.

The question is no longer “Will they buy?” It is “When will they commit?”



Image courtesy of Xbox. All rights reserved. Used for illustrative purposes only.

How do you typically access new games?

Gen X
Millennial
Gen Z



DEPTH AND COMMUNITY ARE NOT OPPOSITES

Modern players expect both mastery and shared experience.

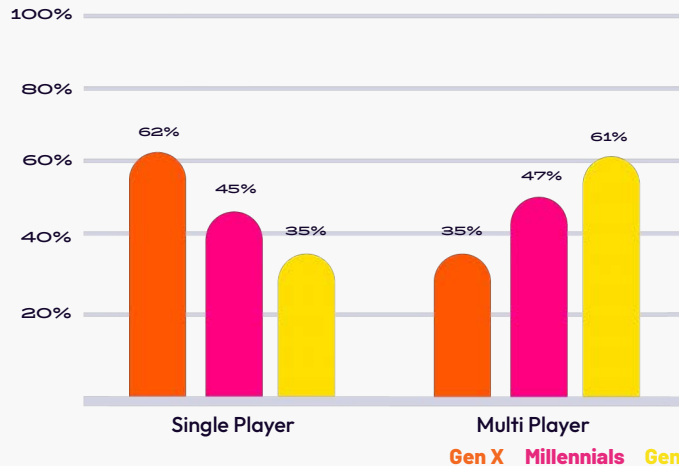
Single-player remains a space for progression, story, and individual control. Multiplayer is where identity, status, and belonging are formed.

Millennials are the first generation to normalize this duality. They “Google it” for help, but they also stream, squad up, and subscribe. They bridge high-intent engagement and feed-driven discovery.

They represent the transition from destination based play to ecosystem based participation.



When playing games, how do you prefer to play?



GENERATIONS IN PLAY





Chapter 3

THE RESIDENT AND THE UTILITY

Entertainment is no longer watched,
it's earned.

The shift from owning content to accessing it is complete, but how audiences use that access varies by context. We are moving from a world of passive viewers to active participants, where creators are the new gatekeepers of trust and entertainment is no longer a product you buy, but an ecosystem you inhabit.

Covered in this section:

Trust of Voice
Utility in Gaming

FOR GEN X, TRUST IS EARNED

Authority isn't claimed. It's proven over time



GENERATIONS IN PLAY



RPS

OX

VG



Gen X grew up where credibility had a track record. Brands, reviewers, and institutions earned trust through consistency, expertise, and accountability. That relationship with authority hasn't changed, it's deepened.

They don't just want a friend on the couch; they want the friend who's actually done the homework. They need to know their sources are established, credible, and accountable.

- **+6% more likely to prioritize name recognition.** Legacy and consistency are commercial advantages with this audience, not liabilities
- **-38% less likely to use AI for discovery.** This is not technophobia, they are just a generation that demands human accountability behind every recommendation



Gen X Information sources

+6%

More likely to prioritize name recognition

+12%

More likely to use social for friends and Family

AI Skepticism

-38%

Less likely to use AI for discovery

-44%

Less likely to believe that AI summaries are as good as human ones

FOR MILLENNIALS TRUST IS VALIDATED

They want proof from multiple angles.



GENERATIONS IN PLAY



Millennials triangulate. Expert reviews, community recommendations, creator deep dives, these aren't competing sources, they're complementary layers of validation. Trust isn't given to one voice. It's assembled across many.

They'll use AI as a research tool. But they want human judgment to be the final word.

- **+43% more likely to prioritize depth and expertise**
They reward platforms that combine editorial authority with genuine community
- **50% believe AI summaries are as good as human ones**
Pragmatic about technology, but the same audience that over-indexes hardest on authentic human expertise



Millennial
Most important
choosing source

36%

Engaging Community/Personable Content

46%

Depth & Expertise

AI
Skepticism

46%

Use AI for discovery

50%

Believe that AI summaries are as good as human ones

FOR GEN Z TRUST IS BUILT IN REAL TIME

Credibility comes from engagement.



GENERATIONS IN PLAY



Gen Z gravitate toward distinct voices and active communities. To them, expertise isn't a top-down title; it's a shared dialogue validated by peers.

They don't reject institutions, they reject sterile broadcasting. They can spot a faceless, corporate message immediately. Trust is earned through active engagement and a clear, relatable point of view.

- **+19% more likely to prioritize platforms with engaged communities**
Connection and expertise aren't opposites for this generation, they're the same thing
- **+55% more likely to agree AI summaries are as good as human ones**
Not a preference for AI, but they accept AI for fast information, which means a distinct, community-driven voice is now the most important differentiator



GEN Z Information Sources

+19%

More likely to prioritize
"A community I can engage with"

+9%

More likely to prioritize
"Engaging, personable content"

AI Adoption

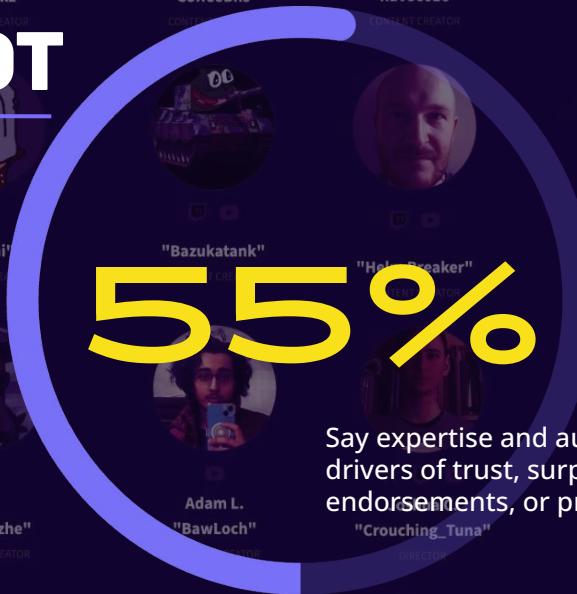
+13%

More likely to use AI for discovery

+55%

Agree that AI Summaries are
as good as human ones

THE GEN Z TRUST PIVOT



Say expertise and authenticity are the #1 drivers of trust, surpassing brand name, endorsements, or production value.

 aer0 "aer0" CONTENT CREATOR	 Erik R. "Chronikz" CONTENT CREATOR	 "havoc616" CONTENT CREATOR	 "cArn_" CONTENT CREATOR	 "Cptn Garbage" CONTENT CREATOR	 Jordan L. "Void241" CONTENT CREATOR
 "Velyna" CONTENT CREATOR	 "JayTX" CONTENT CREATOR	 "Bazukatank" CONTENT CREATOR	 "Helix Breaker" CONTENT CREATOR	 Przemyslaw P. "Zen_M" CONTENT CREATOR	 Josh K. "Milkybk_" CONTENT CREATOR
 "Legi" CONTENT CREATOR	 "FuzzyDuckzy" CONTENT CREATOR	 "Bekykizhe" CONTENT CREATOR	 Adam L. "BawLoch" CONTENT CREATOR	 "Crouching_Tuna" CONTENT CREATOR	 "Zizaran" DIRECTOR
 "SteelImage" CONTENT CREATOR	 "ZiggyD" CONTENT CREATOR	 Jordan L. "Void241" CONTENT CREATOR	 Pascal F. "Teo1904" CONTENT CREATOR	 Marco C. "MacroBioBoi" CONTENT CREATOR	 Barry M. "Jymnasium" CONTENT CREATOR
 Daniel S. "Palsteron" CONTENT CREATOR	 "Goratha" CONTENT CREATOR	 "Ventrua" CONTENT CREATOR	 Tyler P. "Tytykiller" CONTENT CREATOR		

FROM PLAYERS TO RESIDENTS

Why **Gen Z** views games as social ecosystems while **Gen X** views them as definitive experiences.

The "Social Gravity" **Gen Z**

For **Gen Z**, the game is the background for the hang-out. They stay because their Engaged Community (+19%) is there. They don't "finish" Roblox or Fortnite because the value isn't in the win-state; it's in the shared experience.

They return because of "The Meta." They need creators to show them new ways to play, new "builds," or new secrets. This is where IGN Entertainment platform Maxroll thrives, it provides the "Optimization" in the ARPG category that makes staying feel productive.

The "Completionist" itch **Gen X & Millennial**

Gen X and **Millennials** are more likely to return for "Depth of Gameplay" or Mastery. They are the Completionists. They aren't staying for the chat; they are staying to find every hidden item or to reach the max level.

Their return is triggered by Utility Tools (Map-checkers, 100% completion guides). If they feel they haven't "solved" the game, they haven't finished it.

What elements keep you playing, or brings you back to a game?



GAME HELP

90%

of players say they use a form of game help



THE UTILITY SPECTRUM

From "How do I start?" to "How do I win?"

Mapping the generational drivers of retention.

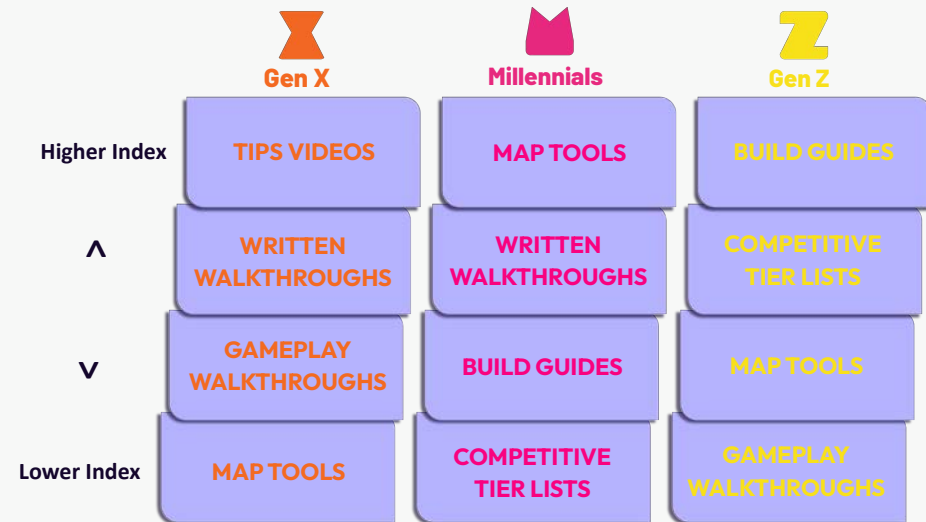
Utility is the connective tissue of gaming. While Discovery attracts a player, Utility retains them. We see a clear generational shift: **Gen X** uses utility to "complete" a journey, while **Gen Z** uses it to "optimize" their status.

Gen Z doesn't just play; they tweak. Their high index for optimization means they return for external tools like build calculators and tier lists. If you own the utility, you own the reason they are online.

Gen X views utility as a Map (Discovery), once it is filled, they move on. **Gen Z** views it as a Manual (Optimization) that is never finished because a game's "Meta" is always evolving.

Millennials act as the "Great Translators," bridging traditional high-intent search for mastery with **Gen Z's** ecosystem-driven participation.

What elements keep you playing, or bring you back to a game?



GENERATIONS IN PLAY



UTILITY ANCHORS FLUID COMMUNITIES

In a feed-driven ecosystem,
structured help becomes the fixed point.

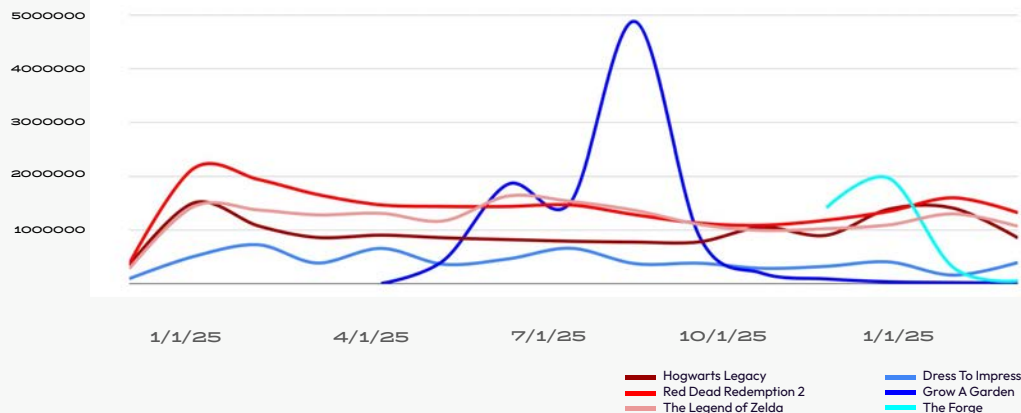
Gen Z may move fluidly across platforms, creators, and trends while core players may anchor themselves in deep systems and long-term progression. But both behaviors converge around one constant: utility.

Game Help represents the stable layer beneath shifting communities. It is where high-intent search meets ongoing participation.

Even in environments defined by user-generated content and algorithmic discovery, players return to structured tools when mastery matters.

Utility is not the opposite of community. It is what sustains it.

Game Interest



GENERATIONS IN PLAY

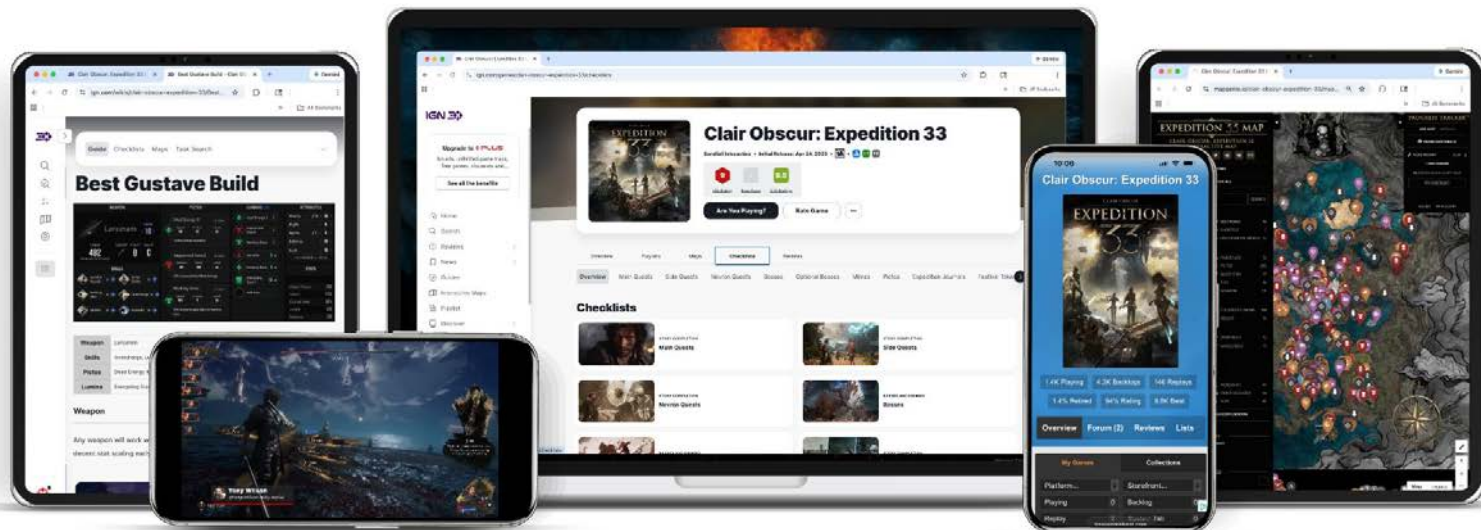


UTILITY IS OUR FOUNDATION

For 30 years, IGN has built tools for players,
not just content for viewers.

What started as simple walkthroughs has evolved into a utility ecosystem.
Game Guides became builds. Builds became planners. Planners became maps.

Utility is not supplemental. It's how high-intent players engage. Our portfolio is
not accidental. It is the infrastructure for the Resident Generation.



Map Genie - Guides - Builds - Howlongtobeat - Walkthroughs - Checklists

UTILITY MEETS COMMUNITY AT SCALE

Maxroll proves that mastery and creator culture are not opposites.



Our acquisition of Maxroll in early 2025 was squarely focused on delivering the right tools for this next generation of gamer. The platform has built a model around core, system-heavy titles traditionally associated with Gen X depth and high-intent engagement.

But today, its growth is being fueled by Gen Z-native trust signals: creators, YouTube personalities, community builds, and shared meta-conversations. It's a place where structured data meets personality, and mastery meets social proof. We're seeing depth meet accessibility in a whole new way.

The result isn't just traffic, it is residency. Maxroll demonstrates that when utility becomes participatory, it truly scales.



GENERATIONS IN PLAY



BUILDING THE NEXT GENERATION OF UTILITY

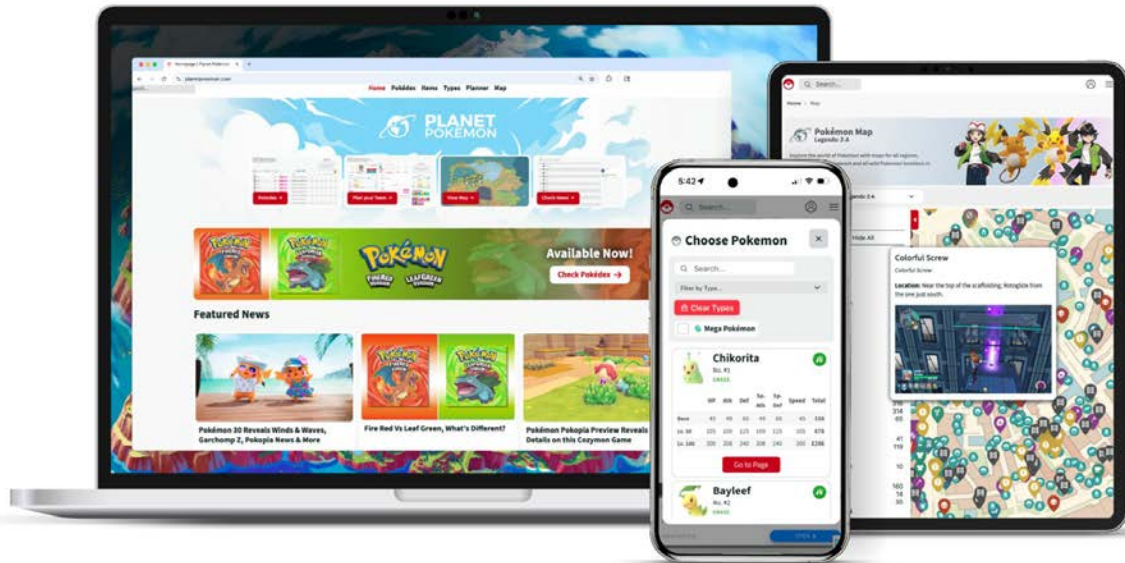
Planet Pokemon is designed for a generation that expects data, identity, and community in one place.



Players are no longer just searching for quick answers, they're looking for systems, identity, and a sense of belonging. Building on the foundational success of Maxroll, we launched Planet Pokemon to integrate structured data, build planning, and progression tools into a single, shareable environment.

This platform directly reflects the dual behaviors of our audience: it satisfies the Gen X demand for depth, bridges the Millennial gap between mastery and participation, and meets the Gen Z expectation for community-native interaction.

This is Game Help reimagined for the Feed era. It isn't just about answering questions anymore; it's about giving players the infrastructure to truly own the meta."



GENERATIONS IN PLAY



Section takeaway:

THE STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE

Build Residency, Not Just Campaigns

Entertainment has shifted from passive consumption to active participation. Discovery sparks awareness, but community and utility sustain engagement. Audiences no longer simply watch or play, they inhabit ecosystems. Retention is earned through involvement, not interruption.

Community Drives Retention

Engagement deepens when audiences feel socially embedded, not just entertained.

Gen Z:

+19%

more likely to prioritize platforms with engaged communities.

Utility Creates Loyalty

Tools, guides, and optimization content keep users returning long after launch windows close.

Gaming:

90%

of players say they use some form of game help.

Participation Converts Attention Into Action

The most valuable platforms are those that help audiences progress, decide, and contribute.

Gen Z:

+20%

more likely to stick with a game because of user-generated content.



CONCLUSION

Navigating the New Attention Systems.

The 2026 Generations in Play study confirmed to us that the data we were seeing wasn't unique just to us. The entertainment landscape has shifted from a model of scarcity and passive consumption to one of infinite access and active participation. While demographics like age provide a baseline, the true driver of modern behavior is the generational "operating system", the distinct media environment in which an audience learned to navigate culture.

Key Strategic Pillars

Intent vs. Algorithm: Discovery has inverted from active seeking (**Gen X**) to algorithmic assistance (**Gen Z**), requiring brands to align creative strategies with how each cohort assigns relevance.

Access as the Default: Possession has been replaced by fluid access; 71% of audiences no longer purchase physical music and 62% no longer buy full-price games, making content libraries the primary unit of value.

From Players to Residents: Engagement is sustained through Utility and Community. Whether it's a "Map" for **Gen X** completionists or an "Optimization Manual" for **Gen Z** socializers, structured help is the anchor for long-term participation.

BEYOND THE DECK

Custom Deep Dives

This report summarizes the foundational shifts observed in our 2026 study of 6,250 highly engaged respondents. However, a study of this scale generates a vast amount of behavioral data that cannot be fully captured in a single presentation.

If you are looking to deep dive into a specific category, such as niche gaming genres, streaming platform loyalty, or regional cultural nuances, we invite you to partner with us directly. Leveraging our IMAGINE audience intelligence platform and first-party behavioral data, we can work with your team to surface the specific insights needed to navigate this increasingly complex ecosystem



DATA SOURCES

This Generations In Play report combines Kantar and UC Berkeley research combined with IMAGINE-powered first party data, live behavioural signals, and proprietary propensity modelling to surface audience insights, market patterns, and activation opportunities.

Insights are generated through an agentic workflow, where IMAGINE autonomously retrieves, correlates, and synthesises signals across multiple data sets, reducing manual interpretation and enabling real-time decision intelligence.

IMAGINE – IGN Entertainment’s Audience AI Platform

- Game Help + Playlists behaviour tracking
- IGN.com engagement signals and taxonomised content analytics
- Audience clustering + propensity models generated through IMAGINE Audience
- Behavioural crossover data across Games, Film, TV, and culture
- Commerce intent, wishlist, search, and SKU-level tracking

Commerce & Transactional Platforms

- Humble Bundle subscriber + purchase intelligence
- IGN Store product performance, SKU affinity, and conversion data
- First-party and affiliate revenue pathing models

Additional Notes

- All data is current as of March 2026, unless otherwise indicated.
- Historical comparisons reflect the most accurate available records at time of publication.
- Audience figures, traffic, engagement, and revenue models reflect internal tracking through IMAGINE, supported by platform-level analytics (Google, YouTube, Spotify, Humble, etc.).
- Propensity scores and CultureMap cohort findings are modelled data, not declared survey data.

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Audio, Video & Social Performance

- YouTube, TikTok, and Shorts analytics
- Spotify + podcast platform retention, share, and cohort analysis
- Social platform audience migration and fandom adjacency mapping

External Intelligence Layers

- Third-party data overlays (e.g., publisher, platform, and industry reports)
- Publicly available insight sources, sentiment panels, and cultural trackers
- Dedicated partner studies including UC Berkeley and Kantar

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