

evolveMKD

THE EVOLUTION OF COMMUNICATION:

From "Fake News" to "News You Can Use"

A SURVEY + REPORT BY EVOLVEMKD

Released February 21, 2023

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The Overview

At EvolveMKD, we know the media is constantly changing. Truly understanding that evolution helps us to do our best work. To that end, we're in our second year of conducting proprietary research on the thoughts, behaviors, and habits of two important players in this landscape: media professionals and media consumers. This year's survey task: Understanding how audiences and media professionals view themselves, and each other. We learned a lot. Some of the results were expected (Audiences see the media as biased). But much of what we learned was illuminating. One highlight we'll dive into in this report is that the skepticism audiences have toward the media has led to more media consumption—not less—more stories, more sources, and more channels. Audiences aren't constrained by outlet loyalty. Instead, they're asking the media and brands to work harder for their attention. They're consuming media in new ways and value the "trusted" aspects of a story.

Why We Conducted This Research

Understanding the complex relationship between media and consumers is foundational to our work as public relations professionals and industry leaders. As the role—and perception—of media continues to evolve, communicators shouldn't simply be reactionary. We must anticipate change. EvolveMKD conducts this research to keep our finger on the pulse. With this knowledge, we can be in the communications and marketing vanguard and help our clients thrive in today's media landscape.

Our Method

Our 23-question, multiple-choice survey was answered by 1,000 consumers and 500 media professionals who were a mix of print, broadcast, and online journalists, and content creators. The consumers were representative of the US general population and given the following definition of media: "The following questions are related to media – media refers to news and lifestyle online, print, broadcast media, social media, influencers, content creators, etc. (media DOES NOT include movies, television series, etc.)." Questions ranged from asking consumers what they consider to be credible sources of media versus the types of media they consume, asking media their professional pain points, asking both consumers and media their perceptions of media as a whole, and so much more!

Categories Explored:



MEDIA PURPOSE
& ROLE



IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA
NOW & IN THE FUTURE



MEDIA
ATTRIBUTES



MISCONCEPTION
& PAIN POINTS



MEDIA & CHANNEL
PREFERENCES



STORY CONTENT
(EXPERTS, ETC.)

What We Learned

Media professionals are unaware that their audiences view them negatively.

Our annual survey revealed two key takeaways. First, there's a disconnect between how the media views itself and how its audience sees it. "Fake news" has pervaded the cultural discourse for many years now, so it's no surprise that the top five attributes consumers assign to media are political, biased, untrustworthy, deceitful, and irresponsible. The media, generally, doesn't see itself this way (they describe themselves as trustworthy and effective). But it was remarkable that members of the media don't know that their consumers don't trust them. In fact, the media believes consumer's use words like helpful, trustworthy, credible, authentic, and truthful to describe them.

Americans are consuming more media.

Our second major finding is that this lack of trust drives audiences to diversify their news sources. They're consuming more media, not less, from a variety of sources and channels. The cultural phenomenon "fake news" created a chasm in perception and had an unexpected impact on media consumption. In December 2022, EvolveMKD CEO Megan Driscoll discussed the meaning of these findings:

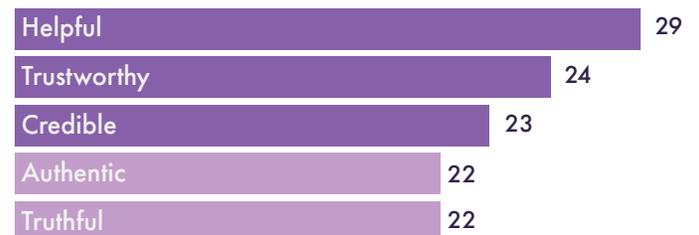
EvolveMKD conducted the research as a tool for our clients' benefit. Telling a meaningful story through the earned media channel is getting more complicated. This data tells us how to leverage our assets to reach a skeptical, at best, audience. Once we saw the results from the survey, we knew we had to not only share this information with our clients, but also with other communications professionals so we are all armed with the information needed to tell our client's stories effectively.

Top 5 Responses

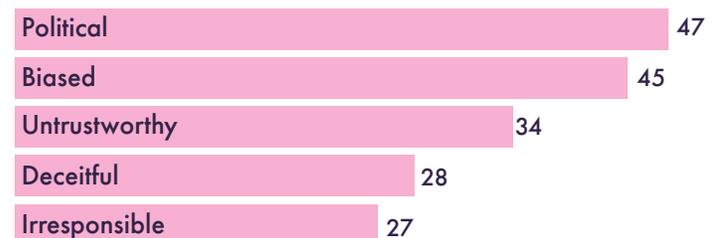
HOW MEDIA DESCRIBES MEDIA



HOW MEDIA THINKS CONSUMERS DESCRIBE MEDIA



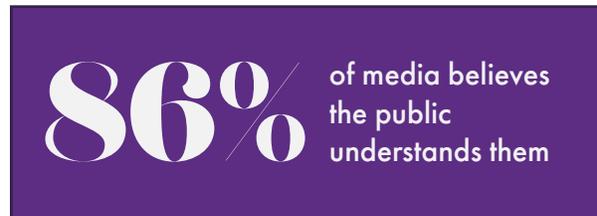
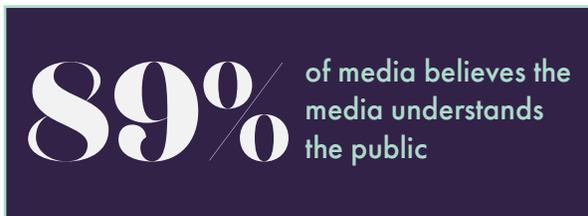
HOW CONSUMERS DESCRIBE MEDIA



While there are a plethora of potential causes for the negative view of media from readers, the one thing that's clear is that consumers themselves understand the public, but that the public's perception of reality. In fact, consumers are on the lookout for the

Why This Matters

Media believes not only that they understand the public, but that the public understands them, too. Media is also under the false impression that the public's perception of them is positive and trustworthy. But as our survey shows, that is not the reality. In fact, consumers think media has an agenda, is inherently biased, and is under the control of corporations (An important callout for PR), and that their #1 priority is serving themselves.



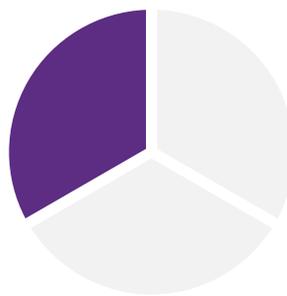
Only a quarter of media believe the public has misconceptions about the media or that the public is skeptical of media



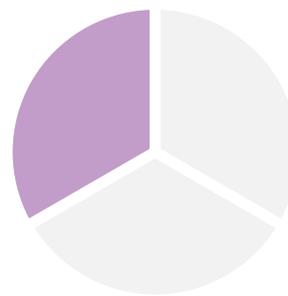
Nearly half of consumers believe the media has an agenda



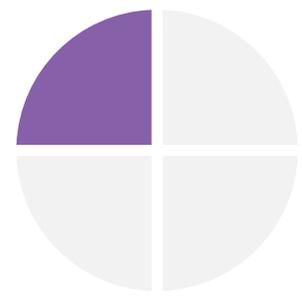
More than 1 in 3 consumers believe the media is biased



Nearly 1 in 3 consumers believe the media is under control of corporations



Nearly 1 in 3 believe the media's #1 priority is serving themselves



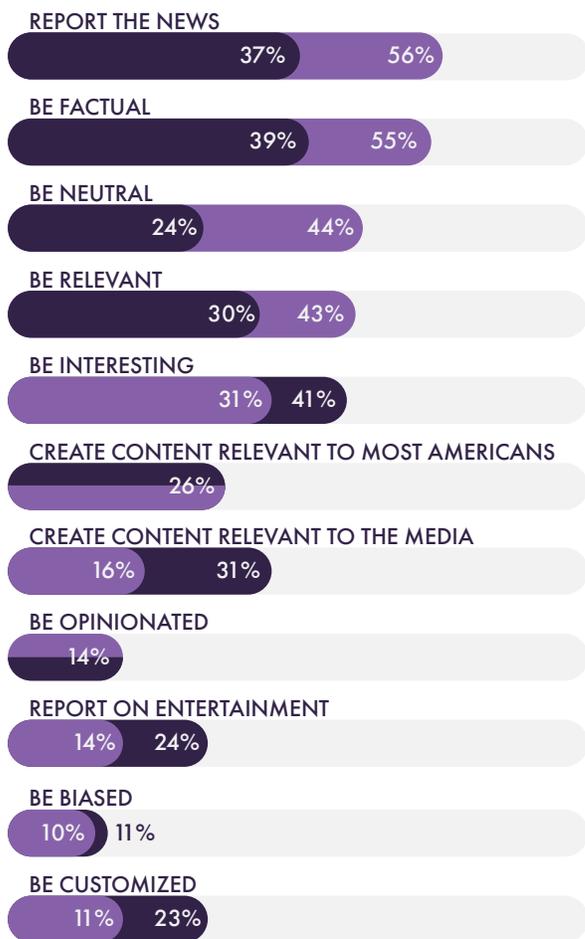
More than 1 in 4 consumers believe the media is under control of politicians

The Role of Media

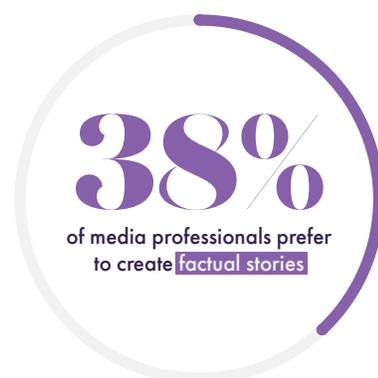
Fifty-five percent of consumers we surveyed prefer to consume factual stories, regardless of whether they are positive or negative. But only 39% of media surveyed said they thought the role of the media was to be factual. And while the majority of media believes what's out there in terms of media is equally balanced between news and entertainment, only one-third of consumers agree. In fact, consumers believe the media is focused on entertainment over news.

The Role of Media

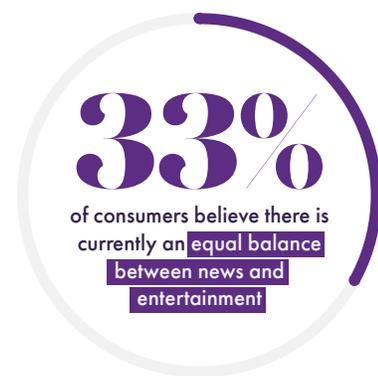
■ MEDIA ■ CONSUMER



VS



VS



Nearly 40% of consumers say the media focuses more on creating entertainment rather than reporting the news.

The Importance of Media

Among consumers who believe media is more important now than ever before, their top two reasons are that media is a fast and easy way to consume information. Coming in third is that the media has influence over society. This is key: Consumers still want media. They still want traditional news stories. They still want to hear from reputable journalists.

The media is the same or more important now than ever before



More Important

■ MEDIA ■ CONSUMER

MEDIA IS AN EASY WAY TO CONSUME INFORMATION



MEDIA IS A FAST WAY TO CONSUME INFORMATION



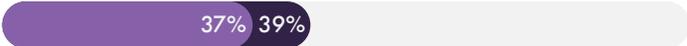
MEDIA KEEPS THE PUBLIC INFORMED ON POLITICS



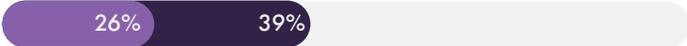
MEDIA INFLUENCES SOCIETY



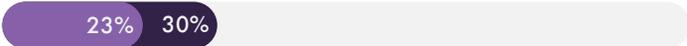
THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA



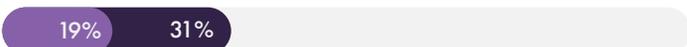
MEDIA OFFERS THE PUBLIC THE TRUTH



MEDIA SIMPLIFIES COMPLEX INFORMATION

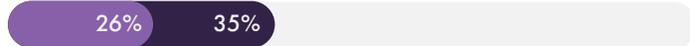


MEDIA IS A TRUSTWORTHY SOURCE IN A WORLD WHERE ANYONE CAN BE AN EXPERT

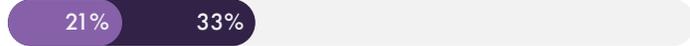


Less Important

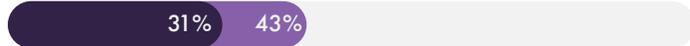
MEDIA IS FOCUSED ON CONTENT THE PUBLIC WANTS INSTEAD OF CONTENT THE PUBLIC NEEDS



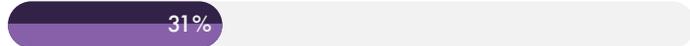
THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA



MEDIA OFFERS ONE VERSION OF THE TRUTH



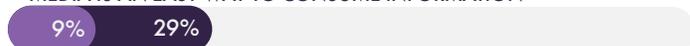
ANYONE CAN BE AN EXPERT



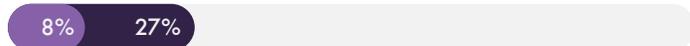
MEDIA IS TOO POLITICAL



MEDIA IS AN EASY WAY TO CONSUME INFORMATION



MEDIA IS FOCUSED ON CONTENT THE PUBLIC NEEDS INSTEAD OF CONTENT THE PUBLIC WANTS



MEDIA IS AN UNTRUSTWORTHY SOURCE



Looking at the Future of Media

These survey results will certainly help communications professionals—and even media and consumers—understand each other better. But it will also be an essential tool for communications professionals as they look toward the future of American media. Traditional media is consistently impacted—and sometimes disrupted—by changes in society, technology, and culture. So, it's our job at EvolveMKD, to constantly evaluate what the industry's future might look like. After reviewing the results of the survey, it's clear that the media will be hindered by its misunderstanding of its audience. The difference between its self-perception and how consumers and audiences view them is significant: More than three times as many media respondents (61%) than consumer respondents (19%) felt media will be more important in the future. That result is tempered somewhat by the fact that only about 1 in 10 media and consumers (finally, a point they can agree on) believe media will be less important in the future.

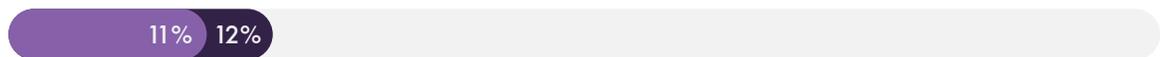
Media will be **MORE IMPORTANT** in the future



Media will be **JUST AS IMPORTANT** in the future



Media will be **LESS IMPORTANT** in the future



■ MEDIA ■ CONSUMER

Today, the media and consumers are at a crossroads. As communications professionals, we cannot afford to simply navigate our clients through this rough terrain; instead, our role today and in the future is to be informed and considerate of the needs of both the media and consumers and arm all parties with the information and tools they need for action. This research gives us the insights for meaningful change – and what we do with it can impact more than just our brands.

Evolving What We Do

Media is also under the impression that the public's perception of them is positive and trustworthy. But as our survey shows, that is not the reality. In fact, consumers think the media has an agenda, is inherently biased, and that they are primarily self-serving.

All this matters a lot for communications professionals.



The biggest shift for us as communications professionals is that we must tell stories based on how our audience will perceive them rather than on the demographics of our audience. Communication is no longer about the "right" channels and messages to reach a 28-year-old, urban woman making \$75k+. Today, communication is about showing up, connecting with, and converting a consumer who wants education, perspective, and reasons to believe but isn't sure where to find them. With the data from our survey, we now know who and how to reach this new media consumer.



Second, this research challenges the notion that different stories are required for different audiences. Instead, our data shows that one story can reach everyone. But it's vital that these stories have the right elements to make them well-rounded. This means a mix of neutral, fact-based pieces (bring on the data) to appease older generations and personal, real-world storytelling to connect with younger audiences. We know what consumers are looking for based on how they react to media, where they are getting their content, and their generational preferences – so it's vital we use that knowledge to make our stories work harder for us.

The New Media Consumer

Lack of consumer trust in the media doesn't translate to disinterest or apathy. In fact, audiences are more invested in stories and content because they're not confident enough to get their news from one source. This new media consumer is complex and skeptical. This presents an exciting challenge for us as communications professionals to understand these consumers so we can best serve them. Based on our survey results, we've outlined five different consumer types and their characteristics.



The Analyst
62% of consumers

Analysts have a keen eye and inquisitive mind. They consume a lot of media from many sources and are interested in the media and expect it to be interesting, in return. They also believe the responsibility to determine what's relevant, newsworthy, and entertaining lies with them. They do believe the media has an agenda, and are constantly questioning which sources they can, and should, trust.

How to reach this consumer: 1. Show up everywhere with consistent messaging. 2. Have sources speak on your behalf who are not on company payroll. 3. Talk about the good, the not so good, and the unexpected – transparency goes a long way with this consumer.



The Loyalist
61% of consumers

This is someone who is skeptical of everything other than their preferred media sources. They only read what they agree with. They gravitate toward news that impacts them directly.

How to reach this consumer: 1. Customization and tailoring your stories to them. 2. Make it personal. 3. Show up on their "trusted" sources because anything else is "fake news."



The Critic
43% of consumers

The Critic has a negative view of the media, generally. Unlike the loyalist who at least believes in their go-to media outlet, The Critic has a negative view of the entire industry. They believe the media is inherently biased, has an agenda, and may even be under the control of politicians. They believe that there are many truths, and that the media only offers one convoluted version of the truth.

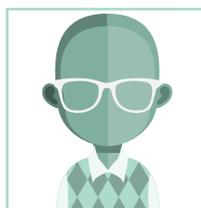
How to reach this consumer: 1. Data, data, data. 2. Outside sources, not media, who can back up your story. 3. Keep it factual. They are looking for a million reasons to challenge you, don't give them that opportunity.



The Fact-Finder
88% of consumers

This is someone who wants facts, fact, facts. They prefer neutral news with no bias. This is not the person you are going to reach with any form of storyline that includes entertainment. They want "news," period.

How to reach this consumer: 1. Transparency and truth will go far with them. 2. No sugar-coating, no fluffy language, no filler. 3. This consumer wants to be respected. They are smart, no-BS people. Treat them that way and they will respect you right back.



The Devotee
40% of consumers

They've heard they shouldn't trust the media, but that hasn't changed their opinion of the news. In fact, the importance of media hasn't changed for them at all. They like all types of stories and content and are more likely to believe that the media's role is to create stories most relevant to the media.

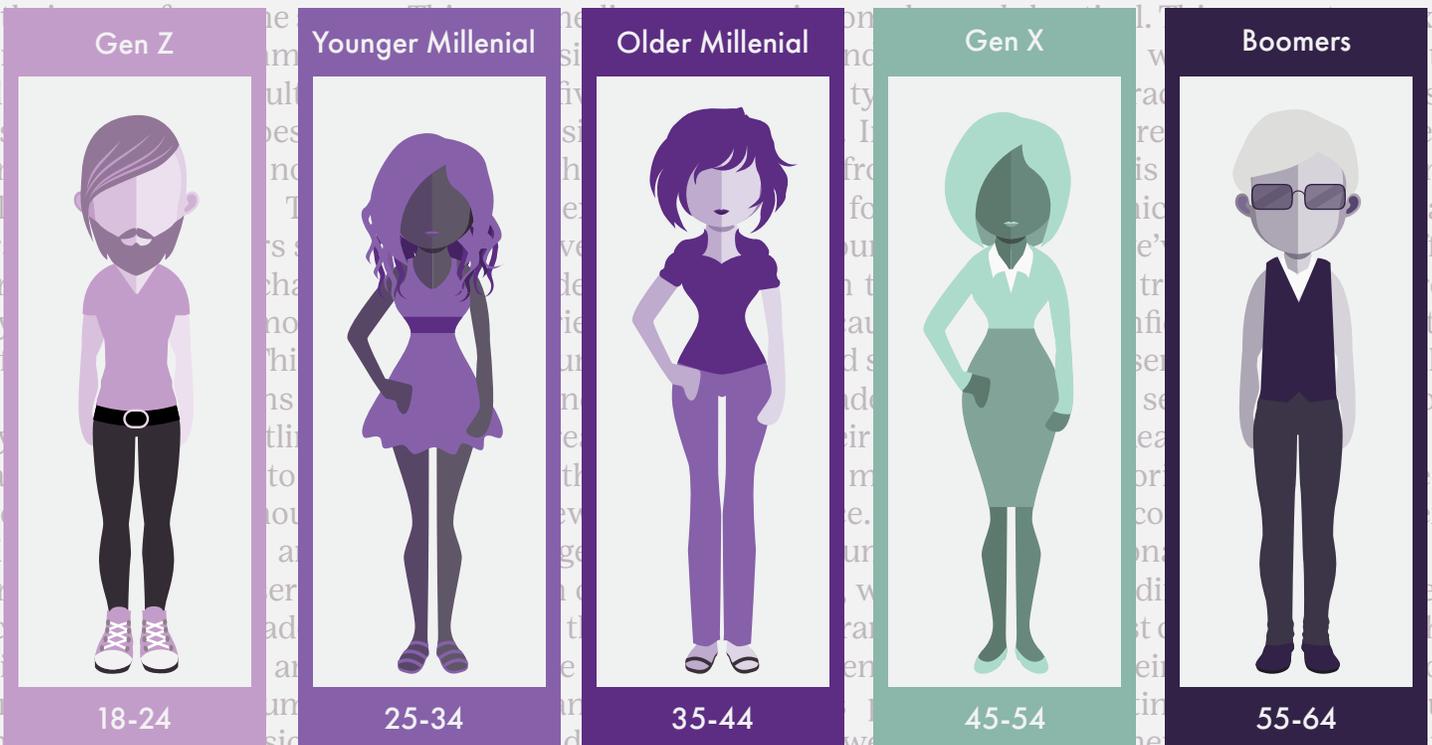
How to reach this consumer: 1. Have passion behind your stories. Media is invested, Devotees will be too. 2. Share your personal experience. 3. Bring in other opinions. This consumer is eager to believe, so give them lots of reasons to.

A Bonus Look

THE EVOLUTION OF COMMUNICATION

The Generational Divide

The survey showed us the different types of consumers based on how they consume and perceive media. But there were also vast generational differences that came through in nearly every answer. Here is some of the biggest takeaways when it comes to media consumption, investment, and conversion across age groups.



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Despite what we've heard, media is statistically more important to younger consumers than their older counterparts.

Gen Z & younger millennials are 33-57%

more likely to think MEDIA IS MORE IMPORTANT NOW than ever before compared to their GEN X & BOOMER counterparts.

Why is it more important?

THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA & MEDIA'S INFLUENCE ON SOCIETY were the TOP TWO REASONS for media's importance to younger audiences.

Anyone can see how strong media's influence over society is just by walking through the aisles of Sephora. In almost every store the same products are completely sold out, entirely thanks to a wave of viral TikToks and online articles raving about a handful of popular products. Whether it be trends, products, or ideals, media continues to influence shopping habits, trend cycles, and ways of thinking across generational lines.

- Gen Zer

As communications professionals, this data gives us the hard, but not impossible truth, that your brand or client's story may be perceived... things - channel, platform, writing style, use of... of these things are actually in our... ible truth, that your brand... writing style, use of... ally in our...

One story, with the right elements, can reach everyone.

“Just give me the facts!”

Older Millennials, Gen X, Boomers are more likely to want hard facts than their younger counterparts

“What’s your story?”

Gen Z & Younger Millennials are more likely to want the opinion of the writer or content creator than their older counterparts

AUDIENCES	DATA FROM A TRUSTED SOURCE	LINKS TO SOURCES	FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE	3rd PARTY EXPERTS	OPINION & PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE
GEN Z	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	MORE IMPORTANT
YOUNGER MILLENNIAL	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	LESS IMPORTANT	MORE IMPORTANT
OLDER MILLENNIAL	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	LESS IMPORTANT	MORE IMPORTANT
GEN X	MORE IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	LESS IMPORTANT
BOOMER	MORE IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	LESS IMPORTANT

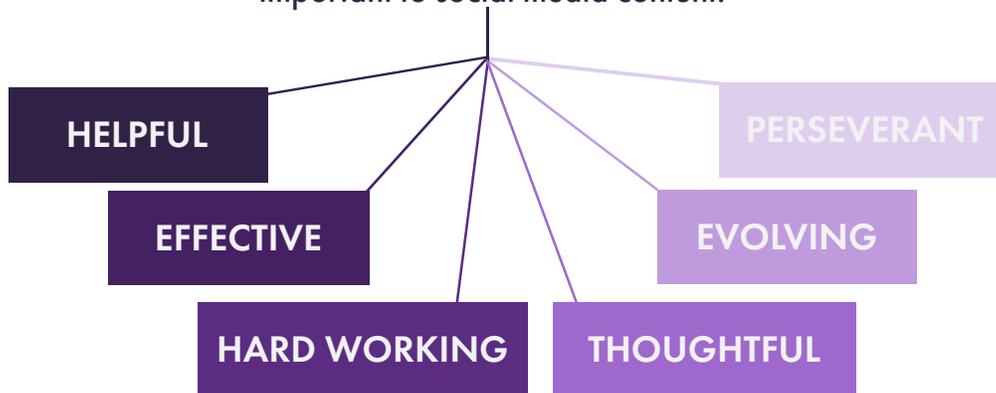
MORE IMPORTANT
 SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT
 LESS IMPORTANT

Readers' lack of trust in the media doesn't translate to disinterest or apathy. In fact, they're more invested in stories from one source. This new media communications professionals we've outlined five translate to enough

Expectations for media differ based on age especially among younger audiences

Younger Audiences (18-34)

are more likely to say the following are important to social media content:



Compared to their older counterparts, younger audiences are more likely to admit they hold influencers & media to different standards, and more likely to admit to trusting influencers over media.

Older Audiences (45+)

have fewer expectations for social media to uphold compared to other media; traditional media must be:



Compared to their younger counterparts, older audiences are significantly more likely to hold traditional media (online, print, broadcast) to a higher standard.

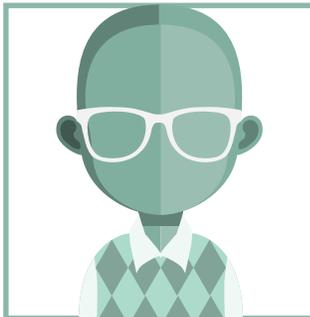
Younger consumers are turning to informational sources over aspirational influencers (lifestyle, celebrity, etc.)



Media are the #1
type of "influencer" GEN Z follows on social channels!



Celebrities, lifestyle influencers, and comedians
top the list for MILLENNIALS



Career experts & athletes
move up the list when looking at GEN X

Readers' lack of trust in the media doesn't translate to disinterest or apathy. In fact, they're more invested in stories from one source. This new media communications professionals we've outlined five translate to enough

Medical & health-based professionals have built-in trust, but that may mean potential changes to their content

~ 1 in 4

Gen z & younger millennials have **HIGHER TRUST** in medical or health-based influencers than influencers in other spaces

~ 1 in 4

Gen z & younger millennials have **HIGHER TRUST** in medical or health-based influencers than the medical media

1 in 4

consumers believe medical and health-based influencers should be held to different regulations and/or ethics than other types of influencers

“High standards of conduct are part of the fabric of being a medical professional, and at the core of how we earn the trust and respect of our patients and the community at large. With this trust comes a responsibility of recognizing the degree of our influence. Ultimately, we take an oath to ‘not do harm,’ a guiding principle that should make us more thoughtful about the medical information and content we disseminate.”
- Dr. Sabrina Fabi

Readers' lack of trust in the media doesn't translate to disinterest or apathy. In fact, they're more invested in stories from one source. This new media communications professionals we've outlined five translate to enough

Younger consumers are looking for love—brand love

If you want love from...



GEN Z

Talk about being “the best,” less expensive, the value you bring, and being “morally better” than others

They are more likely to love a brand if they work with influencers they love



YOUNGER MILLENNIALS

The #1 thing they want? GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE!

This group is eager to love – and split down the middle. Half care about ethics and good practices, the world/society, being morally better than other companies...

...The other half care about the value brands bring to them individually, the issues pertinent to them (not society), and influencer-backed brands



OLDER MILLENNIALS

Opposite to Younger Millennials, the Older Millennial group is the least eager to love brands...

To reach them, they really just want the science/facts/data presented in a way that shows the tangible value the product or service could provide to them



GEN X and BOOMERS

Focus on them! They want to understand how brands provide value to them, what customer service is like, and that the product/service is better than the others

It's a big plus with this group if there is data or science behind claims too

Readers' lack of trust in the media doesn't translate to disinterest or apathy. In fact, they're more invested in stories from one source. This new media communications professionals we've outlined five translate to enough

Younger generations are easier to convert than older generations

Younger generations are

2-3X

MORE LIKELY TO PURCHASE PRODUCTS
AFTER SEEING/READING ABOUT THEM FROM INFLUENCERS & MEDIA
THAN THEIR OLDER COUNTERPARTS

How to move to interest & action among those most motivated by influencers:

- Showing the results/impact of the product/service
- Showing a picture/video of them using the product/service
- Talk about the results/impact of the product/service
- Talk about using the product/service on themselves
- Including a link in bio

What's less important for conversion:

- Knowing the product/service is something they would use IRL
- Makes no difference if it's a paid/sponsored or unpaid/unsponsored product/service

evolveMKD

Be Kind, Don't Suck

... audience sees the
... questioning the media's
... one who dissects
... and looking for
... their personal
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