

Pop Pulse

Gen Z: The Nation's Influencers*

November 2025

* But not as you know them



The ambition

We believe in the power of Populist Creativity to help brands grow.

For the past three waves, PopPulse has captured the state of the nation by listening to the people who hear what Britain's really saying. But for this fourth wave, curiosity pulled us somewhere new.

Gen Z are so often treated as a segment - a niche to decode rather than a force to understand. As the home of Populist Creativity, we couldn't help but question that. What if their influence runs deeper and wider than we think?

So this time, PopPulse went beyond the feeds to explore the Gen Z sphere of influence - listening to them and the people around them - to see how far their ideas, instincts, and energy ripple through the rest of the nation.

What we've uncovered has reshaped how not only how we see Gen Z's influence as a cohort - but how brands need to think about influencing the nation from here on.

“This wave of PopPulse doesn't just look at Gen Z as a ‘segment’ to decode. As the home of Populist Creativity, we couldn't help but question that. What if their influence runs deeper and wider than we think?”

How do we do it?

We Listen To The Listeners

The Brits who, each and every day, hear what people are really talking about as part of their jobs. In partnership with The Outsiders, we task this panel to include a series of pre-defined questions within their conversations and then report back at the end of each working day. These “Active Listeners” comprise respondents from across the country.

We then corroborate these findings with group discussions with families from across the country and a 2,000 person strong nat rep quant study. We also dig further with in-depth interviews talking to experts in the forces influencing culture:

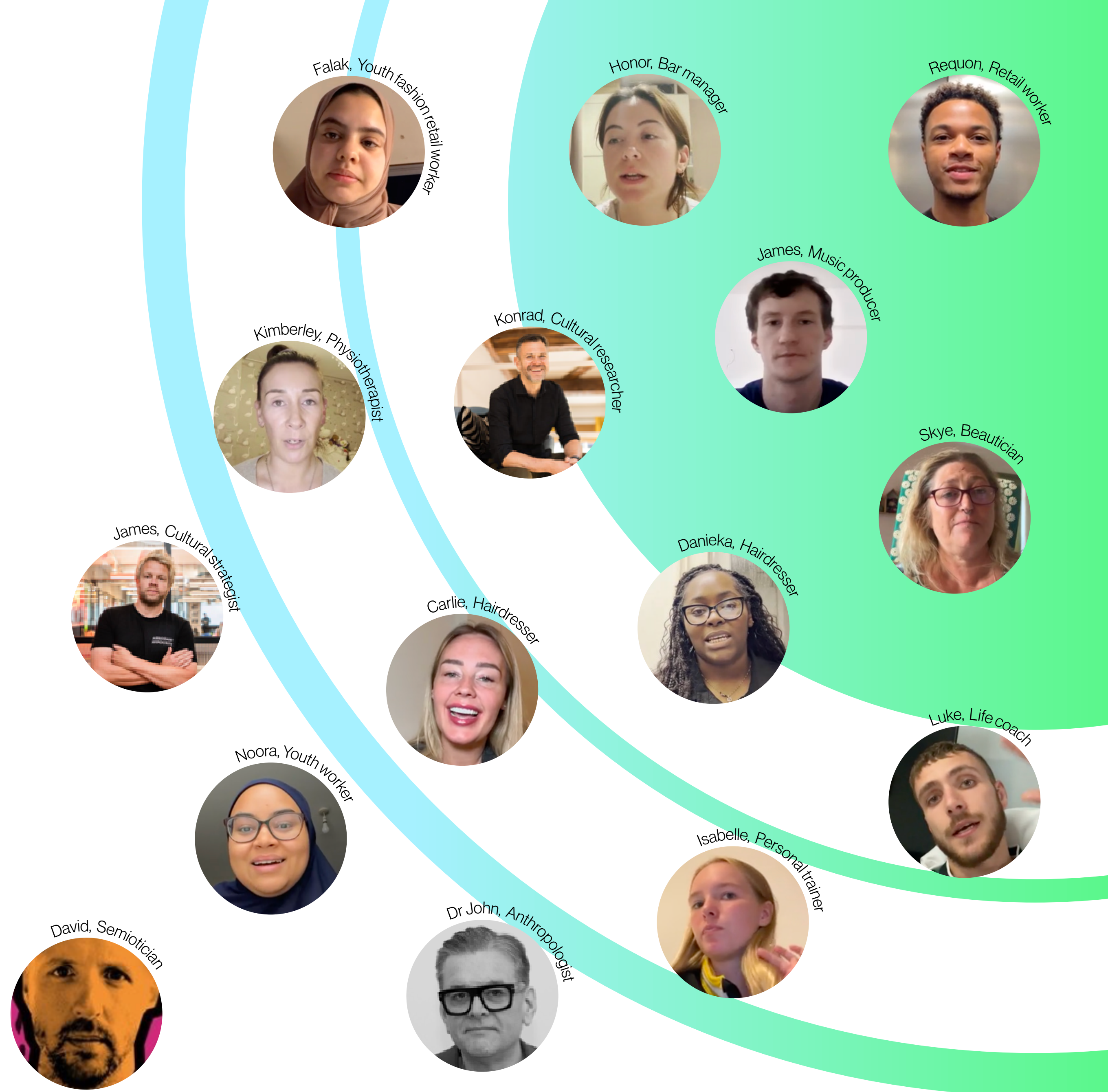
A Semiotician

An Anthropologist

A Cultural Ethnographer

A Trends Consultant

A Social Historian



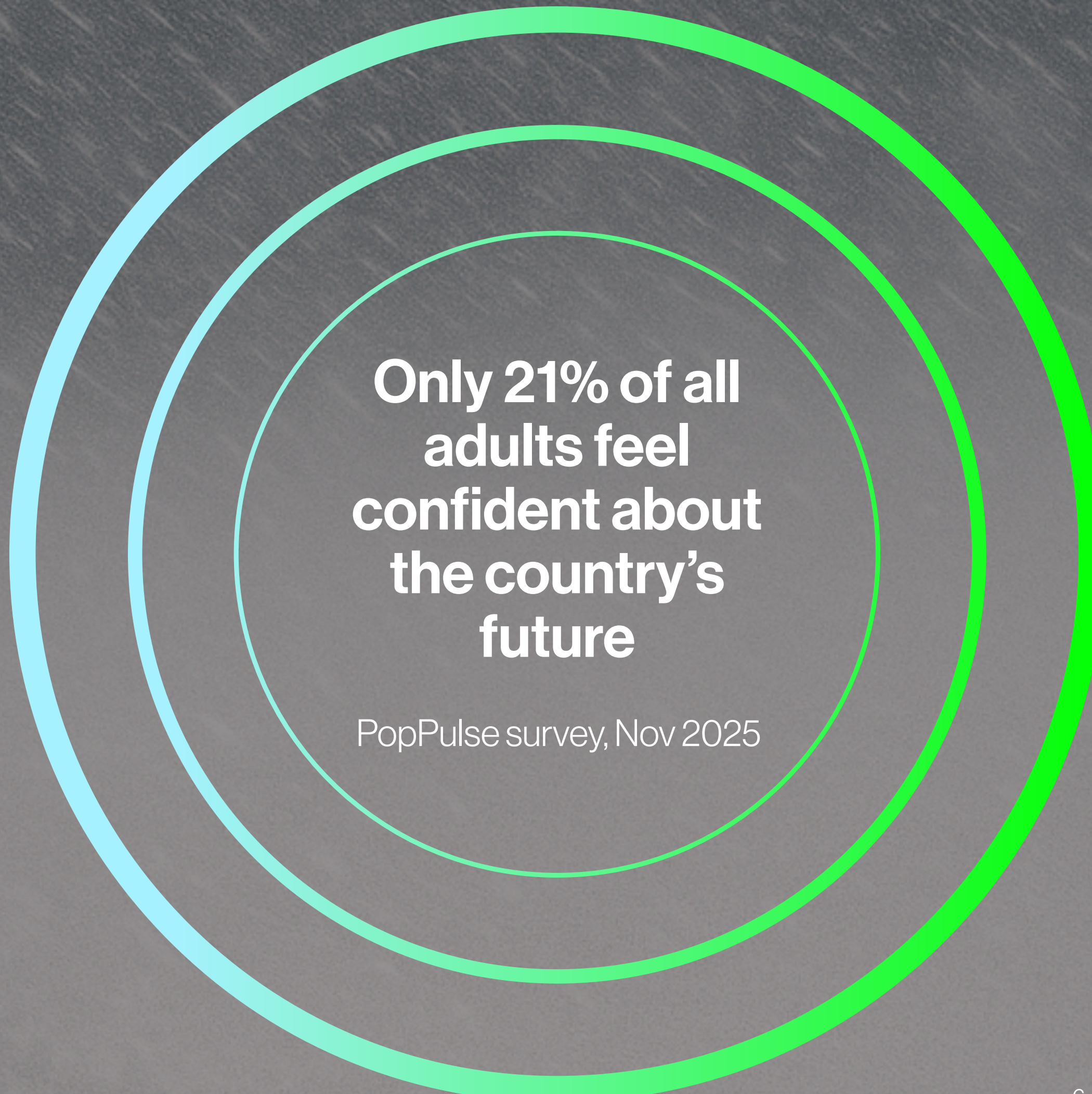
The dozens of families we talked to



What we found

The storm's still raging...

Life feels fast, fragile, and full of confusing contradictions. The pace is dizzying. Institutions feel broken. Trust is draining away. Anxiety about AI and the future looms large. For the first time in decades, most people believe their children will have it worse than them. We're living through constant white noise - and everyone's just trying to find something solid to hold on to.



**Only 21% of all
adults feel
confident about
the country's
future**

PopPulse survey, Nov 2025

And we're all huddling closer

People aren't looking outward for leadership or direction; they're looking inward for safety. The national coping instinct is closeness - family, friends, and familiar routines.

Big dreams have been swapped for small comforts: safety, sanity, stability. Everyday feel-goods over far-off fantasies.

Having once kept their distance, generations are now very much in each other's pockets - both physically and emotionally.

"We're all so busy, always online or working, but what I actually want is just more time with my people – my mates, my family, just hanging out."

— Gen Z respondent

"I think we're craving normal things again – dinner with friends, walks with family doing nothing together. It feels rare now."

— Hairdresser, PopPulse interview

At the centre of
this huddle sits
one guiding force:

GenZers

“Every youth generation comes in with new ideas, but what’s different now is the speed and visibility of their **influence**”

Social Anthropologist

Really??

OK, we know what you're thinking...

Fragile, lazy, joyless, self-absorbed, disconnected,
all aspiring to be TikTok influencers.

And because generations are so separated -
different feeds, different platforms, different postcodes -
the gap widens and the caricature sticks.

“Don't seem to have been taught manners”

“Expect everything to be given to them”

“Live their lives through their phones”

“Don't want to work hard”

PopPulse survey, Nov 2025

Yep.

Really.

Gen Z

The nation's influencers



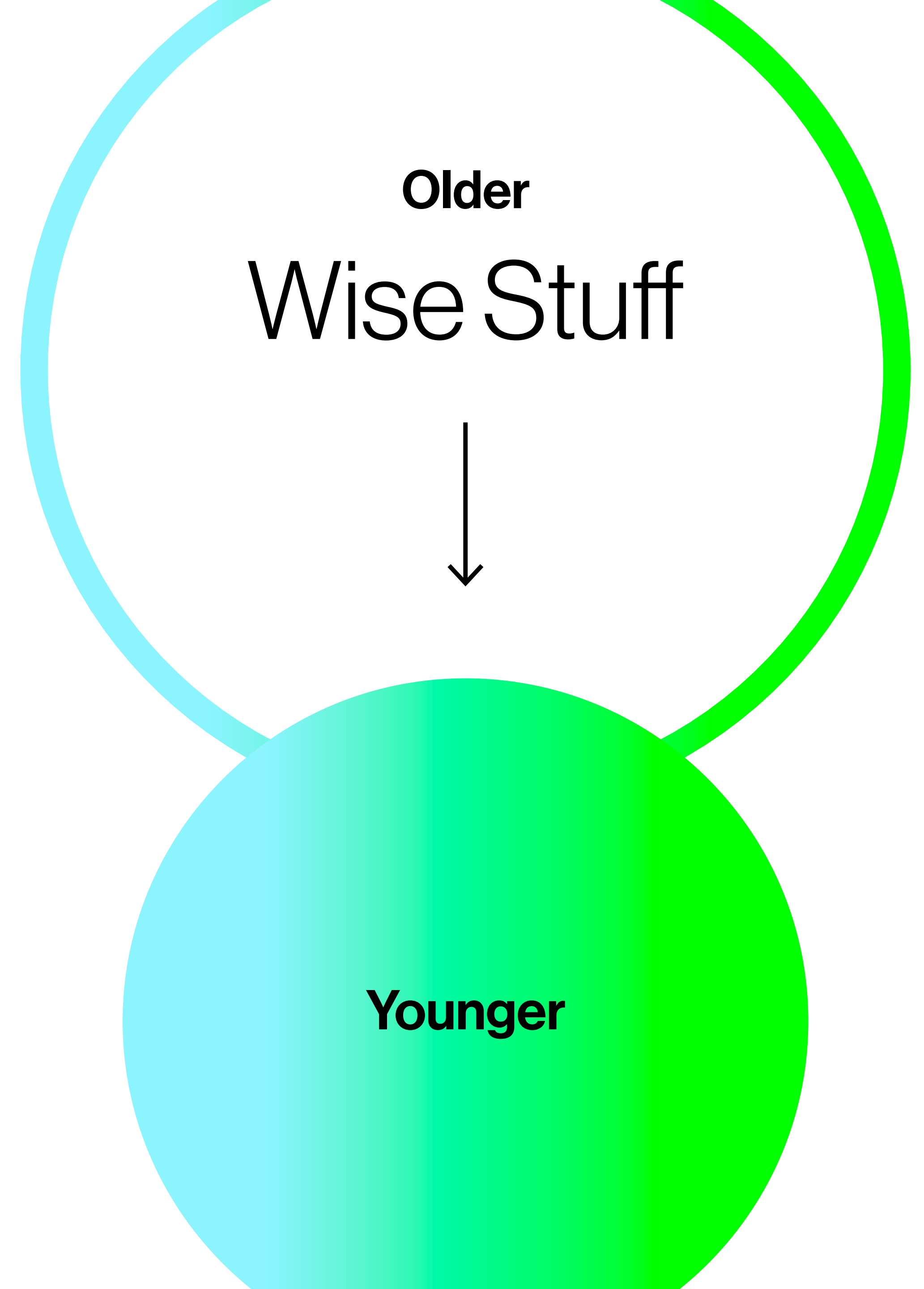
It's more profound
than we think



Worldly wisdom used to trickle down

The theory of intergenerational influence in human history has painted a pretty consistent picture: youth set new ideas and tastes, elders hold the wisdom.

In other words - the cool stuff travels up, but the wise stuff travels down... and progress inches forward.

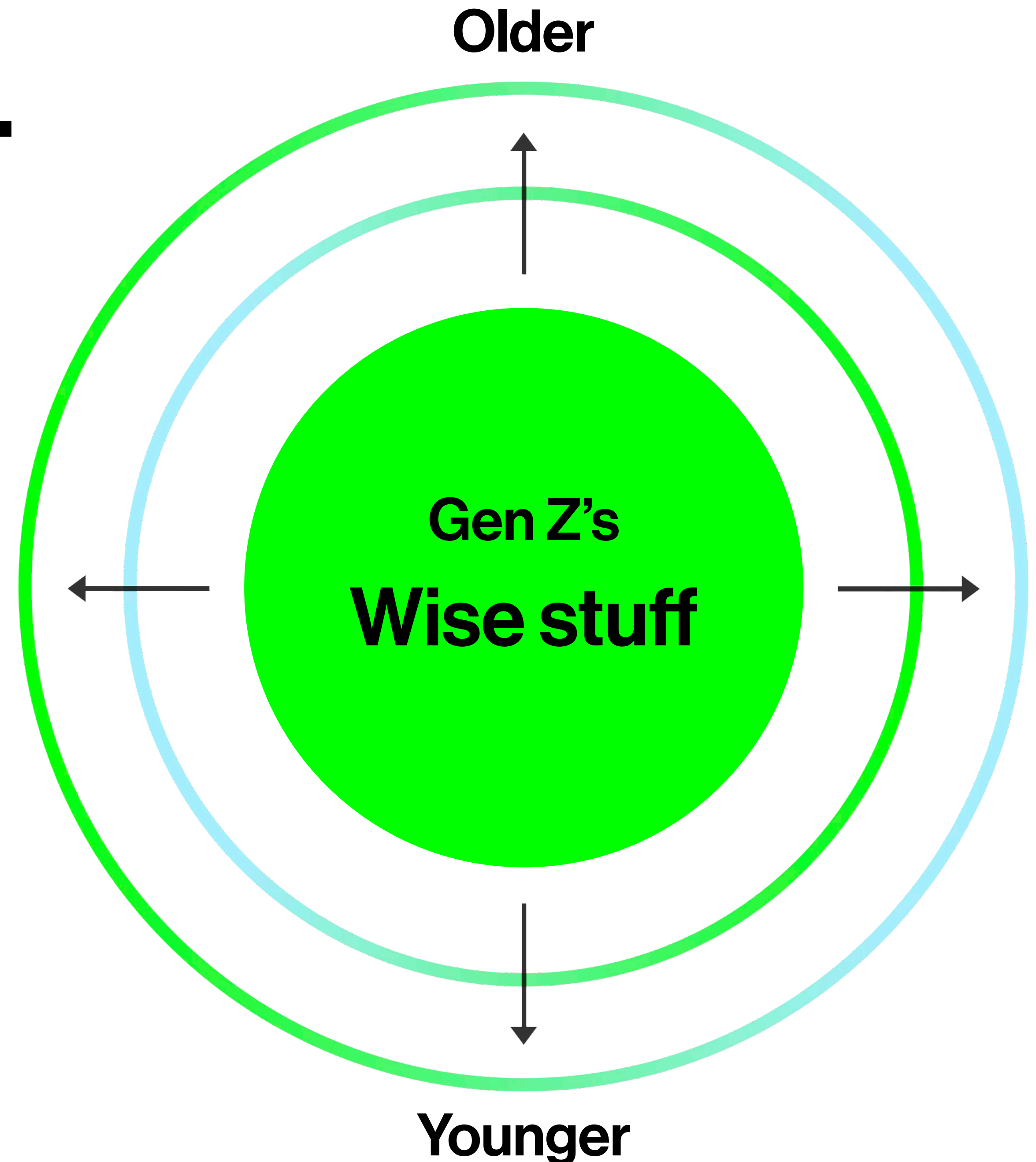


Now it ripples out - through Gen Z

The Information Age has transformed how wisdom circulates through society.

As innovation accelerates faster than tradition can adapt, a new kind of guide has emerged: Gen Zers. The generation able to translate complexity into clarity, to help others live, work, and think within systems mediated by screens and algorithms.

The flow of wisdom is no longer top-down and over decades - but multidirectional and daily - circulating across generations and communities, with Gen Z at the heart.



It's not just the cool stuff.

It's the everyday
wise stuff.

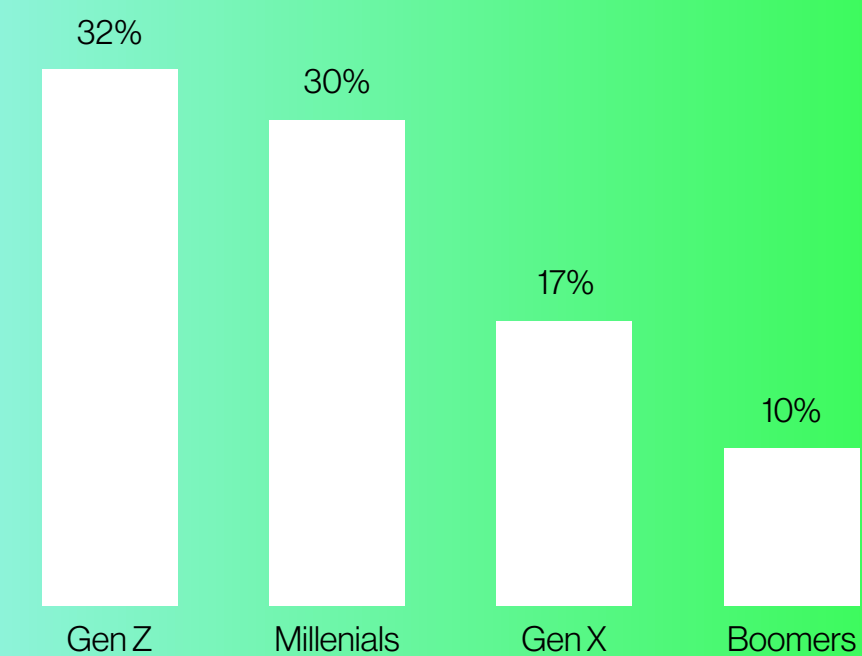
Making Gen Z the micro influencer in every home

It starts where trusted conversation already lives in every day exchanges - DMs, group chats and kitchen tables - and moves through the people closest to them.

Not only does this help the people they care about - it reinforces bonds, deepens trust in close, practical, and deeply personal ways.

**Gen Z are the
biggest net
influencers
across all
categories**

Gen Z are more likely
than any generation
to give advice rather
than seek it *



** and they seek it just as much as everyone else!*

Sharing advice with close ones of all ages

And it's not just beauty and fashion. It's which TV to buy. Where to grab the best deal for lunch. Even where to invest. Their POV cuts across categories and audiences.

One conversation, one household at a time - Gen Z are spreading the good stuff to those they know and love.

Shaping what they trust, what they buy, and how they live.

MUSIC
GURU

BEAUTY &
FASHION
ASSISTANT

TECH
AGENT

EAT OUT
PRO

HOME
IMPROVER

DEAL
HUNTER

LITTLE
CHEF

HOLIDAY
PLANNER

HEALTH
BUFF

ENTERTAINER

“I basically forced my parents to open a Starling or Monzo bank account, so that every time they go on holiday they’re not constantly just going to the travel money shop, taking out all the Euros”

(Triad, Female friends 18-21)

Recently, for me, it’s been TikTok, especially in terms of food, more than anything really. You see different restaurants opening up, showing off the menu in different ways on TikTok and Instagram, stuff like that.

(Triad, Male friends 21-25)

“I’m always researching natural remedies and stuff like that. I actually have a big list like this of just loads of different things written down, things you’ve never heard of for different illnesses, etcetera, and I do have a lot of friends come to me if they’re having troubles with stuff”

(Active Listener)

Mum, she literally is a bit like me, has a thought process and she’ll ask it. It’ll be like, “What dress should I wear this day?”

(Triad, Female friends 21-25)



“My Christmas list, I’m awful for this, I’ll make such a specific Christmas list, it will have the discount codes they can use, so that they don’t have to pay the full price of what I’ve asked for. I’m like, ‘Don’t go to Boots for this, go to Currys, they’ve currently got 50% off this Black Friday’”

(Triad, Female friends 18-21)

“I’m on ChatGPT doing it, and I was showing my papa the other week, I can’t remember whatever we were, and I was like, ‘You can just go into ChatGPT, AI, and ask it, and it gives you an answer’”

(Triad, Family Scotland)

“We’ve got a family WhatsApp that I set up where we put all the food ideas and film ideas in... photos of restaurants I’ve been to, but mainly just the food really”

(Triad, Family Manchester)

“I recently influenced my parents to buy an air fryer, they love it. They’re like, ‘Oh, does yours do this?’ I’m like, ‘We’ve got the exact same air fryer, yes, of course it does that.’ Obviously, it does actually help them.”

(Triad, Female friends 18-21)

Unlearning the stereotypes...

The influencer **TROPE**

Cool stuff

Culture-first

Anarchic

Gen Z bubble

The influencer **TRUTH**

Wise stuff

Community-first

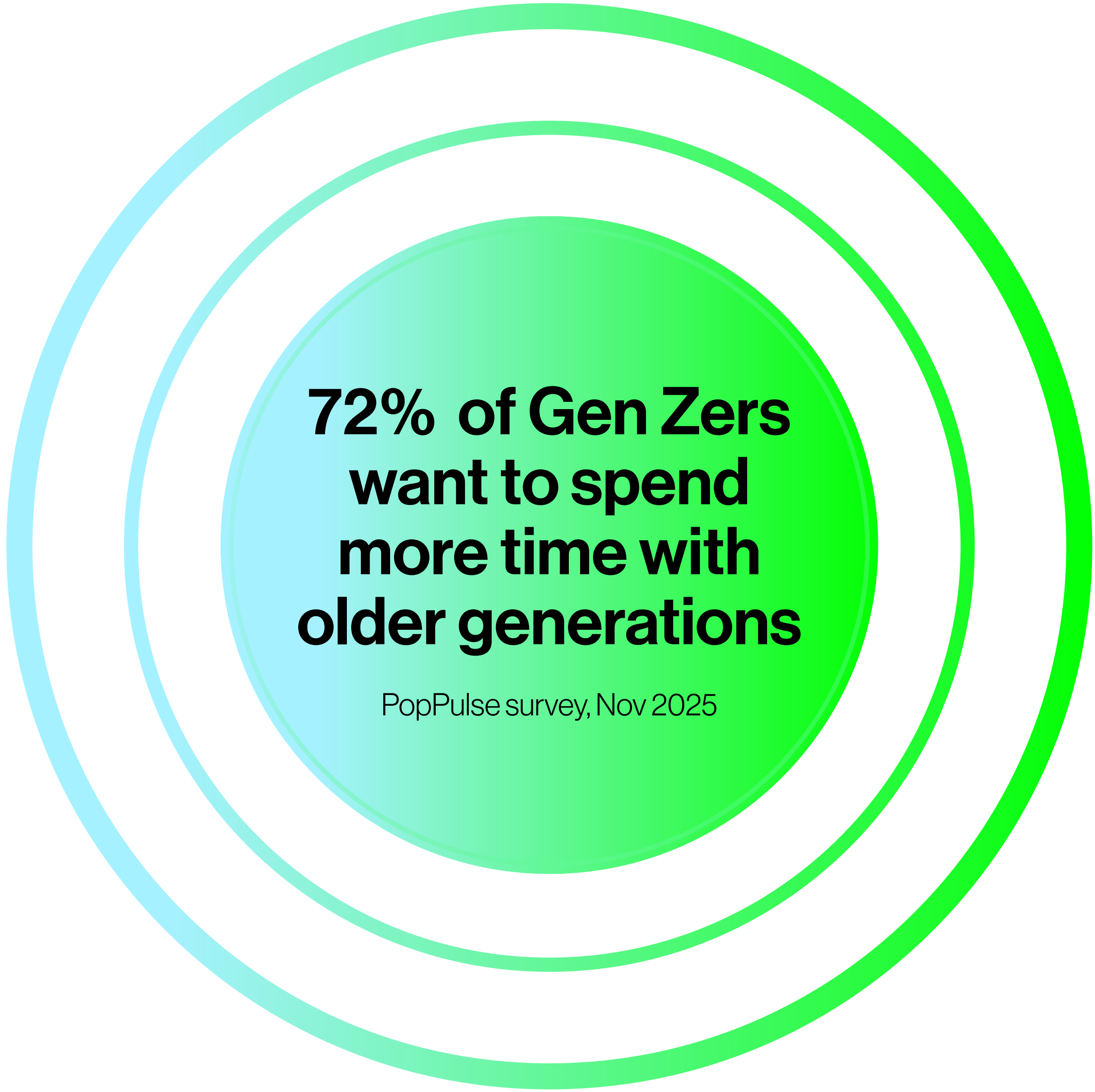
Guiding

Intergenerational

“One of the myths
we need to debunk
is that there is a
generational war...

If you take the dehumanising
generational label off... and just ask
who you respect - influencers,
sports stars, your mum, your nan -
it's always the family.”

- Cultural Ethnographer



**72% of Gen Zers
want to spend
more time with
older generations**

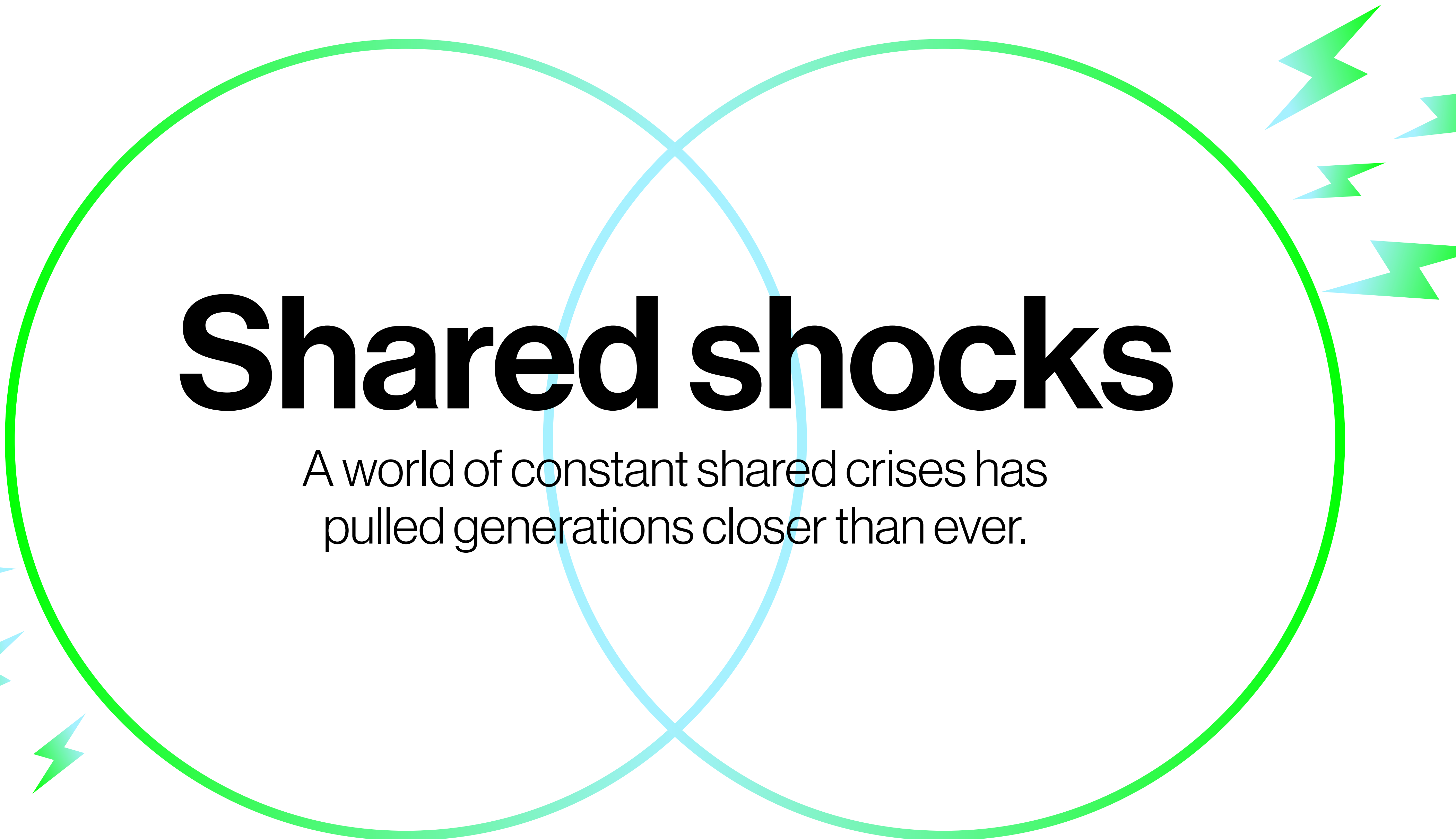
PopPulse survey, Nov 2025

So why

Now

And why

Gen Z



Shared shocks

A world of constant shared crises has
pulled generations closer than ever.

“When there’s a big shock, everyone feels it, no matter your age. I think that’s made people more open to listening and sharing, because it’s not just their generation that’s struggling anymore.”

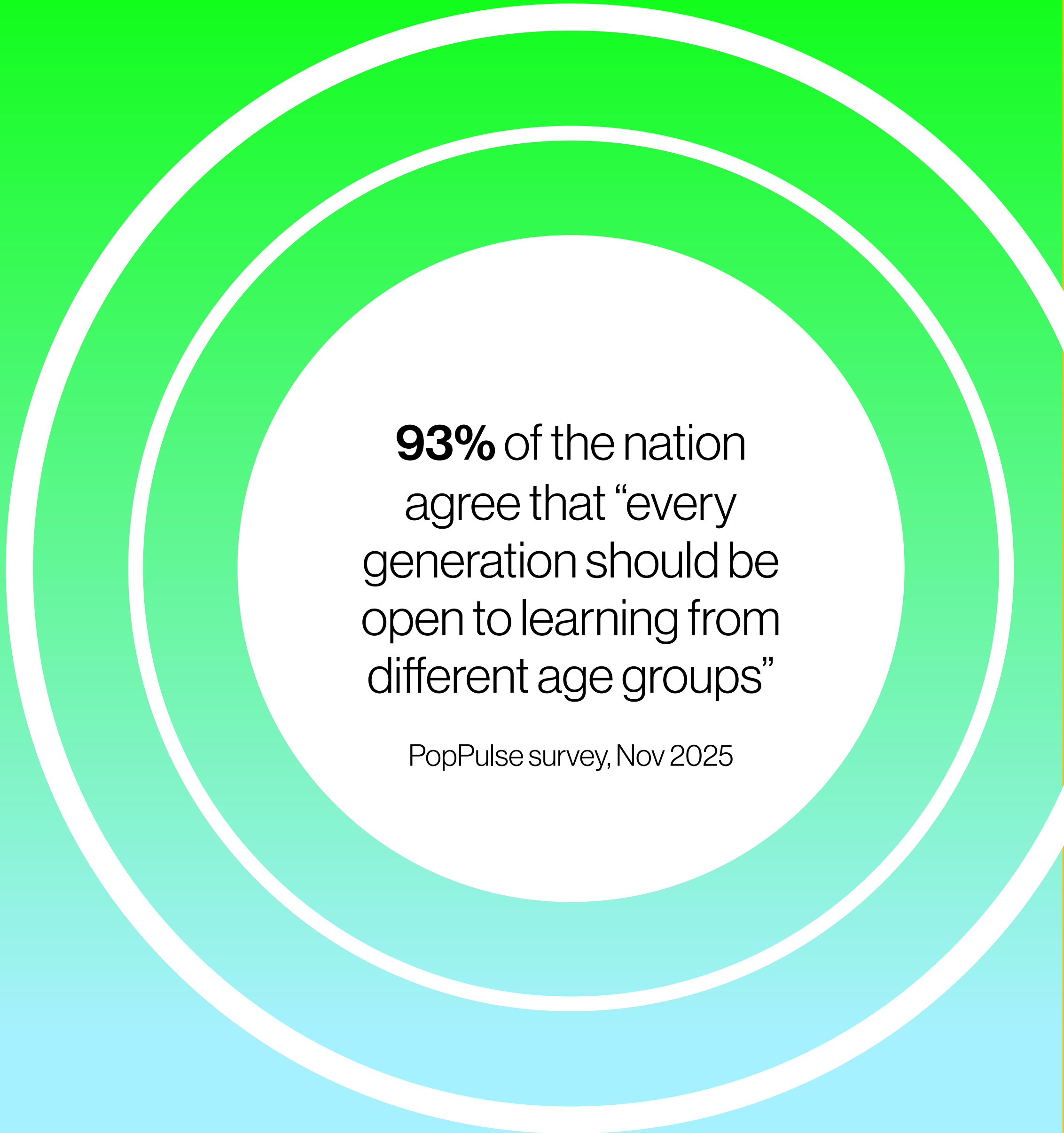
— Parent of Gen Z participant

“Moments of disruption - like COVID, or even the economic mess - have created this weird solidarity across generations. People are comparing notes rather than blaming each other.”

— Social Historian

“It feels like for the first time in ages, we’ve all been through the same stuff - pandemic, cost of living, everything changing so fast - and it’s kind of levelled things a bit between old and young.”

— Gen Z respondent



93% of the nation agree that “every generation should be open to learning from different age groups”

PopPulse survey, Nov 2025

Gen Z are built for the Chaos

Shaped by uncertainty, Gen Z are the first generation truly adapted for modern life - agile enough to thrive in flux, fluent in contradiction, and wired for connection.

Navigators

Gen Z are pros at navigating the push-and-pull tensions of modern life: dreaming big yet aiming for “enough”, living online yet craving human closeness, chasing what’s new yet valuing what lasts. They don’t ignore contradictions - they live within them, fluidly. In a world that swings between crisis and overload, they’ve developed emotional agility: the ability to pivot, prioritise, and find balance in motion. Rather than trying to fix the chaos, they’ve learned to work with it, making adaptability itself a form of calm.

Gluers

In an ever-lonelier, lower-trust climate, Gen Z protect their inner circles and build closeness through continual sharing. They’ve seen the people they love struggle - through pandemics, political upheaval, and a cost-of-living crisis - and learned that connection is survival. Having grown up amid shared shocks, they value interdependence over individualism, forming emotional alliances across age and experience. Where older generations fragment, Gen Z fortify: acting as the connective tissue that helps families, friends, and colleagues hold it together.



They are...

Hustlers

Having grown up through economic turbulence, widening inequality, and relentless hustle culture, Gen Z approach money with unflinching realism. They’ve seen systems fail and financial advice oversimplified - so they prefer truth to polish. They talk openly about side hustles, savings, and financial stress, not as taboo but as shared reality. Their relationship with money is pragmatic, transparent, and morally aware: they want to earn well, spend smart, and still sleep at night. For them, being “real with money” isn’t cynicism - it’s clarity.

Filters

Gen Z have grown up inside a world where information is infinite and attention is scarce. They’ve learned to sift, sort, and sharpen their intake - sponging up what matters, discarding what doesn’t. Their feeds may be chaotic, but their instincts are curatorial: they know when something’s real, useful, or joyfully worth their time. They’re fluent in filters, both literal and cultural - passing on the good stuff: knowledge, hacks, humour, or perspective that cuts through the noise and actually helps.

And their can-do optimism buoys us all

“This generation feels like it has a purpose again. They don’t trust the system, but they believe they can build something better from the ground up.”

Social Historian, PopPulse expert interview

“There’s a lot that’s messed up, but we’re more aware, more open-minded. That’s a good place to start.”

— Gen Z respondent

**2/3* of Gen Z
describe
themselves as
hopeful or optimistic**

*higher than any other
generation

PopPulse survey, Nov 2025



**I accepted the long road
Cause that's how the way to the top goes
Jump over the hurdles and potholes
Smart turns at the junctions and crossroads
Hey, you know that I don't come to play
Kay, i ain't no ones protege
Fate, is it what brought me today
Wait, nothing ever comes late
No one do it like I do it
Rooted Even when I'm going through it
Code switching I keep it fluent
Made an empire out of my ruins
Get a table and see what I bring**

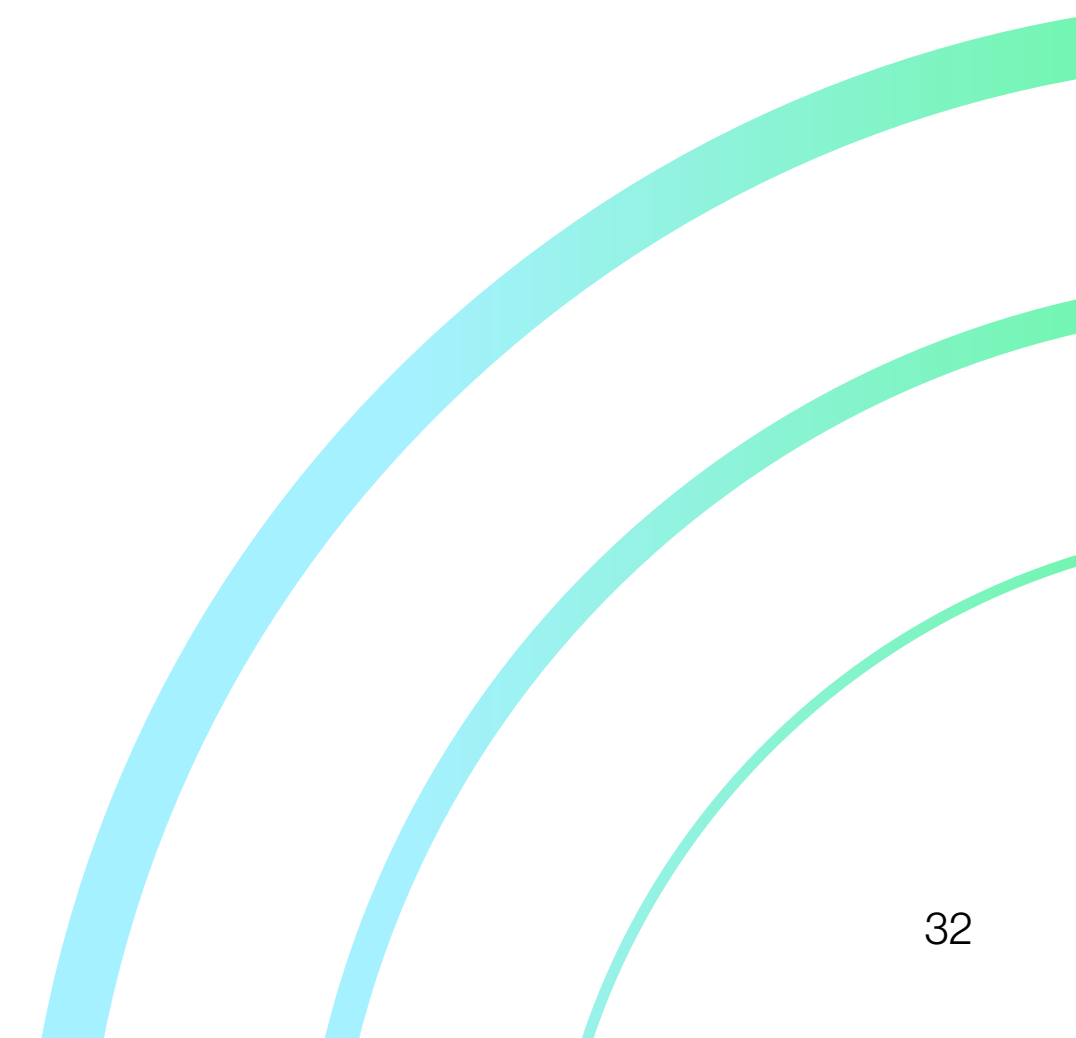
I Did That, Tracy De Sà

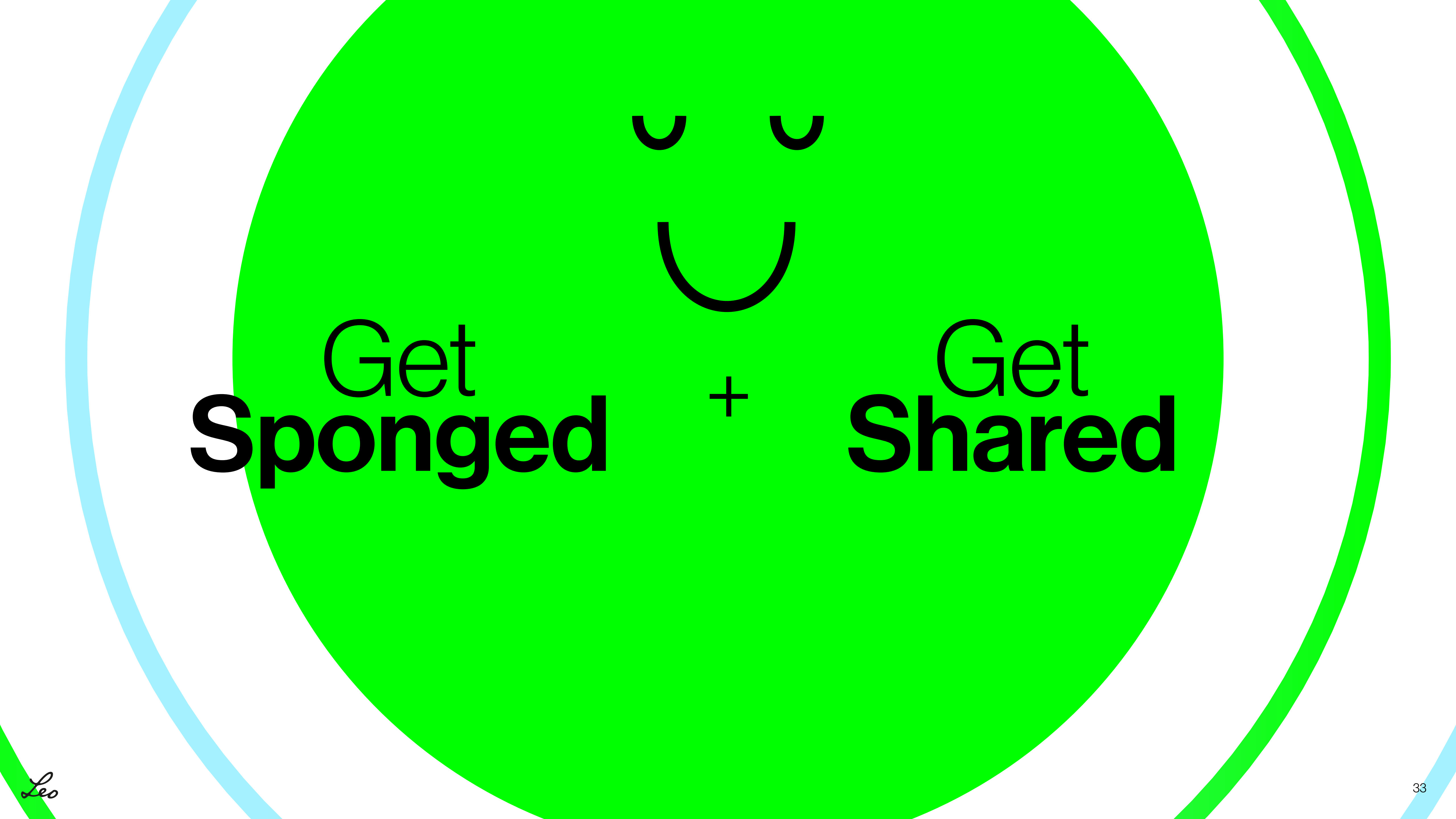
Gen Z aren't just your future.

They're today's
bottom line



So, how do brands influence
the **nation's influencers**?





Get
Sponged + Get
Shared

5 **key** moves

Get Sponged

Magnet not mirror

Many brands mistakenly believe that the way to appeal to Gen Z is to wear their clothes and speak their lingo.

But they can smell the desperation from a mile off.

Instead, they respect and gravitate to people and brands that are the most honest, “no f**ks given” version of themselves. The more weird wonderful unfiltered and unapologetic - the better.

So, don't bend your brand out of shape to trying to mirror the codes of Gen Z, instead double down on the most unfiltered, magnetic version of yourself.

“The ones I actually like are the ones that don't care what people think — they just do their thing”

— Gen Z respondent

“It's not about being trendy, it's about being true”

— Cultural Analyst, PopPulse expert interview

“When brands try to talk like us, it's just cringe. You can tell straight away it's not real.”

— Gen Z respondent



Get Sponged

Unleash your weird

For too long, the mad, surreal and joyfully unhinged have been confined to the fringes - the domain of social-first start-ups and niche creators. But weird isn't just niche anymore; it's what cuts through.

In a world that feels heavy, people crave levity - moments of collective absurdity that remind us we're all in on the same joke. When brands dare to lean into the surreal, they don't just entertain Gen Z; they create shared moments that travel across generations.

So don't just save the strange for the small stuff.
Proudly flaunt it at scale.

**“The brands that own their weirdness,
or lean into what makes them different,
are the ones that get respect”**

- Semiotician, PopPulse expert interview



Get Shared

Be generational glue

Many brands obsess over understanding Gen Z culture and ‘othering them’ as an alien segment, but the real magic comes in understanding *intergenerational culture*.

The conversations that exist between generations are those that are more likely to spread.

Gen Z are the family translators, but they also crave generational closeness – and intergenerational topics, fandoms, and experiences help deepen those bonds.

If you can play in the space that unites generations, that unifies the human needs, wants, and tastes - you’ve struck gold.

“You’ve got scenarios where a Gen Z is introducing a 50-year-old to The Cure. They don’t give a fuck that the records came out before they were even born.”

- Music Producer, PopPulse interview

72% of Gen Zers
want to spend
more time with
older generations

PopPulse survey, Nov 2025

Get Shared

Prove don't preach

We're living in a world short on trust - where words alone don't land like they used to. Brands often feel the urge to shout louder, when what really matters is proving harder.

Because Gen Z - and increasingly all of us - don't want promises, we want proof. We want to see how something works, not just how it feels.

Unromantic as it sounds, showing your product in action - with personality, wit, and no spin - is the new persuasion. Don't over-narrate it; demo it, delightfully. It's never dull if it's done with style.

“When it feels too polished, I switch off. I like seeing behind the curtain - how it's made, how it works, who's behind it.”

— Gen Z respondent

“I don't want to be told what to feel - just show me what it actually does”

— Gen Z respondent

“They've grown up decoding marketing tricks. What cuts through now is honesty and a bit of flair - showing, not selling.”

— Trends Analyst, PopPulse expert interview



Get Shared

Become bubblegum

In an increasingly fragmented media landscape, instinct tells us to get stricter with our brand distinctive assets for maximum consistency.

Of course coherence is critical. But to travel beyond the feed and get shared, ideas must be satisfyingly stretchable and sticky - easy to remix, co-own, and carry across platforms and contexts.

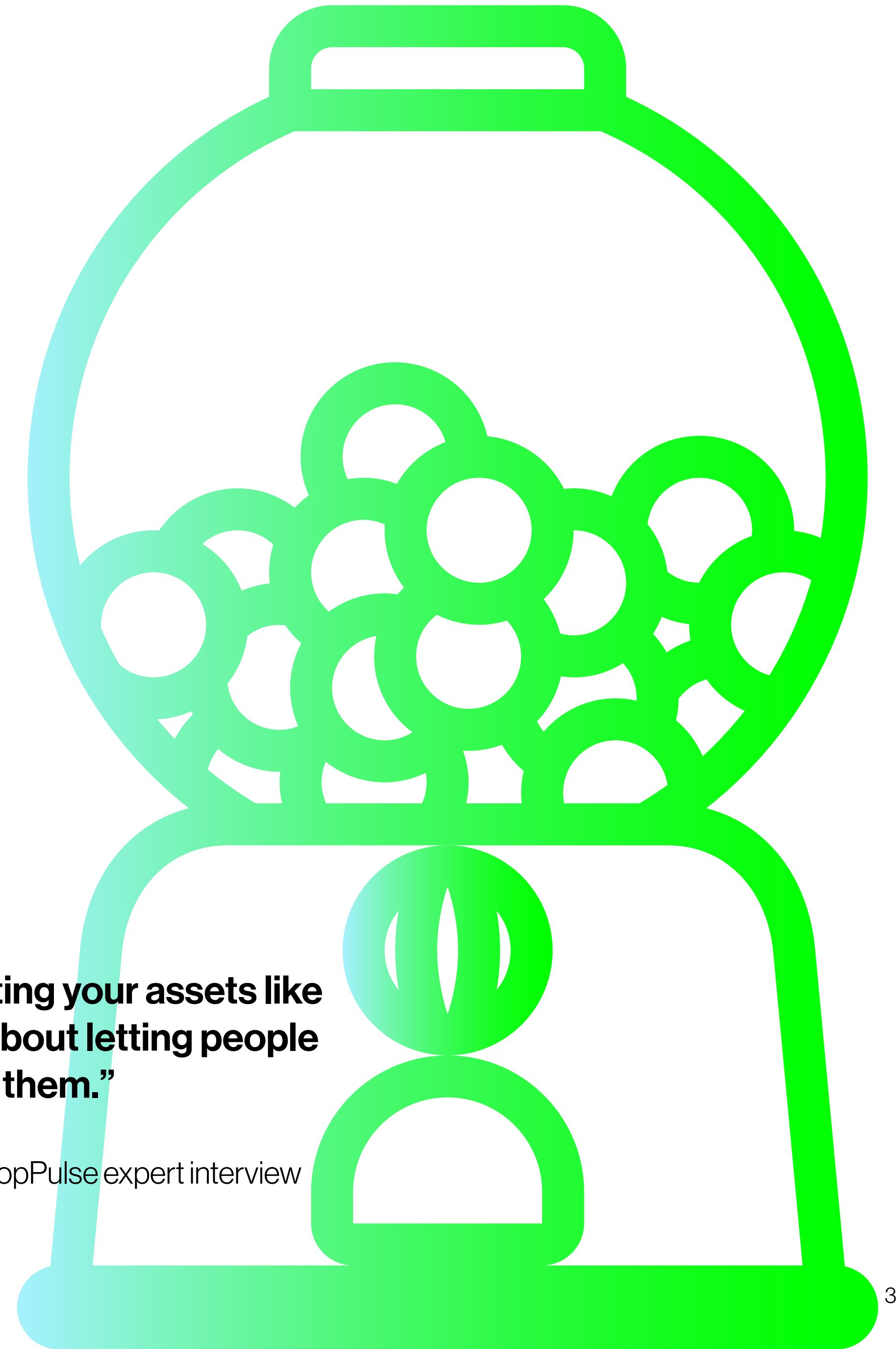
Design for screenshot culture: Create content or tools made to be shared privately e.g. tips, visuals, or discount codes optimised for screen-grabs rather than posts.

“The brands that travel are the ones that make content people want to share, tweak or screenshot. They create things that fit into everyday conversations.”

— Semiotician, PopPulse expert interview

“It’s not about protecting your assets like museum pieces; it’s about letting people play with them.”

— Cultural Ethnographer, PopPulse expert interview



Where could this take your brand?

You can now get involved in the next phase of PopPulse.
Participating brands benefit from bespoke research questions,
category specific insights and tailored recommendations.
Sounds good, right?

To find out more, just email [**poppulse@leoburnett.co.uk**](mailto:poppulse@leoburnett.co.uk)