



**CUL
NEXTGEN
TURE**

THE
FAN EDIT

SPOTIFY'S
GEN Z REPORT





GEN Z

REPRESENTS 35% OF SPOTIFY'S AUDIENCE¹

That makes them our largest and most culturally influential cohort.

They're also some of the most dedicated fans on the planet, spending an average of two hours a day here,² streaming content from their favorite creators, building playlists, and diving deep into the content they love.

They're a nuanced generation, and if you reduce them to a single, one-dimensional segment, you're missing one of the most exciting creative opportunities in media right now.

For this year's Culture Next, we followed the fans. We broke Gen Z into three life stages—**high school** (A14–18), **college-aged** (A19–23), and **early adulthood** (A24–29)—because fandom doesn't look the same at 14 as it does at 29. The way a brand earns a place in that relationship changes, too.

What we found will change how you plan your next campaign.

TO MAKE SENSE OF THE DATA AND PRESSURE-TEST OUR FINDINGS, WE BROUGHT IN **CASEY LEWIS** FOR HER TAKE ON GEN Z AND WHAT'S DRIVING THE TRENDS.

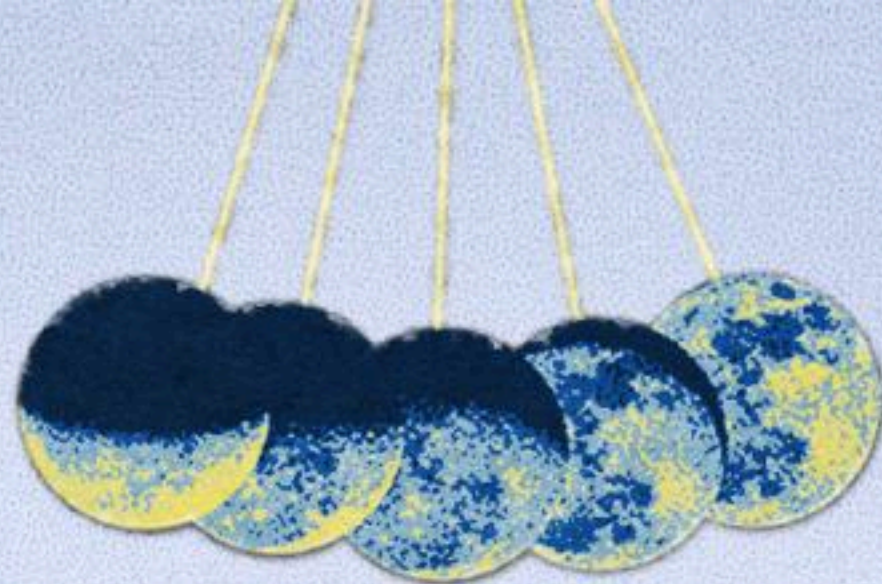
Casey is a youth culture strategist and the founder of “**After School,**” a daily newsletter that explores Gen Z and Gen Alpha consumer trends. With a background at MTV and New York Magazine, she has spent over two decades analyzing teen behavior and digital culture.





WHY IT'S **HAPPENING** (ACCORDING TO **CASEY LEWIS**)

We already know a lot about Gen Z. Despite being the youngest employees at the office, Gen Zs make up the most anxious generation in the workforce, reporting mental health issues that rival that of their unemployed peers. They fret about never owning real estate while simultaneously dropping more on “little treats” than they can afford. They’re leading a phone-free movement on college campuses, and still spending an average of two hours a day on Spotify alone. They’re exploring religion and spirituality in surprising numbers while fueling a manifestation boom across social media. And they’re nostalgic for a pre-internet era they didn’t live through and collecting analog tchotchkes like flip phones while never watching anything without a second screen in hand.



In spite of these observations, Gen Z defies easy generalizations, which makes sense when you consider the generation spans 15 years. A ninth grader and a young professional have almost nothing in common developmentally, and that’s always been the case. But what’s interesting about this particular cohort is that they’re the first generation to live through every life stage on the same platforms. The social media algorithm has swiftly flattened culture, and now everyone’s exposed to the same trends, memes, and feeds at the same time, in a way no prior generation experienced.

So while the way they behave is similar, the way they engage looks different. That’s why Spotify chose to break Gen Z into narrower cohorts: high school, college-aged, and early career Gen Zs. They’re all on Spotify, but what they’re actually listening to and watching here paints a sharper picture of who Gen Z really is at each life stage—and what it takes to reach them.



**CASEY
LEWIS**

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WHEN IT COMES TO
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WATCH MORE THAN
THEY LISTEN, A
STARK CONTRAST
TO PREVIOUS
GENERATIONS.

EYE
PODS
EYE
PODS



WHAT'S
HAPPENING?

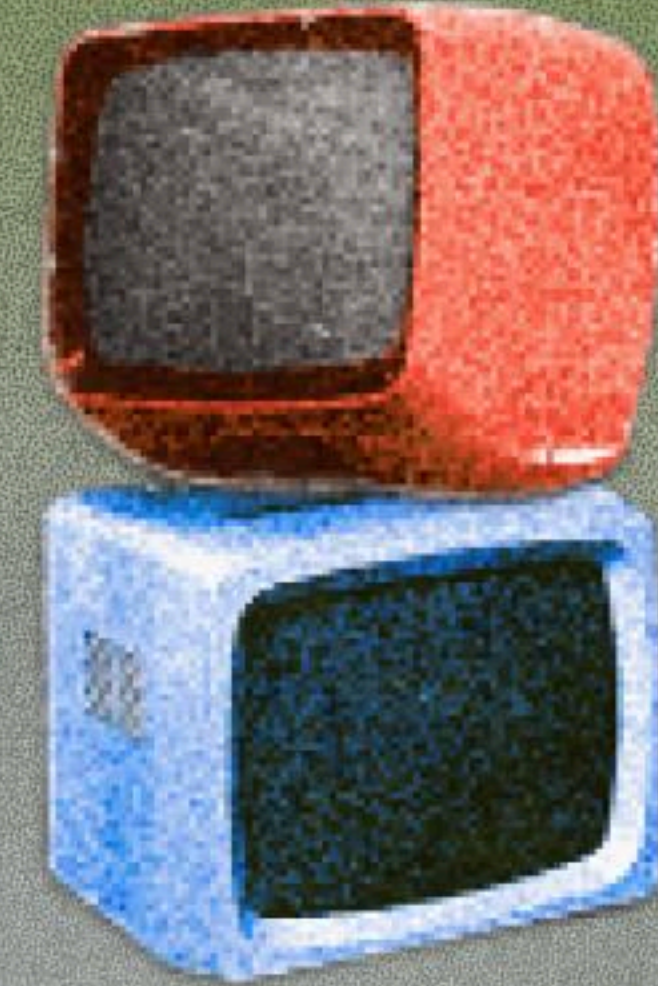
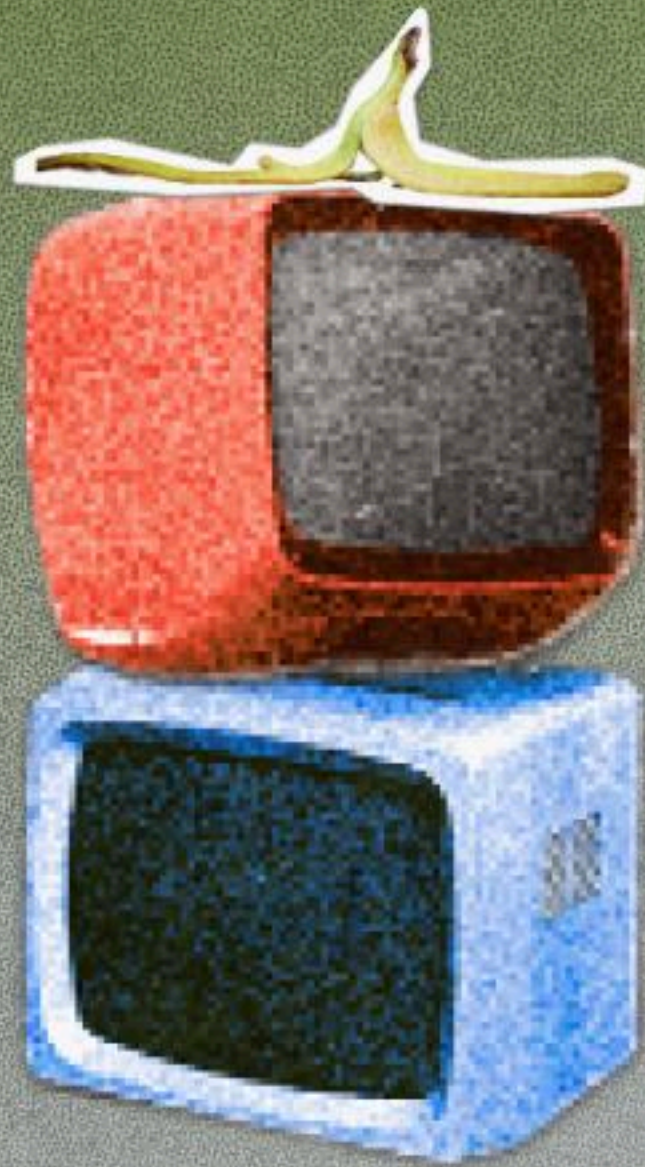
VIDEO PODCAST STREAMS

among Gen Z on Spotify grew

+90%

globally YoY³

This cohort, more than any other, is driving the video pod trend, and what they watch differs by life stage.



FOR THIS YEAR'S REPORT, WE BROKE OUT GEN Z'S TOP PODCAST SHOWS AND EPISODES INTO THREE CATEGORIES TO SEE WHAT KIND OF CONTENT THEY STREAM BY LIFE STAGE: SOCIAL-FIRST CREATORS, CREATOR-ORIGINAL PODCASTS, AND ESTABLISHED SHOWS.

HIGH SCHOOLERS

High schoolers watch **69%** of their podcasts in video. **92%** of those streams go to social-first creators they likely already follow online. Most of their top 10 shows have Gen Z hosts, like ***The LOL Podcast*** and ***Duncanyounot.***

117%

% INCREASE OF VIDEO PODCAST STREAMS YOY

COLLEGE-AGED

For college-aged Zs, traditional podcast content jumps to **46%** of their streams, with crime, comedy, and finance content taking up a more prominent share, with shows like ***The Diary of a CEO with Steven Bartlett*** in their queue.⁴

82%

% INCREASE OF VIDEO PODCAST STREAMS YOY

EARLY ADULTHOOD

Early adults still watch podcasts, but 70% of their streams go toward established shows (like ***Good Hang with Amy Poehler***), an almost complete inversion from high school.

62%

% INCREASE OF VIDEO PODCAST STREAMS YOY

MILLENNIALS

42% INCREASE OF VIDEO PODCAST STREAMS YOY

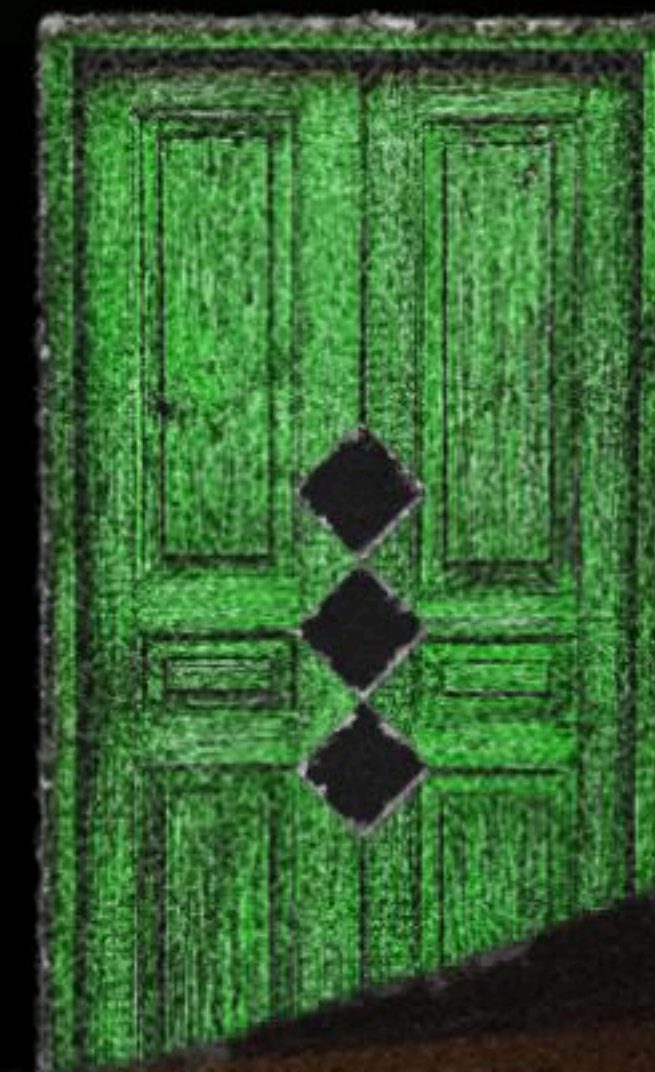
[DATA SOURCE]: SPOTIFY 1P DATA, US, APRIL 2026 VS. JAN. 2025; SPOTIFY 1P DATA ANALYSIS CONDUCTED USING QUILT.AI, US, 2026; [KEY] CREATOR-ORIGINAL PODCASTS: SHOWS FEATURING ORIGINAL CONTENT BUILT FOR THE PODCAST FORMAT, LARGELY HOSTED BY KNOWN TALENT OR SOCIAL-MEDIA PERSONALITIES [EX: GOOD HANG..., ETC.]; SOCIAL-FIRST PODCASTS: SHOWS HOSTED BY SOCIAL-MEDIA INFLUENCERS THAT SERVE AS EXTENSIONS OF HOSTS' EXISTING SOCIAL CONTENT [EX: RYTH, CHAINSF, ETC.]; ESTABLISHED PODCASTS: SHOWS LARGELY HOSTED BY ESTABLISHED JOURNALISTS, EXPERTS, AND MEDIA COMPANIES [EX: THE DAILY]. SPOTIFY 1P DATA, US, APRIL 2026; APRIL 2026 VS. JAN 2025

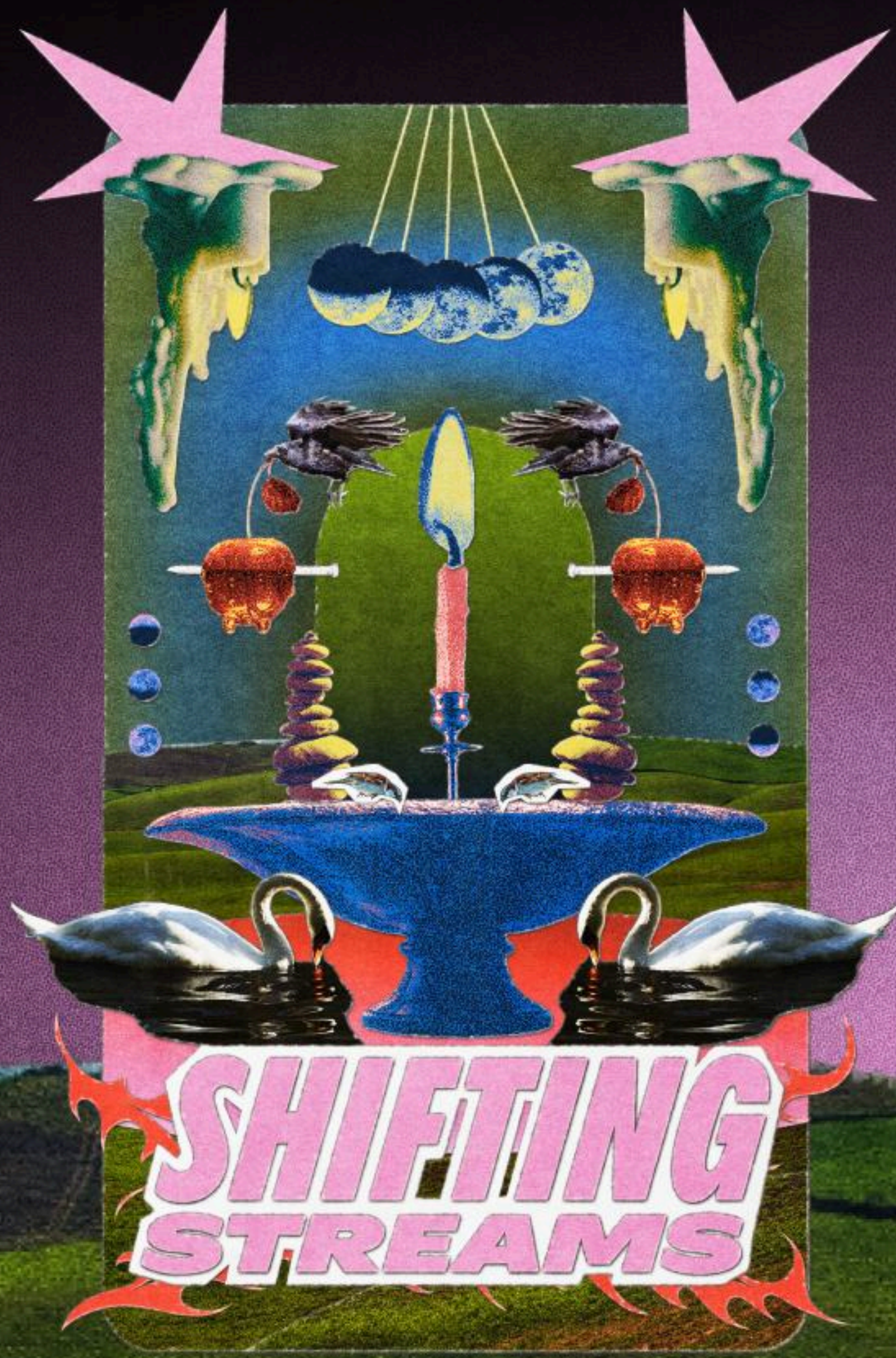
WHY IT'S HAPPENING
(ACCORDING TO **CASEY LEWIS**)

“ DESPITE HEADLINES PROCLAIMING THEIR INABILITY TO READ A BOOK, **GEN Z HAS NEVERTHELESS EMBRACED LONG-FORM MEDIA AS A REBELLION AGAINST DOOMSCROLLING.**

And as this cohort is wont to do, they're (ironically) sharing it online via 'knowledgemaxxing' social carousels summarizing academic papers, 'personal curriculums' with self-assigned syllabi, and 'media I consumed instead of doomscrolling' recaps. This is a generation that's hyper-aware of its own shrinking attention span, so much so that there was an entire trend devoted to filming themselves 'doing nothing' and then sharing proof on social media.

While this was mostly a performative pursuit, their desire to educate themselves is not. They're trying to reverse-engineer the intellectual community and sense of purpose they miss from school. This instinct to learn shows up on Spotify as a boom in educational podcast listening and audiobook streaming; for Gen Z, studying doesn't end when they graduate, and Spotify is where the curriculum continues.





SHIFTING
STREAMS

GEN Z ARE **ALL-IN**
ON PODCASTS
AND MUSIC, AND
HOW THEY STREAM
SHIFTS WITH EVERY
LIFE STAGE.

SHIFTING
STREAMS



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN
PODCASTS?

GEN Z PODCAST BEHAVIOR
SPLITS INTO TWO MODES:

RITUAL

Returning again and again
to the same shows



&



VIRAL

Tuning into a buzzy episode from
outside their normal rotation



LIFE STAGE⁵

RITUAL

VIRAL

HIGH SCHOOLERS

High schoolers are **89%** ritual, loyalists to the social creators they know. They tend to stream content about social memes and challenges, but their viral episodes interestingly focus on topics like brainrot and digital addiction.

89%

11%

COLLEGE-AGED

College-aged Zs are the most viral-curious, with almost **1 in 5** streams going to one-off buzzy episodes from shows outside their usual rotation, like true crime one-offs, celebrity clips, and gaming deep dives.

81%

19%

EARLY ADULTHOOD

By early adulthood, viral drops back to **12%** and ritual reasserts at **88%**. However, the content has matured from fleeting social memes to deep personal growth.

88%

12%

MILLENNIALS



RITUAL
92%

VIRAL
8%

LIFE STAGE ⁶

TOP VIRAL-EPIISODE KEYWORDS & SHOWS

TOP RITUAL-EPIISODE KEYWORDS & SHOWS

HIGH SCHOOLERS

MODERN PRESSURES:

- 💡 BRAINROT
- 💡 ECONOMIC ANXIETY
- 💡 DIGITAL ADDICTION
- 💡 SOCIAL SHIFTS

SOCIAL-MEDIA RELATED:

- 💡 MEMES
- 💡 VIRAL
- 💡 SOCIAL TESTS
- 💡 SOCIAL CHALLENGES

COLLEGE-AGED

ECONOMIC AMBITIONS:

- 💡 FINANCE TOPICS
- 💡 FINANCIAL GROWTH
- 💡 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

SHOWS:

- ✦ *DIARY OF A CEO WITH STEVEN BARTLETT*
- ✦ *RYAN TRAHAN*
- ✦ *PRIME CRIME: SOLVED MURDERS*

CRIME CONTENT:

- 💡 TRUE CRIME

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT:

- 💡 RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS
- 💡 MENTAL HEALTH

SHOWS:

- ✦ *THERAPUSS WITH JAKE SHANE*
- ✦ *SAD BOYZ*

EARLY ADULTHOOD

HEALTH:

- 💡 DIETARY & NUTRITION
- 💡 FOOD INDUSTRY INFLUENCE
- 💡 PROCESSED FOODS
- 💡 DIETARY INTERVENTIONS

SHOW:

- ✦ *HUBERMAN LAB*

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT:

- 💡 RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS
- 💡 PERSONAL GROWTH
- 💡 MENTAL HEALTH

SHOWS:

- ✦ *THERAPUSS WITH JAKE SHANE*
- ✦ *THE MEL ROBBINS PODCAST*
- ✦ *SAD BOYZ*

MILLENNIALS

EXPERT PERSPECTIVE:

- 💡 EXPERTS
- 💡 HEALTH
- 💡 NEUROSCIENCE

SHOWS:

- ✦ *DIARY OF A CEO WITH STEVEN BARTLETT*
- ✦ *HUBERMAN LAB*

NEWS TOPICS:

- 💡 TRUMP
- 💡 WAR
- 💡 ISRAEL
- 💡 ELON

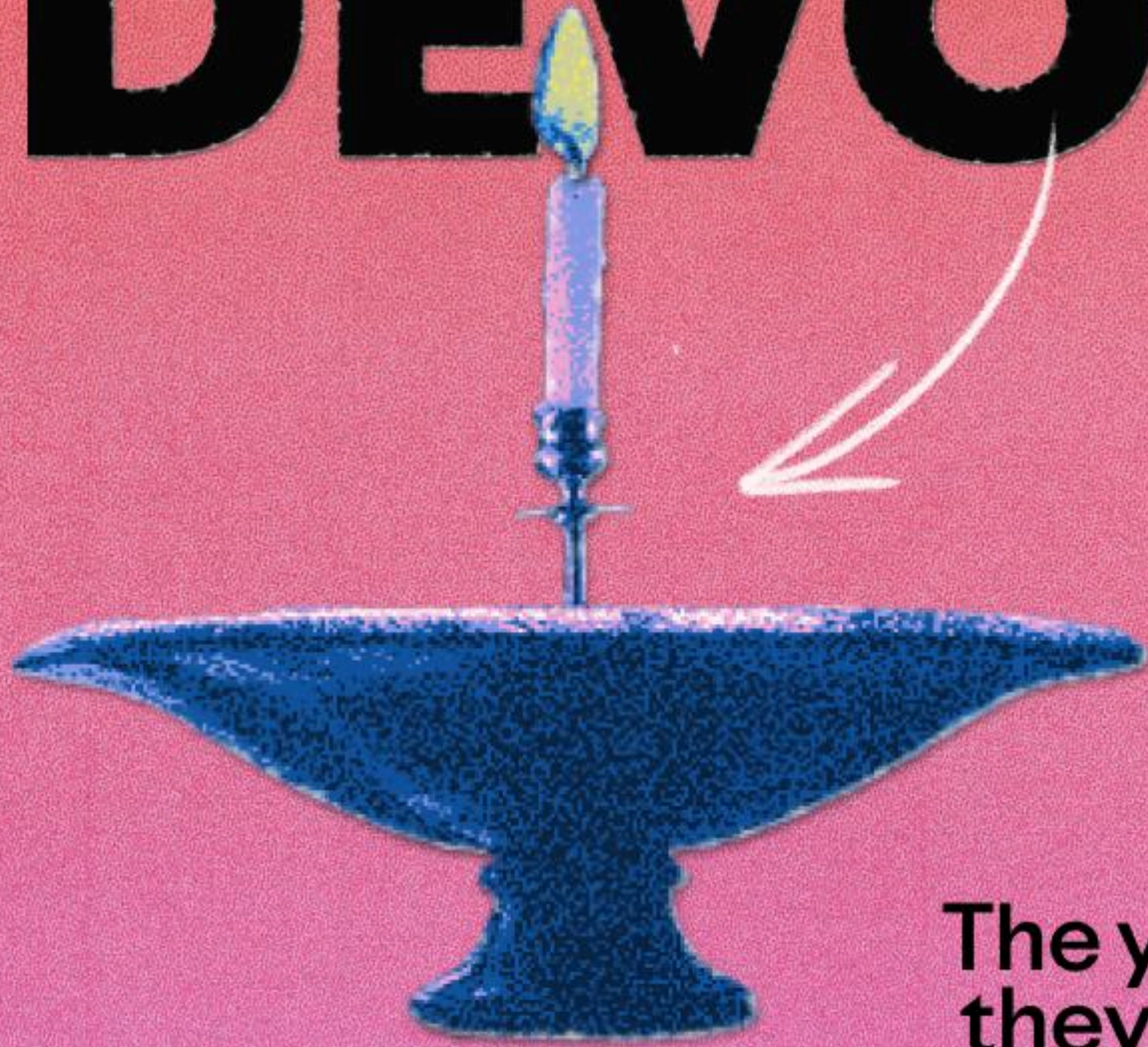
SHOW:

- ✦ *THE JOURNAL*

WHAT'S HAPPENING
IN MUSIC?

GEN Z MUSIC STREAMING
IS DEFINED BY:

DEVOTION VS DISCOVERY



The younger the fan, the more devoted they are to their top 20 artists, and the more broadly they explore.

LIFE STAGE⁶

DEVOTION

(Share of streams % driven by cohort's top 20 artists)

DISCOVERY

(Breadth index, or how many different artists a cohort listens to per 1M streams)

HIGH SCHOOLERS

High schoolers dedicate **1 in every 8** streams to their top 20 artists (13%) *and* have the highest breadth index, meaning they discover the most new artists per million streams.

13%

0.5

COLLEGE-AGED

College-aged Zs' devotion drops slightly (**12%**) as new friends and environments introduce new sounds. Breadth narrows as listening becomes more focused.

12%

0.3

EARLY ADULTHOOD

Early adults have the lowest devotion to their top 20 (**11%**), but their listening is a deeper, more curated mix, making them the most discerning of all Gen Z cohorts.

11%

0.2

MILLENNIALS



DEVOTION

9%

DISCOVERY

0.2



WHY IT'S HAPPENING
(ACCORDING TO
CASEY LEWIS)

“ COUNTER TO THEIR
FICKLE REPUTATION,
GEN Z HAS BECOME
**INCREASINGLY
LOYAL**, ESPECIALLY
IN TERMS OF THE
CREATORS AND
BRANDS THEY'VE
GROWN UP WITH.

This spring's biggest festival comeback moment is a perfect example of this relationship. In the wake of the pandemic, there was a relentless desire for newness, which brands responded to with a constant flow of novelty products and limited-edition 'drops.' But now, launch fatigue has set in, and ritualistically returning to the same things—creators, podcasts, brands, even water bottles and lip glosses—has become a comfort. They're still eager to understand what's new (or even better, what's next), but they're coming back to their favorites again and again.

One thing that stood out to me in Spotify's podcast data is that by college, loyalty begins to give way to experimentation. These kids are away from home, and their friend group is in constant flux; as a result, they're constantly being exposed to new reference and rethinking their personal canon. But in early adulthood, they find their way back to their faves. One way this surfaces is in the form of what I call 'comfort creators' on Spotify, which to Gen Z means artists and creators they return to time and time again, whose content soundtracks their lives while they get ready, study, and party.

”



THE
DARK AGES (BUT FUN)

THE DARK
AGES (BUT FUN)

**GEN Z'S HORROR
AND TRUE-CRIME
OBSESSION DOUBLES
AS A GENERATIONAL
SURVIVAL GUIDE
THAT HELPS THEM
PROCESS EMOTIONS
AND NAVIGATE EACH
LIFE PHASE.**

THE DARK
AGES (BUT FUN)

TRUE CRIME PODCAST STREAMS

among Gen Z on Spotify



with college-aged Zs driving the biggest surge, up **20%**. The content this generation gravitates toward sharpens with every life stage.⁷

HIGH SCHOOLERS

2x

High schoolers consume the broadest spectrum of “spooky” content: creepypasta, paranormal, horror, conspiracy, cults. Teens over-index on criminal psychology content at a rate 2x higher than Millennials.⁸

COLLEGE-AGED

40x

College-aged Zs pivot to real-world risk. Paranormal drops off, and topics like financial exploitation and relationship crime spike. Financial strain content jumps 40x from the high schooler cohort as reality sets in.⁷

EARLY ADULTHOOD

16%

Early adults embrace dark humor, blending crime with comedy. The number of comedy-crime shows in their top 50 more than doubles, and forensic-evidence content peaks at 16% of true crime streams, the highest of any cohort.⁹

MILLENNIALS

While comedy remains a core component of true-crime streams, Millennials seek a window into institutions and corruptable systems. Their focus shifts to shows produced by news organizations and professional investigators, alongside an increasing appetite for nuanced topics like justice systems handling, law enforcement, healthcare, and wealth inequality.

WHY IT'S HAPPENING
(ACCORDING TO CASEY LEWIS)



“ THIS GENERATION GREW UP DURING A PANDEMIC, AMID AN AMBIENT FEED OF GLOBAL CRISIS HEADLINES ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

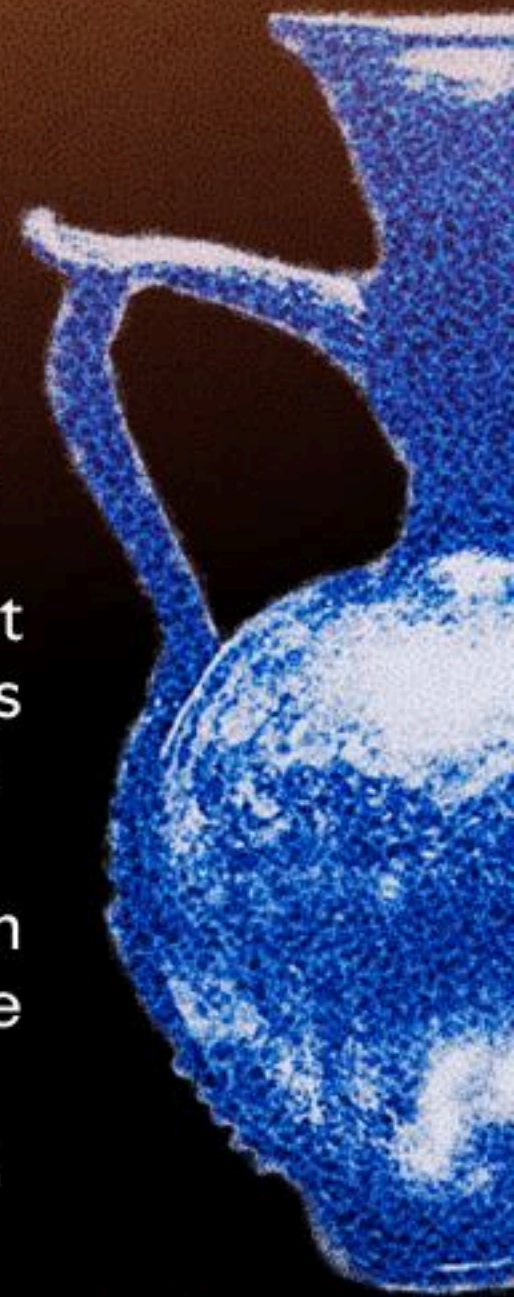
Previous generations learned about world events and global issues from nightly news on broadcast TV. Gen Z witnesses it in their feeds in real time, interleaved with a friend's GRWM and a skincare ad. You might think that would push them away from dark content, but the opposite is true.

In 2024, 91% of Gen Zs watched a horror movie or TV show, compared to 87% of Millennials, 76% of Gen X, and 58% of Boomers.¹⁰ Consuming genres like true crime on their own terms puts them in charge of the uncertainty they've been exposed to since childhood, and laughing at what scares them gives them a sense of control. (Nothing is too dark for Gen Z to joke about.)



High schoolers are drawn to the most extreme versions of this—like creepypasta and criminal psychology—because they're still figuring out where their own limits are.

By college, young people are more interested in real-world vulnerability: relationship-based violence, intimate partner dynamics, and financial exploitation, the latter of which makes sense when you consider that these are young people who just got their first credit cards, signed their first leases, and are navigating relationships without parental oversight for the first time. This is a generation that's also gamblifying its financial life, betting on everything from politics to pop culture in prediction markets, so for them, financial exploitation is a real concern, even if they are incessantly making memes about it.



”



BAILE
REAKTHROUGH

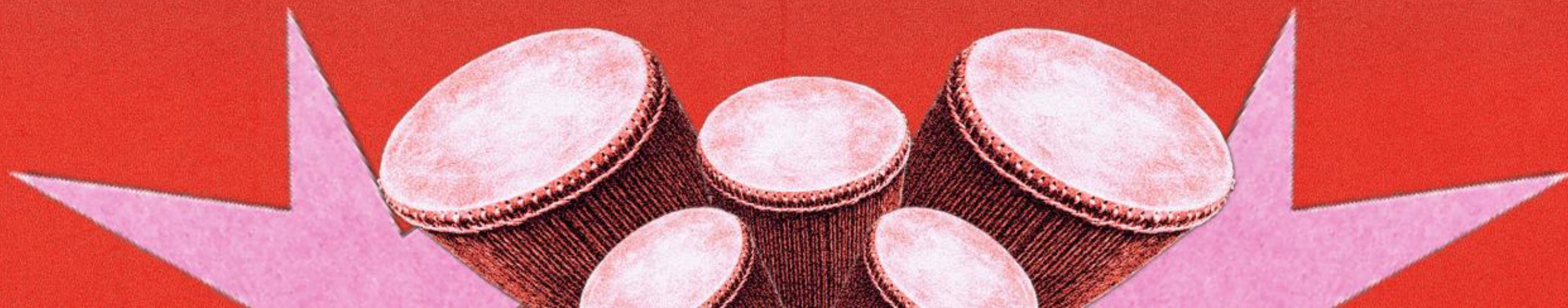
LIKE COUNTRY AND LATIN BEFORE IT, **BRAZILIAN FUNK** HAS BECOME THE NEXT BIG MUSIC MOVEMENT ON SPOTIFY AND THE **FASTEST-GROWING GENRE** AMONG GEN Z GLOBALLY.

BAILE
REAKTHROUGH



BRAZILIAN FUNK'S ROAD FROM **LOCAL SOUND TO GLOBAL MOVEMENT** STARTED IN THE FAVELAS OF RIO DE JANEIRO AND WAS FUELED BY STREAMING.

Spotify caught the signal early, flagging its global breakout back in **2018**. Nearly a decade later, Gen Z has **turbocharged** and reshaped it in their own way, even spinning out a **whole new sub-genre**.

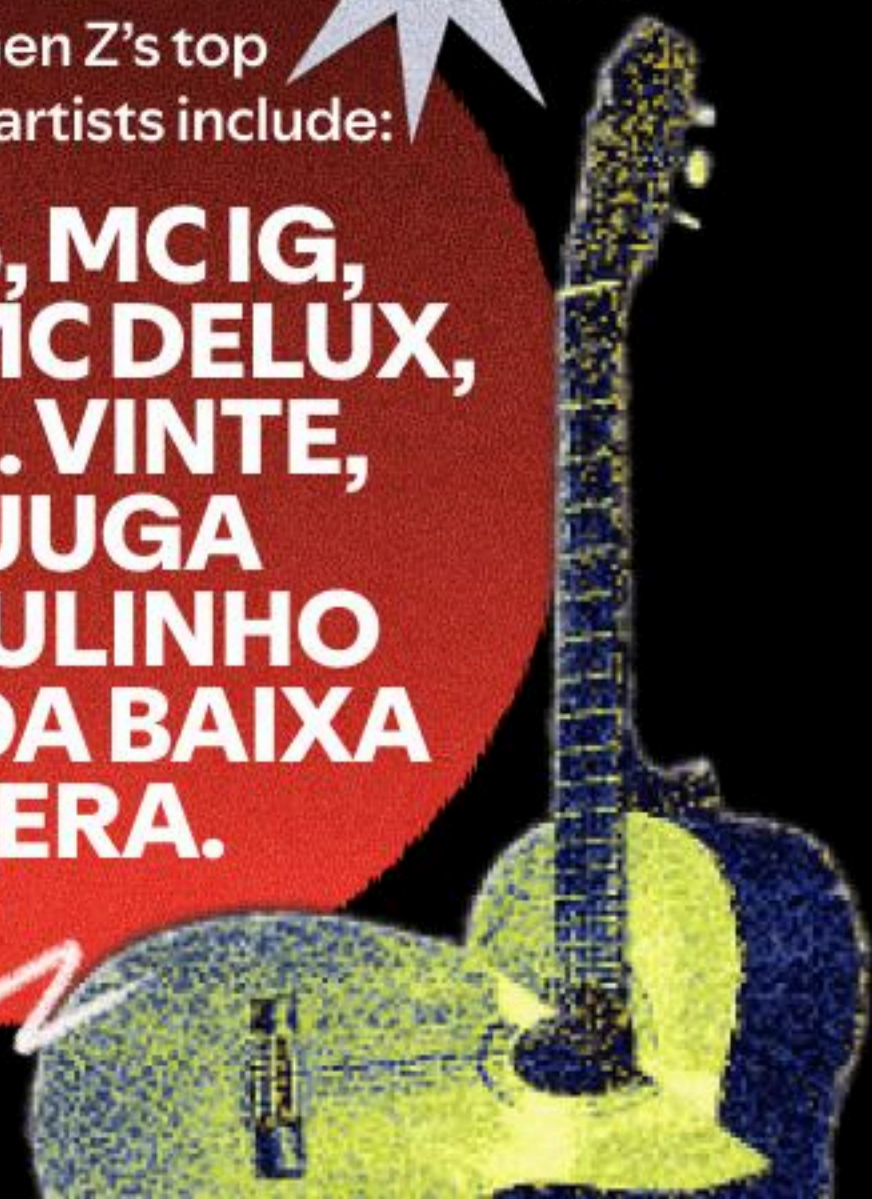


BRAZILIAN PHONK, A GEN Z-DRIVEN FUSION OF BRAZILIAN FUNK WITH MEMPHIS RAP, LO-FI, AND HEAVY BASS, IS ACCELERATING THE BRAZILIAN FUNK TREND, WITH STREAMS GROWING +21–26% YOY ACROSS ALL GEN Z COHORTS.¹¹

The “slowed + reverb” remix trend is a major driver: producers rework tracks into hypnotic versions that travel faster across borders (no language barrier) and sit alongside originals in playlists, often doubling a track’s presence.

Some of Gen Z’s top Brazilian Funk artists include:

**DENNIS, MC IG,
ANITTA, MC DELUX,
MCL DA VINTE,
DJ GUUGA
& DJ PAULINHO
MONDI DA BAIXA
BAVIERA.**



BOTH GENRES ARE ALSO SHOWING UP IN “AURA” CULTURE, GEN Z’S WAY OF TALKING ABOUT CONFIDENCE, STATUS, AND SELF-PRESENTATION.



On Spotify, there are

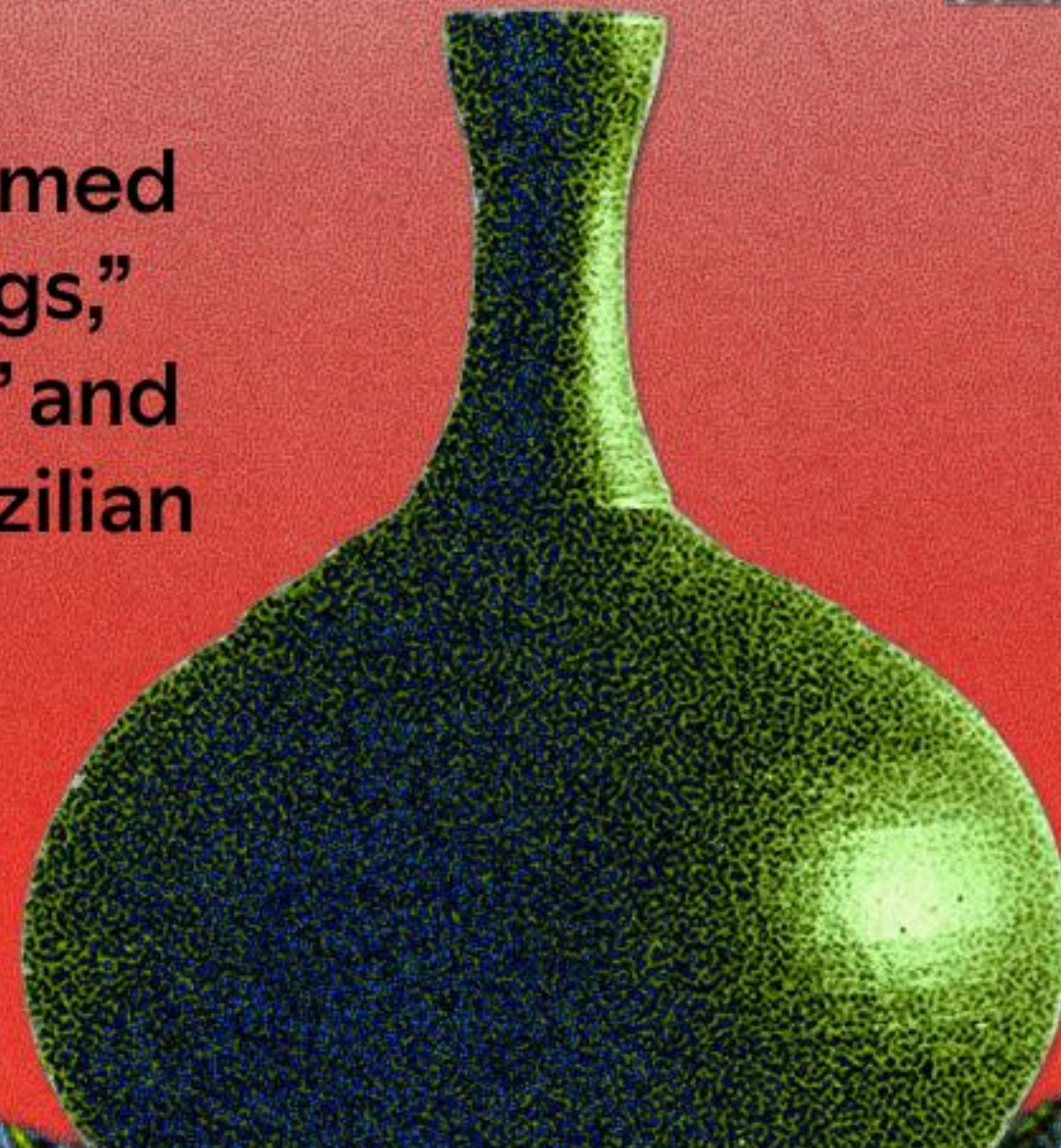
1M+

On Spotify, there are 1M+ aura-themed playlists with titles like “Aura Songs,” “Auramaxxing,” and “Aurafarming,” and they feature Brazilian Funk and Brazilian Phonk heavily.¹²

U.S. streams of aura playlists grew

284%

YoY among the youngest Gen Zs.¹³



LIFE STAGE

% INCREASE IN STREAMS OF BRAZILIAN FUNK

HIGH SCHOOLERS

The youngest Zs over-index 2.7x on Brazilian Funk vs. the general Spotify population,⁸ and their streams of the genre jumped **+55%** YoY, the fastest growth of any age group. This cohort leans into the slowed-down, heavily remixed versions of tracks they first hear on social platforms. The younger the listener, the greater the share of slowed-down tracks in their top 100 songs.¹²

+55%

COLLEGE-AGED

College-aged Zs bridge the gap between remix-obsessed teens and older listeners who favor established artists. Streams of Brazilian Funk from this group jumped **+36%** in 2025, representing the second-fastest growth.¹²

+36%

BRAZILIAN FUNK APPEARS **2X** MORE OFTEN IN WORKOUT PLAYLISTS AND **6X** MORE OFTEN IN GAMING PLAYLISTS THAN OTHER GENRES.¹²

EARLY ADULTHOOD

Meanwhile, the oldest Zs are driving the largest share of listening for Brazilian Funk, accounting for 32% of U.S. streams, with **+33%** YoY growth.¹²

+33%

WHY IT'S HAPPENING
(ACCORDING TO **CASEY LEWIS**)

“ **SHORT-FORM VIDEO HAS COMPRESSED LISTENING INTO 15-SECOND SOUNDBITES THAT SYNC TO EDITS, SUITING BRAZILIAN FUNK'S SLOW BUILD AND HEAVY BASS.**

The genre has also been boosted by a few converging Gen Z obsessions that benefit from some heavy bass: gymcore and fitness culture are peaking, with this generation running 1.1 million applications for a major marathon across the pond and buying tech wearables so fast that sales for one product among women in their early 20s is up 250%. Post-pandemic, the gym has become Gen Z's default third place; 47% of all new gym joins in 2025 came from Gen Z, and 18-to-24-year-olds now have the highest gym membership penetration of any age group at 35.5%.

There are a lot of reasons why: young people are drinking less, both because of health and because of budget, and the gym is something to do, a place to go, a social activity. The rise of 'looksmaxxing' culture and body optimization as a content genre also contributes.

But more broadly: Going to the gym and being healthy isn't something young people 'feel' they should do in a way previous generations might have. It's a wellness ritual!

And when they're not working out, gaming—which is almost always soundtracked by Brazilian Phonk these days—is how they're spending their downtime. And then there's 'auramaxxing', which sounds like a silly meme but is actually a useful look into how Gen Z thinks about self-presentation: confidence as something you perform and soundtrack, with woozy and cinematic slowed + reverb remixes serving as an ideal background.

”





TAKE
ACTION

GEN Z FANDOM **LIVES ON SPOTIFY**, AND SO DOES
THE OPPORTUNITY TO REACH THEM.
HERE'S HOW:

SURROUND FANDOM



Spotify is part of Gen Z's daily rituals, and it's where your brand can authentically show up next to the biggest music moments and podcast episode releases in the world. Meet Gen Z fans in their screenless moments with audio ads across music and podcasts, and in their active moments with video, display, and carousel ads when they're interacting with the app. Target by genre, interest, or playlist tone to reach Gen Z wherever they are, whatever they're feeling.

TAP INTO FANDOM



Fans come to Spotify to live (and relive) cultural moments, no matter how niche the genre or topic. Ride the wave of album drops, cultural moments, and live events with Spotify's high-impact sponsorship solutions, from creator sponsorships to bespoke, immersive experiences powered by The Stage. Surround Gen Z fandom with our reimagined Sponsored Playlists or bring fandom fully to life IRL with Spotify AUX live events that put your brand at the center of the experience.

TAKE
ACTION

Gen Z fandom can mean loyal rituals and viral peaks in podcasts, devotion and discovery in music, creepypasta and comedy in true crime, Brazilian Funk and Brazilian Phonk soundtracking different moments.

What stays constant is their engagement. Gen Z doesn't passively consume on Spotify: they watch, listen, remix, playlist, buy, fan. For Gen Z, fandom on our platform is a part of their identity, and the two hours each day they spend streaming signals who they are and who they're becoming.

Seven years of Culture Next has shown us that the brands who win with Gen Z are the ones who have the nuanced insights to show up in the right moment, with the right message, for the right fan.

**If you want to reach Gen Z, they're fanning on Spotify.
The creative opportunity is ready and waiting.**



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH **QUILT.AI**, WE ANALYZED **4.2M SONGS** AND **680,879 VIDEO AND AUDIO PODCAST EPISODES** THAT WERE TRENDING AMONG U.S. GEN Zs AND PULLED OUT KEY THEMES, LYRICS, WORDS, AND MOTIFS. DURING THAT ANALYSIS, THE BELOW TRENDS EMERGED AS RICH TERRITORIES FOR DEEPER EXPLORATION.



An analysis of the top 100 podcast shows and top 300 episodes by streams (March 2025–February 2026) across each age cohort, classifying shows as either Creator-original shows, social-first shows, or traditional podcasts.



An analysis of the top 100 podcast episodes by streams on Spotify (March 2025–February 2026) within each age cohort. Each episode was then cross-referenced against the top 100 shows on Spotify to identify “spike” episodes: viral standouts that gained traction outside of the most popular shows.

We also analyzed artist-level streaming across all of 2025 within each cohort to assess fandom, using Top 20 Artist Share to measure how concentrated listening is among the most-streamed artists. This was complemented by a view of listening breadth, using a Breadth Index (the number of unique artists per 1M streams) to quantify diversity of consumption.



An analysis of 89,805 true crime podcast episodes in 2025 across age cohorts by leveraging Spotify’s episode-level topics and keyword tags. By examining each cohort’s share of streams across these tags, we identified distinct types of crime content resonating with all age groups.



An analysis of genre-level streaming across each age cohort, examining YoY shifts in share of streams by genre. We then conducted a deeper dive into the artists, songs and playlists driving these movements to better understand the forces shaping these trends. We also analyzed trends in the overlap of genres to cement the findings.

**CUL
NEXTXEN
URE**