

Building a decision-ready toolkit for today's brand leaders

How to curate and leverage the tools you need to create your next success story

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The past two years have shown us that there is nothing more crucial – or more challenging – than understanding consumers. Knowing consumers deeply is the key to brand success; but people’s lives and choices have grown vastly more complex, as they navigate pandemic anxiety, work-from-home stress, and an avalanche of media and shopping choices.

To get a nuanced view of today’s complex consumers, we need more than one vantage point. It takes a variety of perspectives to reveal their desires, concerns, and behaviors in rich detail – the kind of detail marketers need to plan and execute.

But brand leaders also have to be mindful of their own limitations. With so much to process and so many decisions to make – on tight deadlines – abundance is not a senior marketer’s friend. They need the right tools and data at the right times, targeted to their goals and easy to access and leverage.



The lenses that matter for your business



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The experts at GfK [Consumer Life](#) apply 25 years of experience to the task of bringing together just the right tools and insights to solve key business problems. The Consumer Life team helps you see consumers through the lenses that can help you deliver growth – with guidance backed by millions of data points over the past five decades. Because the real challenge is identifying the insights you can trust – and then transforming them into timely decisions.

The marketing leader's toolkit needs to be wisely chosen, and learning to apply the best approach -- just the right perspective -- to a brand's biggest challenges takes discernment. The tools need to be already in place when the big decisions present themselves:

- How will I **find my next key target group**?
- How should I **adjust my messaging to reflect my customers' changing values**?
- How do I **future-proof my strategy**?
- How can I **develop the next breakthrough product in my category**?

Many of the tools marketers use focus on innovation and marketing to consumers. When it comes to understanding how people and products fit together, three lenses can be exceptionally valuable – when grounded in valid, rich data and leveraging smart analyses.

These tools are:

- **Trends** – the movements of consumer need and behavior, carefully tracked over time
- **Generations** – the ways that shared decades and experiences can shape tastes and perceptions
- **Values** – the deeply rooted priorities that play a role in so many decisions



GfK Consumer Life has been gathering consumer insights and applying these perspectives for decades – so we know how to leverage each tool for maximum benefit. **Let's take a closer look.**

Leveraging trends to drive smarter brand growth

Trends in action: Looking ahead to
tomorrow's headlines

Leveraging trends to drive smarter brand growth

The pandemic pointed out how much marketers need a solid grounding in consumer trends to serve as a “guiding light” during unpredictable times. **Crises don’t erase pre-existing trends – but they do influence their new trajectories.**

The trends that we can call suitable for business planning may not be the ones you see every day. Online companies sometimes look at behavior on an hour by hour basis, or cull the answers of an unknown number and type of survey takers, and call these “trends.” But for those with significant decisions to make – about developing a new product or launching a multi-country ad campaign – this kind of information usually does not have “the right stuff.”

Once you have identified and acquired the right, reliable trends for your business, they can act as a compass, helping you:

- **Focus** on the consumer’s voice to drive decision making
- **Uncover** emerging needs and consumer segments
- **Inject fresh thinking** into existing consumer strategies
- **Process current events** in a way that points you toward the future

Looking ahead to tomorrow's headlines

Over the course of 25 years tracking global trends, GfK Consumer Life (formerly known as Roper Reports®) has anticipated the rise of many trends from early-adopter to mainstream status. **From pre-COVID signs of a remote-work movement**

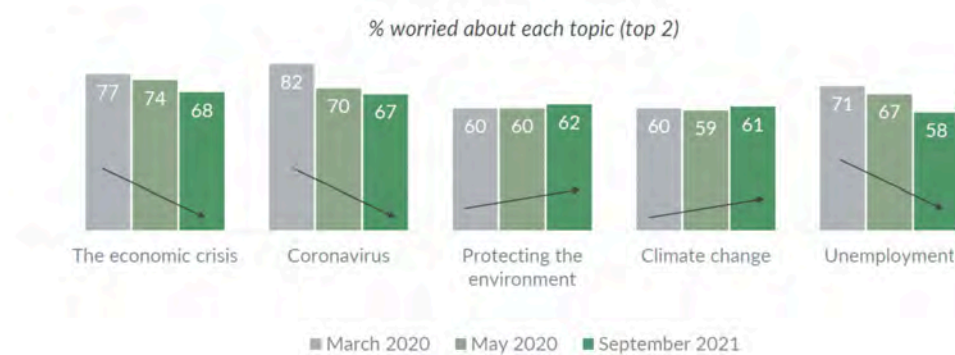
(“portable offices” were a thing at the turn of the Millennium) **to the growing clout of “influencers” and the rise of the “sharing economy,” trends show not only where the consumer marketplace is, but where it may be headed.**

1. Making sense of the noise

While it may sometimes seem that brands are continually chasing the “buzz” of current headlines and fads, marketers know that long-term planning and growth require a much different mindset. **True trends can help brands separate everyday “noise” from reliable insights and guidance.**

Think of sustainability and environmental concern – during the height of the pandemic, many observers suggested that interest in “green” topics and activism might suffer. Who had time (or money) to prioritize the planet? But Green Gauge – a long-term GfK Consumer Life study tracking consumers’ engagement with the environment – told a different story. Concerns and priorities we saw before 2020 remained quite healthy and persisted – particularly in comparison to other worries that experienced more volatility.

Chart 1. Environmental concern doesn't fade



2. Integrating with other insight sources

Marketers today usually have a variety of data assets and options at their disposal – and making sense of them all can be a job in itself. Proven trends can be a powerful resource to guide your sorting and prioritizing.

When conducting qualitative or quantitative research, for example, trends can help inform screening criteria, inspire and prioritize lines of questioning, and add significant context to final insights. The outputs of trends also have a great deal of utility for sales materials, as external thought leadership, or for numerous other tactical efforts.

3. Prioritizing strategic moves

The question brands face every day is “Where do we go next?” Rising above reactive approaches to the marketplace and setting clear, long-term strategy is a continual

challenge. Trends provide an important foundation for inspiring creative exercises and helping teams prioritize their decisions and actions.

They can act as a template for:

- **determining the themes** most relevant to explore for your business
- **brainstorming new areas of exploration** for product or service offerings
- **assessing the impact of external events** on existing trends, or solving very specific problems for your organization.

4. Navigating crises large and small

At times when our usual assumptions seem suspect, marketers need to step back and see the broader context of everyday events. Tracking trends provides grounding and guidance for this essential process.

Macro trends, for example, offer a way to understand the world and the types of innovations and messages that consumers want and need to hear.

Among nine macro trends that GfK Consumer Life has been tracking for some time, three stand out for their relevance in today’s disrupted world:

- **Seeking safety** – in many settings, consumers are seeking reassurance from what they see as threats to their health and wellbeing
- **Eco-conscience** – the pandemic actually accelerated this trend – and, in fact, it is now the #2 global trend, behind seeking-safety
- **Discerning consumption** – people increasingly look for high-quality products that serve people’s needs – and for innovative solutions that protect consumers but still offer the element of surprise (see Chart 2)

Chart 2. Discerning consumption in action

Which of these best represents what innovation means to you and the products you buy?



Applying the power of generations to innovate beyond demographics



Applying the power of generations to innovate beyond demographics

Generations go well beyond standard insights to reveal what makes a cohort of consumers think and behave alike. The currency of generations is in recognizing how they relate to each other through their collective ideals and values, the experiences and events they share – both real and virtual – and their increasing ability to even transcend geography in real-time through today's technology.

Yet, in an age of growing diversity and finite budgets, we also need to avoid generational stereotyping. We need to acknowledge that **generations aren't monolithic – recognizing their value but seeing them as just one lens in your toolkit.**

Generations in action: Adapting to globalization

While we are seeing greater convergence of generations across geographies over time, this isn't a mandate to dismiss localization. Even though Gen Z are the most global generation today, there are distinct local values that may yield stronger connections to brands. While Gen Zs in all three of these markets share values such as Authenticity and Protecting the Family, we also see very different values that would lead to different efforts for anything from fashion brands, to food and beverage, to entertainment, and even ESR.

How do we define generations to make them meaningful and revealing? For the Baby Boomer generation, birth rates provided distinct boundaries; but we've also learned that the greatest influences on a cohort tend to be the environmental and social events that impact them, especially in their formative years. We use these collectively shared experiences – from the AIDS epidemic to 9-11 to COVID-19 – to mark the transitions from one generation to another.

When deployed wisely, generations can help brands target consumers effectively.



1. Shaping portfolio strategy

Adapting to globalization

Recognizing key differences can enhance relevance



Gen Z's top 10 values around the world

S. Korea		Germany		Brazil	
Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank
Material Security	#1	Protecting the family	#1	Learning	#1
Enjoying life	2	Friendship	2	Protecting the family	2
Leisure	3	Enjoying life	3	Freedom	3
Freedom	4	Honesty	4	Honesty	4
Having fun	5	Stable relationships	5	Social tolerance	5
Protecting the family	6	Having fun	6	Open-mindedness	6
Health and fitness	7	Freedom	7	Self-esteem	7
Authenticity	8	Authenticity	8	Preserving environment	8
Social tolerance	9	Material Security	9	Authenticity	9
Fulfilling work	10	Self-reliance	10	Equality	10

Generational studies measure shifts over broad swaths of time, making them ideal to inform brand strategies today and tomorrow. Generational insights are now being applied to managing product portfolio strategies; this can be clearly seen in the auto industry, for example, where brands have a plethora of nameplates applicable to drivers of different generations.

We also see this strategic application in the beverage industry, with different products – featuring a variety of ingredients, flavors, and benefits – catering to various generational mindsets and expectations.

2. Guiding communications and targeting

Whether you are crafting a message that needs to resonate with the cohort, optimizing media mix, or even developing programming (think about the shoutouts to Gen X in “Stranger Things” or the numerous reboots of nostalgic TV shows) – **generations can provide crucial direction for communications decisions.**

Consider first the media channels that each generation trusts most, as well as the messages that will align most closely with their worldviews. Other vital aspects of their identities to keep in mind include the unique impacts of major events (e.g., COVID-19, The Great Recession) on their age groups and whether each generation's values tend to be monolithic (vs. varied).

3. Identifying innovation & product opportunities

By understanding who generational consumers are today – as well as studying those before them – brands can begin to project their future needs and identify innovation opportunities, achieving a stronger idea of when to launch future products and for whom.

When the iPad launched, Apple knew from its iPhone experience that the biggest hurdle to adoption would be the shift from keyboard clicks to swiping on touch-sensitive screens. Apple realized that a premium product catering to the same Gen X and late Boomers who first bought the iPhone would benefit from familiarity with swiping.

Using values to adapt to today's fast-changing consumer

Personal values are the guiding principles in consumers' lives. **They influence the way people live and the choices they make.** Understanding and acting on values enhances brands' competitive advantage.

Part of the appeal of values is that core values tend to be relatively stable compared with many other attitudes, such as mood and consumer confidence. But it is also a misconception to believe that consumers adopt sets of values in their formative years and then stick with them throughout their lives. Those of us who are a little bit older can testify that, as we age, our priorities change -- and so do some of our aspirations and guiding principles in life. Many values -- such as Excitement, Ambition, and Tradition -- are more life-stage driven than true generational imprints.

The interpretation and manifestations of values can be different for different people and evolve

over time. So values are best combined with an understanding of trends and lifestyle behaviors to inform strategies. But values do have huge importance for strategizing and decision making on a number of levels. Let's look at just a few.

1. Grounding innovation at a deeper level

Values are a flexible and dynamic tool that can be integrated into detailed brand strategy exercises and help deliver meaningful innovation. Some of the brands GfK Consumer Life works with have established a values-based branding framework that they use to profile their key customers -- understanding the reach of key values, determining overlaps in target segments, and exploring potential opportunity areas related to values that are emerging or not currently reached.

2. Creating messages that inspire loyalty

A deep understanding of values can also be critical to develop and hone messaging,

marketing, and portfolio alignment. For example, it's possible to develop two distinct marketing strategies for the same product or brand based on the needs and priorities of two different values segments.



In this set of ads for the same car model, you can see that the first example is appealing to a segment that might align with our Aspirers -- go-getters, people who want to stand out and be recognized. In contrast, the second example aligns more with an Indulger segment -- people who want adventure, excitement, and personal fulfillment. It's likely that other aspects of the strategy for these two segments would vary, such as the media plan and key partnerships.

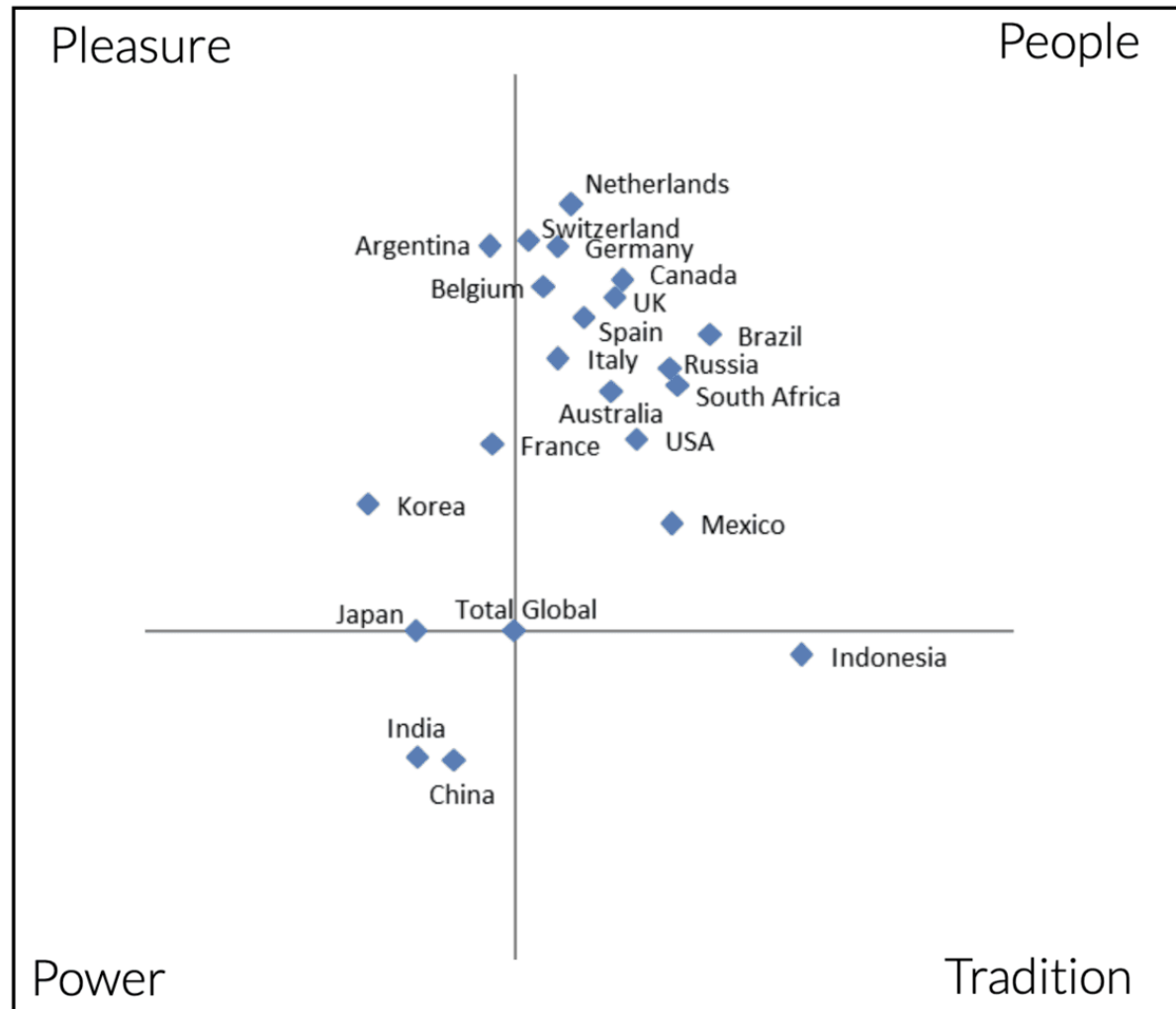
3. Driving brand differentiation

If you have more of a global portfolio, values insights can help you better understand cultural differences across markets – and create a more nuanced and differentiated brand strategy in each region.

In Chart 3, we see that Asian markets like China rest heavily in what we call our “power” corner – distinctly ambitious, attention-seeking, and likely craving the respect of others. These consumers will align more with ads that emphasize benefits like knowledge and a sense of accomplishment. In contrast, the US veers more towards the “people” corner, with a stronger priority on maintaining relationships and social connections. **Marketing that shows people connecting over the product, as well as strong relationships (familiar or otherwise) will resonate more.**

These insights provide powerful guidance for developing smart, differentiated products and marketing and driving to greater success.

Chart 3. Translating values into meaningful insight



4. Enhancing customization

Values can also be a powerful tool when leveraged in a wide array of custom research, especially segmentations. We know from our research that category behaviors are based not just on attitudes within each industry, but on broader consumer attitudes and personal values, as well. Consumers not only expect products and services to cater to their individual needs – they also are increasingly choosing brands that exhibit similar personal values. It makes sense that these types of “explicit” and “implicit” motivators should be embedded within consumer segmentations, particularly to answer questions of *who and why*.



Indulgers Emphasize personal fulfillment



Discoverers Focus on the opportunity to explore



Values in action: Selling similar products to different audiences

Values can also be used to create distinct messages for two brands or products within a company's portfolio. In these examples from two beer brands with the same parent company – Anheuser-Busch InBev – both emphasize enjoying life; but the Stella ad is more likely to appeal to an Indulger segment that seeks the finer things in life, while the Corona ad might appeal more to Discoverers, people who are more exploratory in nature.

A toolkit for 2023 and beyond

With the right insights, carefully curated and deployed through the best analytical tools, your planning naturally paves the way for a brighter future.

Trends, generations, and values are just three ways to see the consumer – supporting and expanding upon each other, and also complementing a host of other insight types. **The key is to identify your most important decisions and assemble the tools you need to answer those questions.**

Take on that task today – and be prepared for a better tomorrow for your brand!



About GfK Consumer Life

Now celebrating its 25th anniversary, GfK Consumer Life Global is the most comprehensive and longest-standing consumer trend study in the world.



Thank you for reading

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For more information about this toolkit, or to learn how to apply these insights to your company, contact consumer.life@gfk.com