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### Engaging the future consumer

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# Engaging the future consumer

28 Feb 2020

*There are different strategies for Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, and Baby Boomers*

The Fila Disruptor 2 and its follow-up Disruptor 3 sneakers are perhaps the trendiest shoes at the moment. From model-actress Emily Ratajkowski to rappers Ne-Yo and Nicki Minaj, celebrities have confirmed the re-imagined version of the 1996 original Disruptor as the must-have shoes for Generation Z.

While most observers now laud Fila for recognising Gen Z's love for nostalgia and exploiting it at the right time, fewer people know who gave Fila the idea.

"What we looked at was the trends among Generation Z and specifically their appetite on nostalgia," explained Marc Villemat, APAC Director for Client Success at trend forecasting company WGSN. "The idea here was to take a hero product from Fila years ago and try to adapt it in the current market.

"There's been a change in recent years. We used to have an industry that was product-led but now it's very much consumer-led. If you miss out on what your consumer wants, then you won't be successful. "

## OPTIMISM FOR THE YOUNG...AND YOUNG AT HEART

Villemat recounted the story in a recent SMU Centre for Marketing Excellence seminar titled Future Consumer 2022, where he included Generation Z into what WGSN calls the 'New Optimists' consumer profile.

"It's more Gen Z and Baby Boomers where Gen Z influence their grandparents," Villemat says, pointing to a childlike spirit in both cohorts. "They have a vivacious appetite to embrace joy no matter what the context is, no matter what the fear."

Gen Z's focus on issues such as "impacting change through community, volunteering, and social emotional learning" are in line with their view that climate change is the most pressing global challenge. New Optimists, Villemat explains, "gravitate towards brands that promotes community interaction for climate change", citing the example of Outdoor Voices, which closed its stores in September last year for the Global Climate Strike.

For Baby Boomers who might be New Optimists, it is about shifting the cultural narrative from ageism to ableism. "Just because they are at different life stages doesn't mean that they stop living, and smart companies are investing in that brain workforce," Villemat points out while highlighting a [2018 Deloitte survey](#) that found that:

- 16 percent of companies are creating special roles for older workers;
- 20 percent are partnering with them to develop new career models.

"They are determined to find joy," Villemat stresses. "Ageing is being reverted to focusing on shifting the cultural narrative from ageism to ableism."

## ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

So how should brands engage the New Optimist? According to Villemat, one way is to use virtual reality and augmented reality (VR/AR).

“According to a [Gartner survey in 2018](#), 100 million consumers globally will use VR and AR by 2020,” says Villemat. “For the new optimist who feel that in-store shopping may be a bit cumbersome, brands provide them with that quick platform to test products at their convenience.” Apps such as [Wanna Kicks](#) and [IKEA’s Place](#) are two of many examples of this.

There are also engagement strategies for Gen X and Millennials, the two main cohorts between Gen Z and Baby Boomers. While individuals in those age groups may be New Optimists, they fall mainly into either ‘The Stabilisers’ or ‘The Settlers’ categories.

For the former, their main urge is to cope with what Villemat calls ‘Desynchronised Society’ which:

*“Despite the fact that we seem to be a lot more connected, we actually getting disconnected from the people that are closest to us. 10, 15, 20 years ago, you go to work from nine to five, you come back, hear the news, everybody more or less listen and hear the same news from the same channel.*

*“People now work very early or very late and they get information and news from different channels. And so you feel that you may be closer to people that are far from you and not as close to the community.”*

For this group of people, simplicity matters. “People want a very simple path to purchase,” says Villemat, pointing to the decision exhaustion amongst consumers. Citing the example of prominent blogger [The Aldi Nerd](#), Villemat makes the case of less being more.

“What she loves about Aldi is she walks in and there’s one type of mustard or one type of chocolate. She realised that going shopping there saves her a lot of time. That’s how you have to think about your consumer. Less choices and faster shopping trips.”

For the Settlers, their main defining feature is rejecting “the belief that work is not only necessary to economic production but also to a centrepiece of your identity”. “Because they’re spending less time in the office, they also do work from home,” Villemat notes. “They’re spending more time in their communities and they spend more money in their community. For every dollar spent at a small business in the U.S., 67 percent of it stays in the community.”

As such, an engagement strategy would be hyper localised social commerce. Villemat gave the example of Singapore-founded blockchain reseller app [RateS](#), which advertises itself as “allow[ing] ANYONE to start a business without INVENTORY”.

“You’re been directly connected to other manufacturers and other retailers, and they allow you to sell some of the items and you can sell to your social network. Think about it a bit like a influencer 2.0, or micro-influencer 2.0.

“Instead of just promoting the item on your social, you’re actually getting people to pay for the item through you. So you’re the intermediary and you can make up to 30 percent, but you decide on the price. You cut out a lot of middlemen in retail.”

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