



GENERATION NATION
COMPANION
REPORT

Authenticity



First, a little history ...

In 2019, Quester conducted a landmark project in conjunction with 747 Insights and Collaborata:

GENERATION NATION 2019: Defining America's Gen Z, Millennials, Generation X and Boomers

This study provides a comparison of attitudes and behaviors across 4,012 respondents in these four cohorts, to expand upon current intelligence and cut to the core of what it means to be an American in 2019.

Aided by technology, media, politics, and more, we can see Generational values shifting at a faster pace than we've ever seen before.

The study is both insightful and actionable. Contact us to learn more about subscribing to Generation Nation.



We set out to not only collect information about each of these generations, but also to develop a deep understanding about who they are, and their experiences.



One thing we discovered was that each generation consistently values authenticity. But we wanted to know what that means – and that's what you'll find here. It is likely the most authentic report you will ever encounter.



WHAT WE DID

We set out to learn about people's thoughts on authenticity to determine what they look for in life and their beloved brands.



HOW WE DID IT

We asked 404 people across four generations about authenticity, focusing on different aspects in their lives. We landed on brands and probed a little deeper using an AI-delivered conversation.



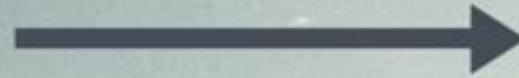
WHAT WE ASKED

We asked them to define authenticity... and then we asked about authenticity in people and relationships ... and then authenticity at work or school ... and social media ... and then we dove into brands to find out how much authenticity matters and how people judge a brand's authenticity. It was exhausting, but fun, insightful, and certainly authentic!



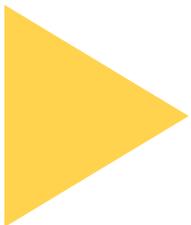
▶ Here's what we found...

The basic Consumer definition of Authenticity is rooted in staying true to yourself and maintaining honesty and truth at all times, never pretending, faking or conforming.



AUTHENTICITY

STARTS HERE



Sounds neat! So does free ice cream! For everyone! Also unicorns! Sooo ... does authenticity actually exist? Anywhere? In the real world?



For sure. But it's not easy. Because here's the definitional part ...



authentic

[ô'THen(t)ik]

adj

Always yourself, a true one-of-a-kind who doesn't pretend to be anything you're not; you're pretty honest and transparent but always kind, a stick-to-your-values kind of person who is unwilling to conform for others



I think about myself. I don't sugar coat situations or obstacles. I don't bother patronizing people. I don't shield my children from the unfortunate events that happen in life and the world. Authentic = genuine, not placing a veil over one's eyes. Genuine is to be real. No need for fictional scenarios. (Millennial)



But then there is Authenticity Activated.

It's one thing to BE authentic – but how do you actually, effectively DEMONSTRATE authenticity?

Tricky, right? Yes! And especially because it varies based on the setting you're in ...

So what does Authenticity mean in ...



Relationships

39%

Honesty



It's being honest, kind, helpful and trustworthy. NOT fake, conforming or behaving badly. It's Boy Scout, not *Big Brother* (though who doesn't love reality TV? But sadly, the opposite of authentic).



Someone or something that is original, honest and true. Not fake. Something that comes naturally and doesn't have to be faked. Like an authentic talent or item. If it's faked or forced it's not genuine and effortless. (Millennial)



At Work

31%

Trust



It's pulling your weight and looking out for other people. You know, demonstrating work ethic. (At Quester we call this "being a person.")



At work authenticity is very important being it allows you to trust people, which I find critical in business. If I cannot trust someone, it's very damaging to working with them. I think authenticity builds trust. (Millennial)

So what does Authenticity mean ...



On Social Media

Hilarious! There is no authenticity on social media. People are authenticity-skeptics the second they open the app. They love it, but they scroll & roll ... their eyes. While taking nothing at Face(book) value.



I feel like authenticity is a constant battle between two worlds when it comes to social media. I see three sides to the authenticity situation: There are people who post things to make them likable but are being disingenuous; there are people who curse the disingenuity of social media and make every effort to combat it and this, in itself, feels a bit like a show; and then there's the people who don't care either way. I think it's difficult to be entirely genuine on social media because you're either trying to make people like you or trying to make people feel like you're relatable" (Gen Z)



At School

Aw, our poor Gen Zs. We're giving them a pass. They don't even know; they're just in survival mode trying to figure out who they even authentically are, much less anyone else. (See our BTT library – and be kind to a teenager! While reminding them to make eye contact.)



Honestly, I think everyone at school is trying to be genuine, but at this time in our life, it's honestly a minefield to try and figure out how to be genuine. You want people to like you in the short time you're given in a school day ... you put your best face forward. But to be real, I'm not sure if anyone really knows our own selves well enough to know how to be genuine." (Gen Z)

But let's cut to the chase ... what if your brand is aiming for Authenticity?

Brand Authenticity

First of all – does it matter?

The short answer is **YES**.



Think about how you're **activating authenticity** through what you do — your product or service. You need to be **trustworthy**, provide **durability** and ooze **quality** — everything that shows you're the real deal.



Reliably **deliver** on what you say you're going to do (be a person, Brand).

So ... which brands get credit for being authentic?



Apparel

Specifically 9% Adidas, 8% Levi's — especially Nike, but more on that in a minute

41%



21%

Specifically, 10% Apple

Tech



Automotive

Trusted, tried and true Ford and Chevy are credited for being around a long time

7%



11%

Designer

Knock-off or generic products are not authentic!



Consumers understand that there's a bottom line, but that doesn't mean they don't have expectations. The language is more like that of a **work relationship** — for **65%**, it's about establishing **trust**.

Products aside, can a brand offer up a truly Authentic personality?

If you're activating through what you stand for, you really need to handle with care. Take Nike:



20%
give them credit
for authenticity

7%
knock them as
inauthentic



You MUST be consistent – you can't change stances or waffle, and you can't claim you're super awesome for one cause or group of people while mistreating another (i.e., standing up for people but running sweatshops).



You also can't appear to be only telling people what they want to hear without some genuine connection to the product or service you provide.



Remember how people love social media?
And reality TV? They will recognize fake when they see it ... **Don't pander!**

ARE ALL THESE DIRECTIVES LOFTY? FOR SURE.

But we always advocate for aspirational. And because we're language nerds, here is some linguistic inspiration about how to operate ...

Think of this as your "authenticity checklist"

41%



True to Self

Living your true form without compromise – being fearlessly "real"

38%



Honest

Truthful in all circumstances

19%



One of a Kind

"An original," unique

13%



Transparent & Open

Without barriers, "an open book"

9%



Kind

Kind, loving manner

9%



Beliefs & Values

Grounded firmly in beliefs without wavering

What authenticity is NOT

18% Fake – the opposite of authenticity; not being "real"
18% Pretending to be someone you're not; being different based on the person you're with or the circumstance

8% Conforming and trying to fit in
7% Lying or trying to deceive



Follow the Rules of Authenticity:



**Be Your
True Self**

Establish a strong brand identity ... where your products/services reflect what you uniquely deliver, stand for and won't waver on. Then showcase your true self like an overzealous pageant mom.

If you're standing on values, a strong stance = good; waffling yourself into conformity = bad. And make sure it ties to what you do or deliver.



**Be Legitimately
Trustworthy**

Focus on the experience you're delivering – remember, authenticity isn't only about who you are, it's about how you live it. And you can't be the perfect (still overzealous) pageant mom who coaches and preaches kindness and world peace while stabbing other pageant moms with your stiletto heel.



**Be
Honest**

Transparency is key. Mistakes can happen. You can apologize for a mistake (but never for your identity). Be honest and own who you are and everything you do.

Your reputation becomes your story. Guard it.



**Keep Social
Media In Mind**

Social media is a critical, invaluable tool ... but people are skeptical and savvy to marketing practices and malpractices. If you can't be genuine, don't bother. Beware the scroll & roll.

A few more things ...



Instead of asking questions (What should we say for people to trust us? What should we do?), you need to make statements. Take a stand on who/what you are. People will trust that, and they'll trust you. All generations, all the time.

In short, be you. Whatever that is. And stick with it. That's authenticity.

And because we authentically care about details and language, here's a little more to think about ...

Wait – what about the generations?

There were a few interesting perspective differences

Gen Z



Millennials



Gen X



Boomers



Defining Authenticity



More focused on being kind than Millennials or Gen X



More often mention parents and friends as being authentic



Expect authentic to include sticking to beliefs and values; view religious people and organizations as more authentic



Focus more on being kind than Millennials or Gen X



Gen X and Boomers are more likely to mention honesty than Millennials or Gen Z

Relationships



Call out inauthentic relationships that have elements of being fake, mean or based on conformity



Talk about “selfishness” as they define inauthentic relationships

Social Media



Especially recognize alterations/manipulations to create an image



Say people use social media to get attention

Brands



More often mention brands/products that “do the job”



Boomers (and some Gen X) cite proof of past experience and reputation



Younger generations think of authentic brands in terms of being genuine (the “real” Gucci, Coach, Michael Kors, etc.); they focus on Designer and Apparel brands



Older generations (Boomers especially) appreciate tried and true “staple” brands (Ford/Chevy, Levi’s, Coke, etc.)

In their words ... What is Authentic?



Gen Z



"I would consider my mother to be the most authentic person in my life because she always tells the truth whether it's good or bad because it comes out of a good place ... whether you like it or not the truth is what helps us move on in some cases."

"A person that is always themselves regardless of who is around. Not changing how you act or what you say depending on who you are with. I always try to be authentic."

"My best friend Jamie comes to mind. She is always authentically herself and isn't afraid to be exactly who she is and facing the world fearlessly - being genuine and honest and one hundred percent oneself."



Millennials



"My sister is very authentic. She doesn't allow others to mold her and she is a person of her word."

"My therapist is authentic because she asks clear, concise questions and actually listens to what I have to say. I think being authentic is being true to yourself and being comfortable in your own skin and being your own person and not compromising yourself for anyone else."

"Being authentic to me means not pretending to be someone else when you are with people. I am always myself, although some do not like it. Being a fake is the opposite of authenticity."



Gen X



"Authentic to me means to be completely original. It's like finding a rare treasure. When I hear that word, I think of something that I would love to have in my life. A thought or thing that no one else possesses."

"Being authentic means that you are your true self to people. You are always truthful and don't try to be someone you're not. It means I act like myself when I'm dealing with people no matter the situation."

"My daughter is very authentic. She doesn't hesitate to explain how she's feeling or to stand up for what's right. Holding true to oneself – having integrity. Because too many people do not have this quality anymore."



Boomers



"I would say that my Pastor is authentic because he is always there for me and my family. Being honest and trustworthy. Not compromising yourself. If I trust you, that means you are a good person and you are true to yourself and everyone around you."

"My husband is authentic in the way he is real – tells the truth and stands up for what he believes in always. To be real, not phony, to tell the truth and to be yourself even if you don't fit in."

"This is a very important topic in the life of everybody. Being authentic means to be themselves without losing themselves in a selfish ego behavior and, this said, I know how difficult this is. Being authentic means for me to be kind and to live from the core of who I am really."

In their words ... How to be an Authentic brand



Gen Z



"They've never failed me in a time of need and you get quality."

"They're authentic in the way they advertise their products/services. Of course there will always be bias, but the quality and success of the brand speaks for itself. They do their purpose, whether it's to provide quality makeup, a more healthy snack choice, or a better place to stay while on vacation. Cut and dry, their obligations and goals as a brand is awarding for everyone."

"I know each of these brands are authentic because they are true to what they say most of the time. They are huge companies that have lots of buyers and reviews that are great."

"I know they are authentic because they have special marks/logos on their products. Also with some of them they come with little booklets about the brand."



Millennials



"These brands demonstrate their beliefs in their corporate practices no matter if their beliefs match popular opinion. They do not sway simply because it is not a popular stance."

"For Bombas, they don't deny they're wanting to make profit but also go out of their way to help other people. For WTF, I believe that the host only chooses sponsors who he doesn't morally disagree with. Picking your advertising based on your morality and not money is a big deal. As for Red Bull, they are a company that could have sold for millions but decided to stay true to what they want and stay independent. Staying true to who they are, what they do and not compromising makes them authentic to me."



Gen X



"Their common denominator is their product is as good as they advertise. The product is great for the amount of money you pay and it lasts for more than a day."

"The Children's Place makes quality clothes and they stand behind their brand. Chick-Fil-A stands behind what they believe in, even if I don't agree with them, and they support that. Applebee's stands behind their products and their workers."

"Straight forward and transparent. Not cover up any mistakes they made."

"They all live up to their word and I haven't a reason to not believe what they say or claim."



Boomers



"Their key points are reputation, trust. The maker/designer of the product. Reliability and excellence in the development of the product."

"These are all retail brands that have stood the test of time. I and my household have been consumers of these brands for several years. We are consistently pleased with their quality and service. We know what to expect and we receive that or better from these brands all of the time."

"I can count on the quality every time and their reputation is built on their responsibility to the products they produce."

"They have stayed true to what they do and are still doing well because of it, like Quaker Oats – been making them for over fifty years the same way. They have not changed so my method has not changed. Get the same great taste every time."

In the Weeds – Conversation & Detail



WHO WE TALKED TO

- 101 Gen Z – aged 13-22
- 102 Millennials – aged 23-38
- 100 Gen X – aged 39-54
- 101 Boomers – aged 55-72



404 Online interviews
with AI moderator



TECHNIQUES APPLIED

- ✓ Customized probing
- ✓ In-depth language review
- ✓ Quantified qualitative language analysis

1

But I'm wondering about *authenticity* and what it means to you in your day-to-day. To start, think of someone or something in your life you consider authentic. Tell me who or what you're thinking of and why that comes to mind here. Still keeping in mind what you just told me, give me your *personal definition of being authentic*.

2

Talk to me about a person or group of people in your life you consider to be authentic. Tell me what traits or characteristics makes someone *authentic*.

3

What about those situations where you identify someone or a relationship as *not* being authentic? Tell me about a person or group of people you know fitting this description. How do you know when someone or even a relationship is *not authentic*?

4

Think about the place where you spend the most time outside of your home – this could be school, or your workplace ... help me understand what you look for and how *authenticity* plays a role here.

5

Now let's talk about another area ... social media. Earlier you told me about the specific social media platforms you use, now talk to me about the way you think about *authenticity* when it comes to social media.

6

And finally, let's talk about brands and *authenticity*. First, real talk, help me understand how much (if at all) *authenticity* matters to you when considering a brand.

7

Now tell me what brands you consider to be *authentic*. If you have that many, three to five brands would be fantastic! Please enter those into the boxes below. Explain to me how you know each of these brands is *authentic*, especially if there's a common denominator in earning that distinction.

8

I'm also interested in the brands you find to be *inauthentic* – the opposite of *authentic* ... What specific brands are *not authentic* ... and how do you know?



If you're like us, you're obsessively curious about interesting trends. That's why we launched ***Beneath the Trend***.

Beneath the Trend reports demonstrate the depth of information that can be gleaned from Quester's artificial intelligence-backed software moderator.

If you have ideas for future ***Beneath the Trend*** research topics we'd love to hear them!

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