

A Generational Approach to Brand Identity or Ideation

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8 Questions to Get Your Conversation Started

- 1 *What has changed about your brand since it was created?*
- 2 *Think back to X years ago, what do you wish you knew then and why?*
- 3 *How does our company help people / employees within common stressors (financial, interpersonal, health)?*
- 4 *How has the market changed since our brand was created?*
- 5 *How can our brand / company be seen “as family”; a go-to resource for advice and solutions?*
- 6 *How would your brand / company from when it began (or X years ago), view itself today and why?*
- 7 *What advice would you give your brand/company from X years ago if you could go back?*
- 8 *How can we use our cross generational makeup / customer base to come up with more informed strategy?*



Thought exercise: thinking of your brand within a generational construct.

In working through some content ideas for an event I am building, I decided to do a couple of small surveys to look at concepts like, “how life experience frames personal context”, and “how our tastes change over time.” It wasn’t meant for anything else other than personal curiosity, but after reviewing the information, I thought I should share some of the information and the ideas that it sparked.

Often times, we as brand owners, brand supporters and brand strategists need to set aside time to think about our products and services from different perspectives. When looking through the survey responses, I saw an opportunity to apply the constructs to brainstorming or ideation exercises. Sometimes, being creative needs a kick start. Framing some of our thinking from a generational perspective, can ascribe new voices to our products and services.

The informal and unstructured responses from the survey helped me think about a brand from an “individual” perspective. This helped fuel a path of questions that could start new brand and culture conversations in a meeting room, or between companies and their customers. Some questions that popped up were:

- *Knowing what you know today, what would you have said to yourself 10 years ago (as a brand, as a professional, etc.)?*
- *What will personal fulfilment look like in the next 10 years? How does that differ or mirror what you would have told yourself 10 years ago? Why?*
- *How much do our tastes change over time? What influences those tastes and changes?*
- *How can we relate better with our ... [customers | employees | vendors] when we directly or indirectly take their primary stresses into consideration?*
- *How can our brand / company become more of a resource for our customers or employees when thinking about the stresses they are dealing with (e.g., how can we increase perception for trust, empathy, degree of personal knowledge?)*
- *And more...*

This approach was exciting because it opened up all kinds of ideas for action (marketing content, session content, sponsor pitches, etc.). It was quick, easy and based on real human answers translated into real human terms.

Data can provide answers but “should” also inspire conversation and reflection.



When we learn something about “ourselves” how should we apply that to our brands, products and services?

I’ll provide some background on the surveys here. The surveys were NOT meant to be “scientific” other than I was hoping to get to 100 or more completed interviews in each survey. I won’t make a case that the findings are “earth shattering” nor “surprising.”

Questions were largely open-ended which makes measurement “quantitatively” a little more subjective as responses needed to be coded into similar themes while allowing flexible qualitative responses that don’t constrain answers to “best fit”. The findings in research like this are largely “directional”, and need to be weighed against common sense. However, if the themes make sense, they can help frame creative thinking.

Two separate surveys were conducted. One focused on stressors and resources used to help with stress (family, work, authority resources, etc.), and the other survey focused on self-advice to an 18 year old self, personal hopes in next 10 years, and media content favorites when 18 years old and today. Each survey had over 100 respondents. One was recruited solely through a panel environment and the other was recruited through social media and a panel environment. So let me reiterate, this is NOT meant to be a statistically representative population that should be extrapolated for societal conclusions. Rather, it was meant to help inform some theories I had when considering how we change with age, and how we deal with stress.

This information was meant to help me review content ideas for a seminar series and to help to understand if there might be some general concepts to help frame language I

plan to use in marketing collateral over the next 6 months or so. However, as I started looking at the data, some interesting themes appeared and ideas on how to approach brands generationally appeared. Data should help to inform current hypotheses, BUT should also serve as fodder for new hypotheses. For example, how would knowing the following influence your new hypotheses?

- Top 3 current stresses mentioned by people today revolve around Finance, Interpersonal Relationships, and Health.
- Family is the top resource for dealing with stress because we tend to look to for resources we are familiar with and who are familiar with us when we experience stress. Friends are also important, but family is the primary resource we turn to.
- Cross-generational interactions that we recall most often involve family and specific activities (i.e., grandma and cooking, grandpa and Christmas, etc.). Additionally, technology is cited as a connector (i.e., Facebook).
- When we look backwards, we often have very specific but aspirational advice to our younger selves. We know we make mistakes and life looked backwards is filled with wisdom about life in general, finance, and love.
- Our general hopes for the future can vary drastically as life stages change (e.g., as we age, we hope to be alive or we may hope for our country / family’s happiness more).
- Tastes in TV and Movies (favorite in each) may be more consistent over time versus favorite songs.



Many brands already do similar exercises around personas. They create more human versions of their customers / stakeholders in order to frame new internal conversations like, “how would Bold Betty respond to this message?” But if you haven’t gone through those exercises to humanize your customers, there are some great inexpensive ways to go about getting similar feedback that can help you think differently about chronic issues or new opportunities. All you have to do is “ask”.

I often see clients struggle with “what to do” when they get new insights. As a consultant, I want them to see the value of the data they have before them. Yes, we want data to provide answers to questions, and it usually does, but the data can’t make the decisions. Data informs actions, guides strategy, but it usually won’t “fix” the problems. We still need stakeholders and leaders to take the data, absorb it, and then devise a plan that takes data into consideration.

As a consultant, I often want to “solve” things, but I know that true solutions need to come from within. A fresh perspective may be needed, but the broader team working on a product, brand, or corporate culture will have 1,000 times more context about what is truly possible in a given environment. Therefore conversation is needed in order to use the data, find the meaning, and apply a plan of attack. How might we take this generational data and apply it to a business question?

For example, assume a tradeshow skews

somewhat older (e.g., factors like industry aging, or more senior employees generally attend trade shows, etc.). Let’s apply some generational ideation to fuel some creative conversation around strategic initiatives for content, marketing, sales, sponsors, etc.?

- *What kinds of artists/genres might my target be interested in? Who will help me attract more of who I already get?*
- *How can we leverage the wisdom of this senior audience more to help provide guidance to the new people who are tomorrow’s attendees?*
- *What would your event 10 years ago think about your event today? What has changed for the better? Changed for the worse?*
- *Who were your exhibitors 10-20 years ago and who are they today (look back further than our traditional 3-5 year window)? How is that mix changing and how does your event need to pivot to make sure disruptions are still included (Reality TV shows were not a standard “thing” 30+ years ago)?*
- *How can your messaging address major stresses that people face in their day to day lives? Finances – do people who attend our show tend to be more successful financially? Leveraging common acceptance that networking is a business version of an interpersonal network – when has a person’s network helped to solve a significant problem? How can we replicate that on a larger scale? Who might sponsor that?*
- *What does my internal team need outside of work? How are we more than a paycheck?*

What should we do with this new information?



About Brian Sherwood and Sherwood Enterprises, LLC.

Interest in:

- *Research projects (quant or qual)*
- *Ideation sessions*
- *Event opportunities*
- *Strategic event cycle advice*
- *General good conversation?*

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Brian Sherwood has established himself as a global thought leader in the marketing science of quantitative and qualitative research that leads to actionable insights used to drive business growth. Combined with his management skills and leadership talent, he has created a career highlighted by innovation and outstanding relationships with client companies ranging from small to medium businesses to Fortune 100 enterprises. His creativity, energy, and drive, combined with the quality of the work his teams produce, have earned him the respect of the people he works with, both colleagues and customers located around the world.

While Brian has at times focused on specific industries – financial services was a specialty for a period when he worked with Bank of America, Wells Fargo, Morgan Stanley and other leaders – he also has proven the ability to become conversant and add value in environments ranging from the fan-driven, consumer-focused Comic Con event in New York City to B2B events such as the National Hardware Show. In every engagement, Brian uses his research and reporting expertise to help customers make data-driven decisions that enhanced business results through engagement, loyalty and profitable sales growth.

Now, Brian is working independently to

bring his expertise to clients and projects not well-served by large event and market research companies. His creative, entrepreneurial energy and critical thinking skills are available to his clients in varied industries, including those for which he has personal interest. These include sustainable farming and other industries and initiatives that serve people and the greater good.

Consultative collaboration is an accurate way to describe how Brian works with clients. He digs deep to understand their needs, business challenges and opportunities, and the goals of stakeholders. Once the problems and possibilities are defined and understood, he goes to work, executing the research to support business-building strategies and tactical priorities. He is inquisitive and focused on doing what it takes to analyze data and complete research that is credible and valuable to customers.

Brian's view of marketing and the role it plays in society helps explain what drives him to deliver excellence for his clients. "I am passionate about people and the relationships that develop from creative and powerful marketing. My goal is to make a difference in my work by enabling great organizations to connect with their customers in ways that build loyalty and sustainable businesses."



Supporting Data

2 Informal Surveys

Research Note:

These findings are not meant to be considered representative of any particular market, but rather they are directional in nature. However, as a more quantitative look at a qualitative dataset, it generated enough consistency to move out of “marketing curiosity” and into an opinion piece that could help frame discussions for a variety of products, services and cultures. If you are looking for conversation starters, some of these findings could help start new conversations to create ideas within your organization.

Survey 1 Completes

122

Survey 2 Completes

120



What are your biggest stresses?



Finance dominates biggest stressors in our lives, followed by Interpersonal Relationships [family and friend based stresses] and Health concerns.

Example questions for ideation:

- How does your brand or product impact the finance, relationships and health of the customers it serves OR the employees who work for the brand?
- How can you minimize or solve "their stress"? Generate revenue? Provide guidance, etc.?



- 01 "Performance at work and relationship with parents and significant other."
- 02 "Living on Social Security and my savings or the next 25 years."
- 03 "Worry about paying my bills"

- 01 "Performance at work and relationship with parents and significant other."
- 02 "not be present on my kids lives until they become independent"
- 03 "Things that effect my family that are caused by someone else's actions that cause pain (emotional) on them. People not being responsible for their actions or their responsibilities. Injustice to children."
- 04 "In my life I stress most about money and what is next in my life."

- 01 "Husbands health"
- 02 "Eating right"
- 03 "In my life my health and money issues stress me out the most. I got very sick in 2013 and was hospitalized for six months. I am now disabled and unable to work, so I tend to stress out about financial issues in my life."



Question: In your life, what would you say you "stress out" about most?

Who do we lean on when dealing with stress?



We look to family and friends as our resources when dealing with stress, but family takes the primary spot (60%).

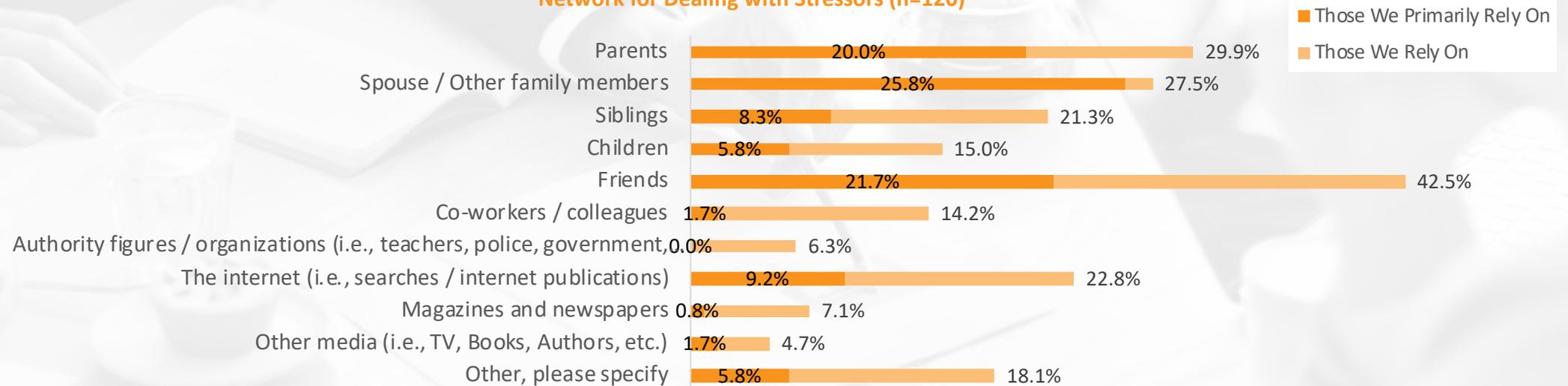
- Friends also play prominent roles along with the Internet.
- Top Reasons:
 - Trust / Non-judgmental
 - Quality of Advice / Experience / History
 - Level of Personal Knowledge / They Know Me



Example questions for ideation:

- How does your brand move from casual acquaintance to relied upon “family” or “friend”?
- What ways can your brand separate itself from the competition within the construct of Trust, Counsel, and Personal Knowledge?
- What stresses drive someone to our brand? How do we as a brand want to help someone overcome “stress”

Network for Dealing with Stressors (n=120)



Question: Thinking about your answer to the previous question [biggest stresses], who do you look to for help or guidance? (Select all that apply)

Question: Who is your primary “go to” when you need help?

Question: Why are they your primary resource?



Cross Generational Memories



When we consider positive memories of cross generational interaction, family reigns supreme (called out in nearly 58% of respondents). Often these dealt with elements like:

- Activities (i.e., learned skills like cooking or hobbies like sports, etc.)
- Very specific moments
- Group gatherings
- Technology

Respondents remembering these instances recollect them because:

- Memories / missing past loved ones
- Remembering a connection with the individual or group
- Learning something new / different
- Valuing the conversation or communication



Example questions for ideation:

- How could we create a culture where co-workers interact together more like family and are a resource for each other?
- How can we create a culture where we create positive memories around working across generations rather than generational friction?
- What brands or activities are associated with positive cross generational moments and how can those be applied to my brand or company?
- If we think about our brand and it's life, what we were like when we were younger? How would we communicate that to today's audience? Can we leverage our past to build positive rapport with the people who will make up our future?

01 "Family reunion"

02 "Seeing a chocolate cake reminds me of bed time stories"

03 "Doing a family tree with parents"

04 "My paternal grandmother when she talked about her life when she was my age"

05 "I connected with a cousin that I haven't spoken to in years from facebook.com. It was really a good experience."

06 "My Grandfather was from Germany and gave us a dime at Christmas if we would give him a kiss"

07 "My Grandmother always made a dessert we called stickies. Years later I was home and asked did anyone still make that dessert."

08 "Being with my Dad and sharing our lives...my parents divorced when my brother and I were quite young, so spending time with him as he got older was very important."

09 "My drive through visits to my neighborhood Starbucks."

10 "My daughter and I love Tide with Downy because it reminds us both of my mother. That scent brings back great memories."

11 "When I was able to go and visit with my grandma when she was alive and listen to her stories. Or some of the coworkers I've had over the years."

12 "I became friends on Facebook with relatives that lived far away and hadn't seen in years. Its very nice to see what's happening in their lives on a day to day basis"

13 "Playing Pokémon with my niece"

14 General Electric tv we use to have on my parents house, the only one and all the family use to get together for watch



Question: Please describe a positive memory of a time that you connected with someone from a different generation. That could be anyone including family, friends or even casual acquaintances.
Question: Why did that memory stand out for you?

Advice to 18 Year Old Self



We are constantly evolving and changing. Looking back is always done through a window of experience that our present self can't see.

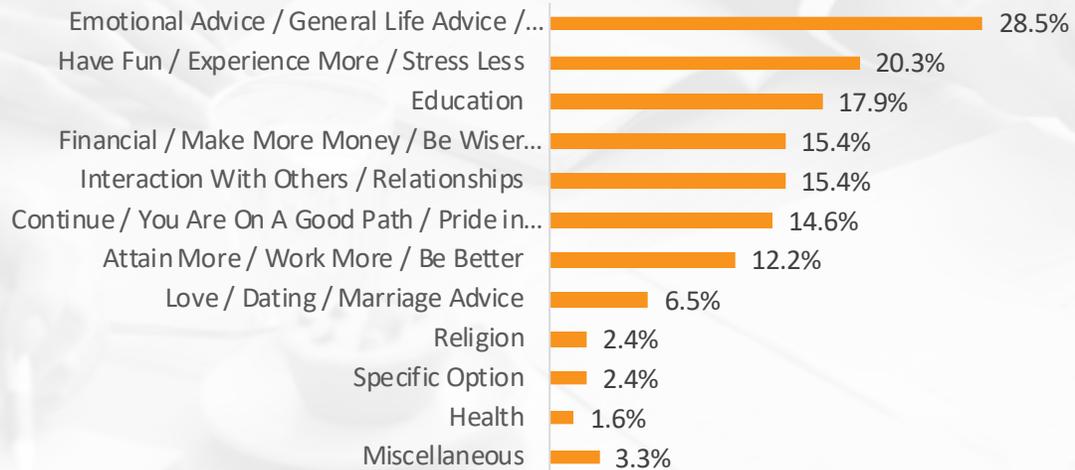
- Much of the advice we give ourselves is aspirational (i.e., take the time to enjoy your life, educate yourself, etc.), but there are also instances of specific clarity regarding relationships, family, and what is "important."



Example questions for ideation:

- *What age is your target? What are they embarking on, or where have they come from?*
- *If you are marketing younger? What are the things we "wish" we had known before? What is in their future?*
- *If you are marketing "older", where did you come from and what can you learn from the advice they give "themselves" at a younger time frame?*
- *How does that advice change based on life stage?*

Advice You Would Give Your 18 Year Old Self? (n=123 Records)



Example Responses:

- 01** 63 Year Old: Don't be in such a hurry to grow up. Take time to really enjoy your walk through life.
- 02** 52 Year Old: Always do your best. Study. Push yourself to be better. Go to a good college. Help people in need. Be a good friend. Take care of yourself.
- 03** 51 Year Old: Save money, don't think about boys, do better in school.
- 04** 23 Year Old: Don't waste your time on love.
- 05** 32 Year Old: keep doing what u r doing.
- 06** 41 Year Old: be kind, be honest, giving to helps others and all sentient beings, don't be attached to love (romantic), don't believe all man, learn Buddhism, be a good person/Buddhist, love your family, be kind to yourself too.

Question: If you could give your 18 year old self some real advice based on your experience today, what would you tell yourself?



Hopes in Next 10 Years



What we hope for in the next 10 years is largely influenced by our current life stage.

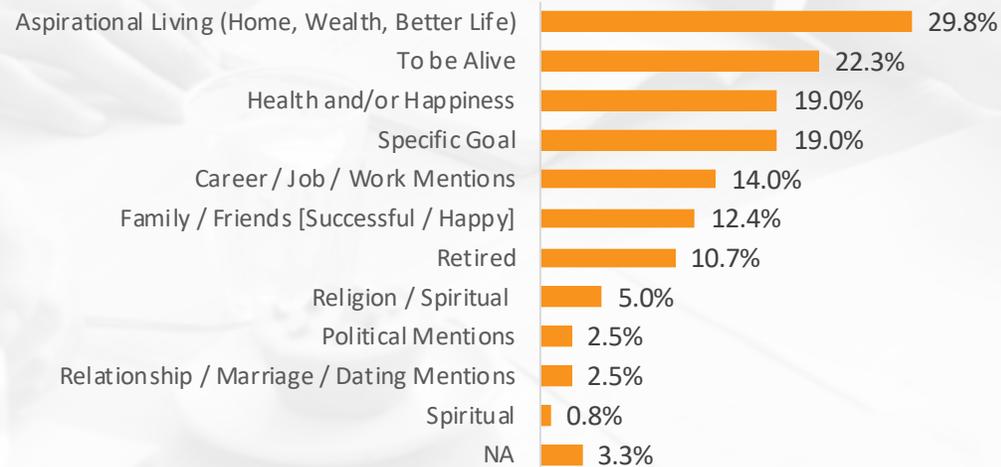
- Elderly were more direct, with many hoping to simply be alive.
- Middle aged and younger were more likely to think about career.
- However, more general topics around general “better life”, and health and happiness were spread across the generations.



Example questions for ideation:

- *If you are marketing to someone who is in an elderly age range, could you consider being direct and talking about short term benefits – what you can actually use before you “can’t”?*
- *How can aspirational goals be incorporated into your brand ideals? Corporate culture?*
- *Does your brand look inward (narcissism) when thinking about the future or does it look outward (altruistic)? How so? Should that change? Why or why not?*

Hopes in 10 Years (n=121 Records)



Example Responses:

- 01** 27 Year Old: I have my @# \$! together even just a little. The world still exists. We haven't become a nuclear wasteland. Some sort of peace exists. We've solved the dumb ass @# \$! ^% \$ problems of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and every other -ism that should have been bred out of our % @ ^# & @ species centuries ago but somehow still exists.
- 02** 34 Year Old: To be further in my career.
- 03** 40 Year Old: That my kids are successful in marriage and life.
- 04** 51 Year Old: I can save money, travel, teach my daughter all the things I wish I could tell my 18 year old self
- 05** 58 Year Old: To be healthy and active
- 06** 65 Year Old: Trump is gone, people are peaceful, cultural labels are not used, living is not such a struggle.
- 07** 76 Year Old: To be Alive



Question: In 10 years I hope...?

Genre of Favorite Media When 18 and Now



Tastes may change slightly over time when thinking about past and current "favorite" programming, but this change is more evident when thinking of favorite song.

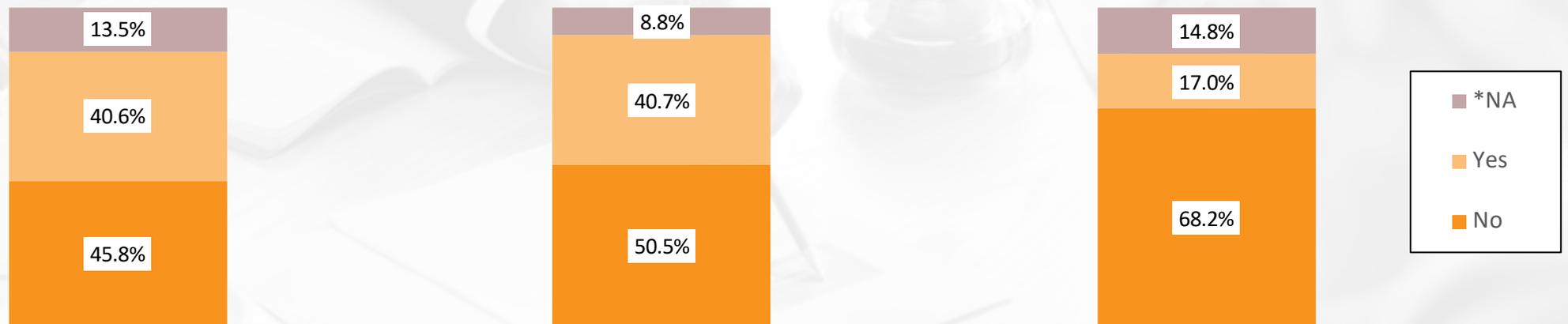
- Of course we know our tastes will change, but identifying the influences that drive those changes is what is really important.
- For example, how TV show format changes like Reality TV impact preferences past to present considering the format was in its infancy 30+ years ago.



Example questions for ideation:

- *Why might our tastes change over time (internal or external factors)? And how might our brand fit into those changes?*
- *If our tastes stay the same, what are we missing? What aren't we getting exposed to? What will change my tastes in spite of my preferences?*
- *Do we play in a space that is more consistent (i.e., Movie) or do we play in a space that changes drastically over time (songs)?*
- *What changes in the industry have disrupted and changed the way products and services are consumed today?*

Comparison of Changing "Favorite" Tastes From When 18 Years Old to Current Day



TV Show Same Genre As When 18 (n=96 Records)

Movie Same Genre As When 18 (n=91 Responses)

Song Same Genre as When 18 (n=88 Records)



Genre of Favorite Media When 18 and Now



Preferences overall stay fairly consistent across media favorites with some slight notes of change.

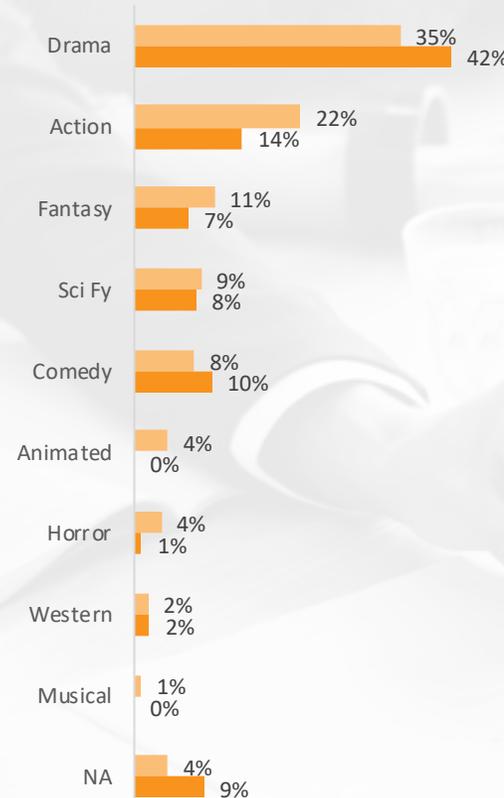
- Country received more current mentions for Songs.
- Drama received more current mentions for TV.
- Action received more current mentions for movies.



Example questions for ideation:

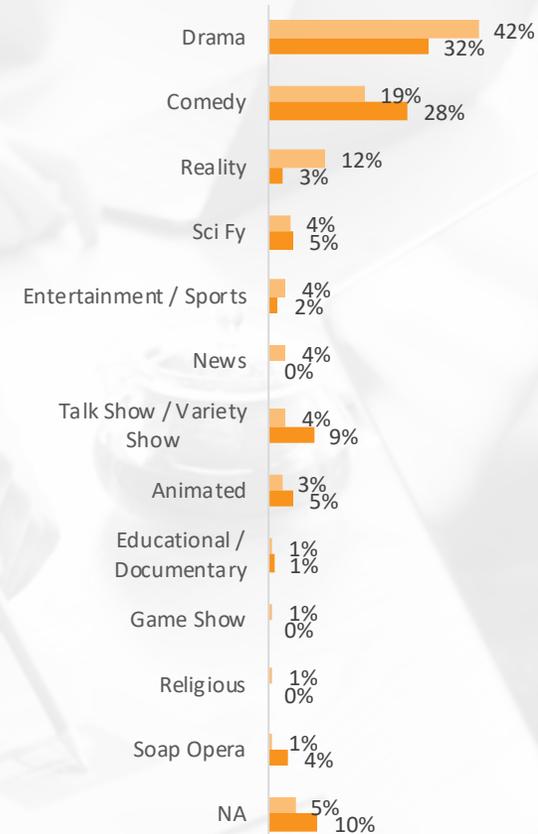
- Why might country, religious and other songs become more popular as we age? How might that change or remain the same tomorrow or with younger generations?
- As we age, do we start to prefer more serious content?
- What happens when new things disrupt the status quo (i.e., reality TV)?
- What big data sources could we leverage to prove/disprove hypotheses?

Genre of Favorite **Movie** at 18 and Today



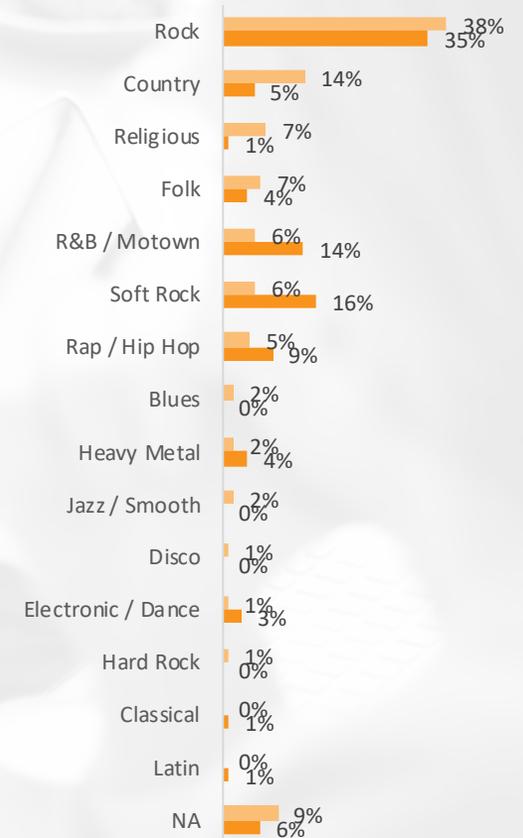
■ Count of Genre Movie Today (n=113 Records)
■ Count of Genre Movie 18 Simple (n=97 Records)

Genre of Favorite **TV Show** at 18 and Today



■ Count of Genre TV Today (n=113 Records)
■ Count of Genre TV 18 (n=99 Records)

Genre of Favorite **Song** At 18 and Today



■ Count of Genre Song Today (106 Records)
■ Count of Genre Song 18 (94 Records)



Question: What was your favorite [Media Type] when you were 18 years old?

Question: What is your favorite [Media Type] today?

*Responses were open ended and coded into categories. For favorite song, codes were more generic because at the time a song was a favorite when one was 18 years old may have been classified differently than it is today (i.e., pop-rock, classic rock, etc.).