

Generation STREAM

THE TV MULTIVERSE

Building Connections
Through Television

hulu



3

Welcome to the TV Multiverse



Generation Stream is creating new “networks” of television—constellations of fandom built from the ground up that tap into a deep need for human bonding.

6

The Meme Scene



Memes are a new social currency and provide an outlet for humor and levity in chaotic times.

8

Podcasts & Crews



Podcasts are the new spin-offs of TV, cultivating highly personalized communities and allowing conversations.

10

Otherhoods



Communities formed around niche content interests—a way for viewers to find and connect with like-minded fans over unique passions.

WELCOME TO THE TV MULTIVERSE



Streaming has forever changed our relationship with traditional network TV.

95% of Generation Stream say streaming has changed the way they watch: from watching more content to watching niche content to being able to binge multiple seasons at a time. But as we've shifted from revolving around one prime-time sun to each having our own content "north stars," we're feeling a little out of orbit.

We have infinite choice, but fewer people to share these choices with. "It used to be that we all tuned in to watch *Friends*, *Family Guy*, even *LOST*. Then, we would discuss our favorite moments or jokes from the episode," Adam,

30, of LA, told us. "Nowadays, I feel excited and connected when I find out that someone watches *Big Mouth* or *Succession*. It feels like we are somehow connected, that our niche tastes have aligned and now we share something obscure in common." Adam's not alone. Generation Stream is creating new "networks" of television—constellations of fandom built from the ground up. These new networks are as much about a deep need for human bonding as they are about what's on TV.

In the beginning, there were the Big Three—CBS, NBC, and ABC—and all of America

95%

of Generation Stream say streaming has changed the way they watch TV.



“The more that we can create real conversation and community, I think the better we'll be.”

—Larz, 25, Brooklyn, NY

49%

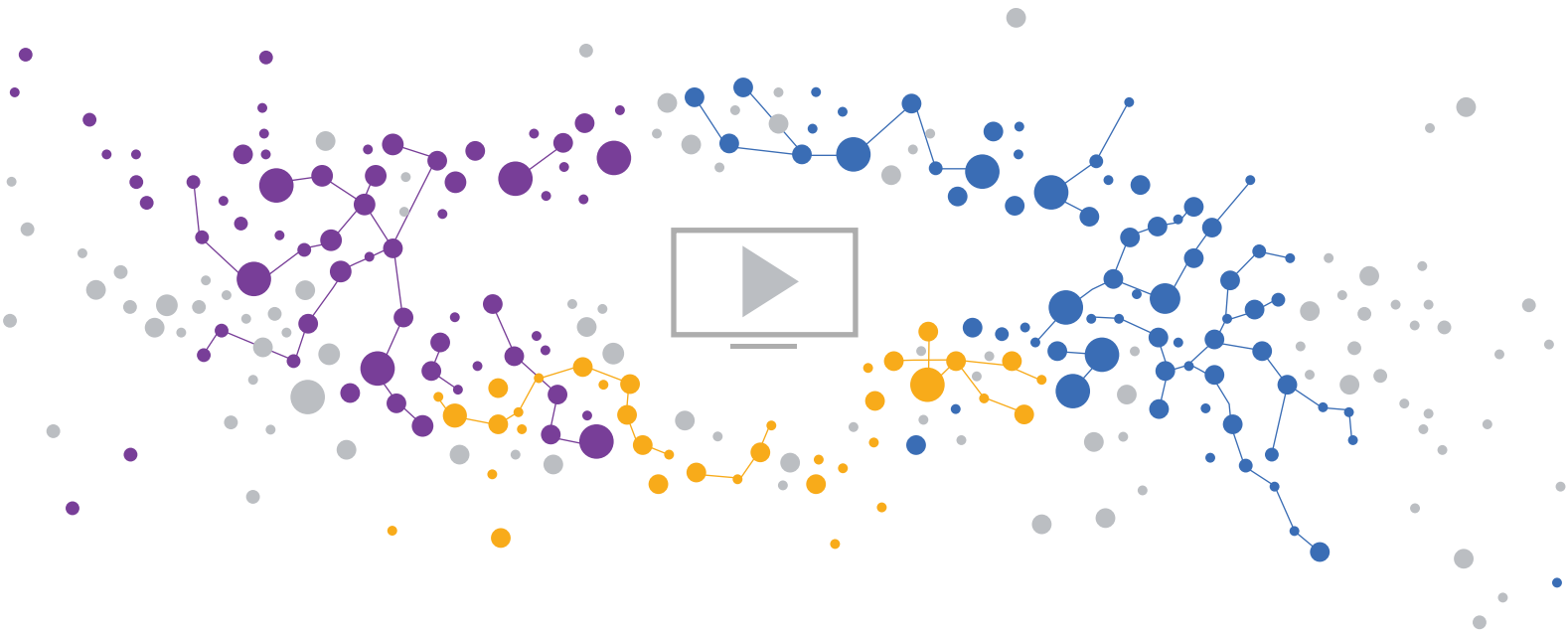


of Generation Stream say
they miss those collective water
cooler conversations.

tuned in to watch the nightly roster. Now, the average household gets almost 200 channels—and that's just counting linear television. With original content coming from every corner of the internet, it's never been more possible to go down the TV rabbit hole and come out with titles as niche as Netflix's *Peaky Blinders*, Hulu's *Big Time Adolescence*, or YouTube's *Wisecrack*. And while that means finding a show that fits your exact taste is as easy as opening your laptop, it also means that the water cooler conversations about last night's episode have all but disappeared. And while the water cooler may be an outdated concept, that connection isn't—nearly half (49%) of Generation Stream say they miss those collective conversations. “It can be very disconnecting to just be in your room watching a show,” says Larz, 25, of Brooklyn. “The more that we can create real conversation and community, I think the better we'll be.”

Sure, fandom has long taken forms beyond that proverbial water cooler, from Comic Cons to FanFiction to petitions to bring favorite shows back. But today's constellation communities are taking connection over content a step further by tapping into deeper human needs—and forming factions around them. Whether it's *Rick & Morty* chat rooms, *The Office* podcasts, or viral memes, people are finding bespoke forms of connection—and that's what really matters.

“When you discover that someone else likes one of ‘your shows,’ you feel intrinsically connected,” Adam says. “I think television is such a commitment in the wake of all this content that it's become akin to finding out someone else really loves model train building. It genuinely feels like a part of your life and your identity. These shows are appendages of our own personalities, our affinity for them reflects our personality on some level.” ▶



Generation Stream is creating new “networks” of television—constellations of fandom that reflect personalities and tap into a deep need for human bonding. It’s about more than just watching a show—it’s the community bonds, personal connections, and conversations that extend the TV viewing experience.

Meme Scene

Memes are a new social currency and provide an outlet for humor and levity to cope and connect with others.

ASPIRATION
CATHARTIC CONNECTIONS

56%

of streamers agree, “Keeping up with popular TV shows and movies is a form of social currency that allows me to be part of cultural conversation.”

Podcasts & Crews

Podcasts are the new spin-offs of TV, allowing conversations to continue long after the season (or show) ends, creating highly personalized communities.

ASPIRATION
NOSTALGIA AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

46%

of streamers are actively part of a community, either IRL or online, that discusses their favorite TV shows and films.

Otherhoods

Communities formed around niche content interests—a way for viewers to find and connect with like-minded fans over unique passions.

ASPIRATION
BONDING OVER NICHE CONTENT

49%

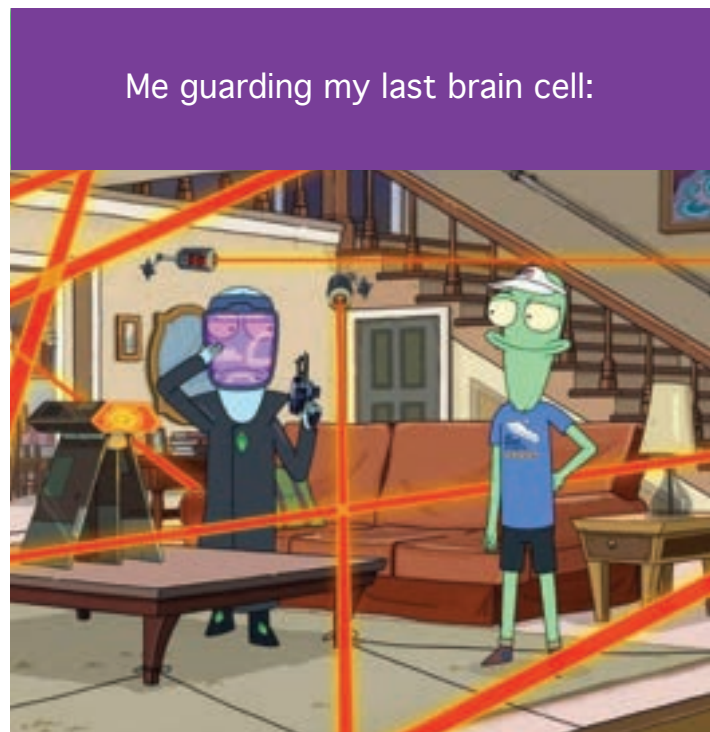
of streamers miss the “water cooler” conversations that used to happen when everyone watched the same shows.

THE MEME SCENE

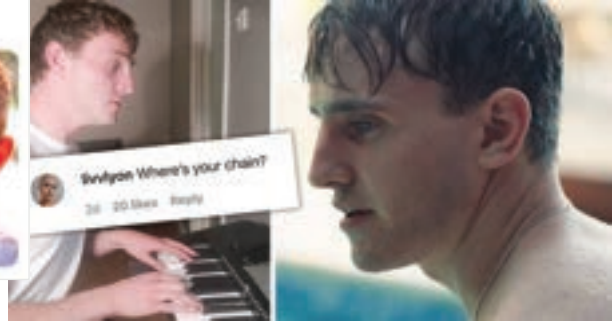
In the vast and rapid-fire world of the internet, memes have become the new social currency, especially among Gen Z. Appealing to Zers' notoriously dark humor, memes provide an outlet for levity in chaotic times. In other words, memes help us cope and connect with others. These days, general mental health is top-of-mind among streamers and non-streamers alike. When asked to rank the issues most important to streamers and non-streamers, mental health ranked first out of 15 key issues, ranging from climate change to LGBTQ+ rights. And while depression is an issue this generation takes seriously, making light of it is in Gen Z's dark nature—and has become their go-to coping mechanism. Memes tackling topics like depression, debt, and failed relationships abound on Instagram, Reddit, and Twitter meme groups. Research from *The Conversation* even found that people with depression actually prefer memes that relate to their mental health experience over the lighter variety. Memes are also changing the conversation around therapy, and even therapists are catching on, creating memes to help themselves cope with the emotionally taxing nature of their work. In true internet fashion, this has

gotten meta: one meme from TherapyMemeQueen reads, "Therapist: 'And how does that make you feel?' 'I am not very good at describing my emotions, maybe you could just hold up a bunch of meme pictures until I see one that I would normally comment the word 'mood' on?'"

It's safe to say that memes have taken over the internet. They've become one of the leading ways content gets dissected and shared—and that gives TV shows and movies a second (or third or fourth) life. *The Office*, for example, went off the air seven years ago. But in the world of the internet, "you won't need to scroll too far down your feed before you come across one of Dunder Mifflin's disgruntled employees," writes Daniela Cabrera for *Teen Vogue*. The same goes for *Game of Thrones*, *Friends*, *Sex and the City*, and oh so many more. ▶



THE MEME SCENE



“If I meet people who also watch *The Real Housewives of New York City*, we automatically have a ‘gif keyboard’ of language in common. We can talk about it in a very familiar way, even if we don’t know each other.”

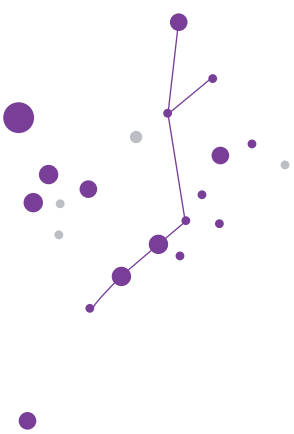
—Corinne, 23, Brooklyn, NY

TV memes tend to take two forms: memes directly related to the show or those that connect a specific TV show with something broader going on in culture (i.e. comparing the mess of climate change to a still of Peter Weber’s season of *The Bachelor*, a joke you’d only understand if you were in the know on just how much of a mess his season was). This creates levels of fandom that everyone can participate in, from superfans to those who just occasionally tune in.

More than just a laugh, memes have become the conversational nexus: when everyone on Twitter is memeing the latest episode of *Killing Eve*, those not in the know want to join the conversation. In fact, 40% of streamers say they find out about and decide to watch new content based on social media—on which memes are rampant—compared to 28% of non-streamers.

“Memes are what’s influencing me the most to watch TV,” says Ben, 32, of Seattle. “It’s like the internet has all just melted into one consciousness and everyone is pretty much plugged in at this point.”

There’s a next level to all of this. While content shapes memes, the internet has become such a feedback loop that memes are also now shaping the content. Memes are so indicative of a TV show’s success that some creators are framing shots and writing lines with the meme world in mind. Consider *Love Island*, which writer Ellen E. Jones says “has audience engagement written into its DNA. Every episode is crammed with the meme-makers’ raw materials of character confrontation and closeups on expressive faces... and fast-turnaround edits allow producers to double down on whatever’s trending.” ▶



PODCASTS & CREWS

While spin-off shows were historically a way to continue a character's journey and social media created a new layer of spinoff content (see FanFiction and Tumblr), podcasts have opened yet another format for fans to relive a favorite show and continue the spinoff fan dialogue. Podcasting has exploded in popularity in recent years, with the industry expected to reach \$1 billion in revenue by 2021. According to Edison Research and Triton Digital, globally there are now an estimated 800,000 active podcasts with some 54 million individual episodes and 62 million American listeners each week. And while many of these podcasts have nothing to do with TV shows, the two formats

have been intertwined since pods started being cast—a number of successful audio shows have been adapted to TV, including *Dirty John*, *2 Dope Queens*, *Homecoming*, and *Lore*. As Richard Frankel, Global Creative Director of Spotify, put it, "Anything at all that drives conversation in pop culture, and TV does a lot of that, is worthy of consideration in a podcast environment." What's more, streamers are also more likely to be listeners: on an average day, streamers spend 27% more time listening to podcasts than non-streamers, according to our survey, and Hulu subscribers report spending 14% more time listening to podcasts than non-Hulu subscribers. ▶

LISTENING TIME

+27%



More time streamers spend listening to podcasts, compared to non-streamers.

+14%



More time Hulu subscribers spend listening to podcasts, compared to non-subscribers.



Making the leap: *2 Dope Queens* went from hit podcast to TV series.

PODCASTS & CREWS



Podcasts are becoming the new water cooler; they're becoming the meeting grounds where fandom communities can dive deep into the ins-and-outs of their favorite TV shows, whether they've got the primetime slot or not. *The Office*-centric podcast *Office Ladies*, for example, launched five years after the show went off the air—and shot to the number one slot on the Apple podcast charts the day it launched. Made for *The Office* superfans, the hosts go down the rabbit hole of one facet of the show in each episode, gleefully taking the fandom community down with them. *Buffering the Vampire Slayer* follows a similar premise, revisiting an even more off-the-airwaves cult series. While these podcasts hold a nostalgic appeal and allow fans to stay connected to characters that feel like old friends, other podcasts offer a

more immediate fix for fans wanting to process an on-screen breakup, make up, or twist in real-time. *The Good Place: The Podcast* offers fans behind-the-scenes stories and up-to-date insights about the show (Ted Danson's dance moves and all); and *Here To Make Friends - A Bachelor Recap Show* is exactly what it sounds like. For streamers, having a place to connect once the episode, or season, ends not only gives them a favorite-show fix after the credits roll, it also offers them a more intimate connection to the community than that of memes, where virtually anyone can join in. Listeners need to know the ins and outs of the shows to appreciate the podcast. Furthermore, they often report feeling a personal connection to the host, strengthening and deepening the community bond. ▶

OTHERHOODS

Log on to Adult Swim's *Rick and Morty* Marathon Channel day or night and you'll find two things: a nonstop stream of live *Rick and Morty* episodes and a chat room full of *Rick and Morty* superfans talking about anything under the sun. (On a casual Monday evening, we found a group of fans discussing their hometowns and the importance of hydrating.) The Marathon Channel is a perfect example of fandom connection in the digital age—communities formed on platforms may have initially been built around specific or niche interests (*Rick and Morty*, say) but the bond formed between members grows beyond that initial connection point. The Marathon Channel is no longer about one TV show; it's about fans finding their odd-ball posse in a disconnected world.

While there are many ways to connect in the digital realm, interactive viewing—that is, watching alone, together—is not only most like old-school viewing parties, it's also one of the most popular ways for fandoms to congregate. In fact, 32% of streamers say watching shows or movies with others and having a community of fellow fans is very important to them, while 59% of streamers say they are part of an online community that is specific to a passion of theirs—20% more than non-streamers. Online communities are even more central for Hulu viewers: 62% say they are part of an online community that is specific to a passion. Hulu recently answered this call for community with the launch of its Watch Party feature, which allows viewers to virtually watch and chat about Hulu shows while in separate locations, making Hulu one of the first major streaming services to offer co-watching directly on its site. "People don't want to watch things by themselves," says Jonathan Miranda, Emerging Strategy Principal at Salesforce and content futurist. "It's not how human beings are wired. There's a broader need to connect with individuals." ▶



ABOVE:
Rick And Morty

59%

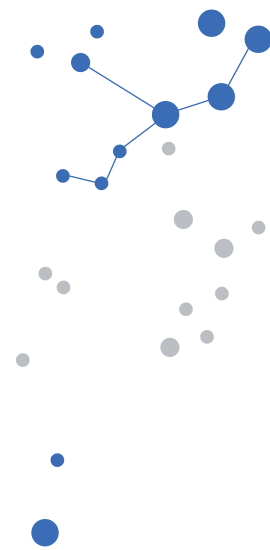
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This connection is particularly prevalent on the game-streaming platform Twitch. While gamers log on to watch like-minded people play their favorite video games, most people now stick around to just chat. The platform’s “Just Chatting” feature is now its most popular. In fact, in December 2019, Twitch viewers watched 81 million hours of “Just Chatting,” according to stream management site Stream-Elements—7 million hours more than the first game listed, *League of Legends*, and 23 million more than the second, *Fortnite*. Miranda says Twitch is known for pulling in parallel interests beyond just gaming. “Music is a big community on Twitch and it is common for people to jump into ‘chill’ music areas and just talk about whatever is going on,” he explains. “It’s why Twitch is moving to a multiplayer platform, and not just a gaming-focused one, because the community can take the platform where they want it to go.” Like TV and film, gaming provides a jumping off point for people to connect—the community evolves well beyond discussing kill ratios, Easter Eggs, and XP levels (though that talk happens, too).

Anime viewing platforms have similarly expanded beyond simply streaming. While they provide a place for fans to chat about anything

inside the anime universe or out, they also provide a creative outlet—most of these platforms have a place for people to share their own manga and anime. Crunchyroll, for example, recently announced its first slate of original shows (becoming the first anime streaming service with its own animation studio), but it also hosts one of the most vibrant and international forums, covering topics well beyond anime like religion, healthcare, and breakfast. Hulu’s own lineup of anime has been credited by Thrillist as “a treasure trove of titles” that outperforms its competitors by offering a strong selection of both classic shows (voted 2020’s best classic anime streaming service by *PCMag*) and off-the-beaten-path options. According to Android Authority, “It’s one of the few streaming services with dubbed *Gundam* shows.” Then there are the anime forums specifically for fans of color, for whom making connections in forums is not just about expressing their identity but validating it. “Even though I have a huge love for anime, Black people and people with darker skin tones are very underrepresented in these shows,” anime cosplayer Shellanin told *Vice*. “I figured that when I cosplay, I should make my childhood dreams come true.”

It goes without saying that these communities are on the more niche side of the constellation community spectrum, reserved only for those in-the-know (i.e. not just anyone can join into a black anime cosplay community). They are also largely populated by Gen Z. This isn’t just because of Z’s well-documented digital native heritage; it’s also because of their status as citizens of the world. 71% of streamers say they are as in tune with what’s happening globally as they are with what’s happening in their immediate surroundings compared to 63% of non-streamers. With a worldwide community at their fingertips, how could they not be? ▶



TUNED IN GLOBALLY

Percentages of streamers who say they are as in tune with what’s happening globally as they are with what’s happening in their immediate surroundings.



Critics Circle

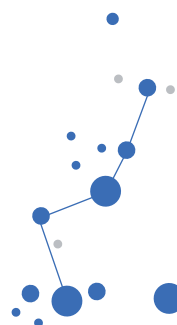
Outside of the casual, constellation communities forming around television and film are more elite creative circles, comprised of writers, film buffs, aspiring directors, and other professionals squarely anchored in the entertainment community. These Critics Circles, as we're calling them, are leveraging digital to expand conversations, critiques, and creativity well beyond La La Land.

Think of the creative circles of yesteryear and you'll find them centered around one thing: geography. Studio54, Hemingway's Paris, grunge-y Seattle, and, of course, Hollywood. And while young TV- and film-industry hopefuls still flock to Los Angeles looking for their big break, new and perhaps more innovative communities are forming across platforms as a way for folks in film and TV to connect, share ideas,

and—perhaps most importantly—start new entertainment trends. Like virtual clubhouses, the digital pages of Twitter, Vimeo, and less-well-known forums have become filters through which creatives find their like-minded peers.

One of the most popular and prevalent of these circles is the culture-changing world of Joke Twitter, a subset of blue-checked Twitter users that use the platform as their virtual open-mic night—and have risen to notoriety with viral one-liners. Originally a subculture dedicated to text-based joke formats on Reddit, 4chan, and Tumblr, Joke Twitter took off in 2012 through Favstar, an app that tracked tweet popularity and rewarded creators for popular content before the social currency of Twitter's "like" and "retweet" functions were born. This early reward system gave an incentive to amateur comedy

writers to collaborate and create new joke formats. In the process, the subculture grew, cult comedy icons were born, and Joke Twitter essentially took over the internet. Remember those TV show-based memes we talked about? We can thank Joke Twitter for that. But while meme culture participation doesn't require insider status (anyone can share that *Love Island* still), membership to the inner circle of Joke Twitter requires a comedic commitment. ▶



“I find the general public’s opinion on movies or shows regularly contradicts my own, and so I tend to not listen to ‘amateur critics’ ever.” —Tim, 33, Seattle, WA





Film buffs have also found places to congregate around their shared love of cinema—and their hopes of breaking into the industry. No Film School, for example, is a worldwide community of filmmakers, video producers, and independent creatives who want to learn from each other as they build their careers—no film school re-

quired. Similarly, the forum Indie Talk acts as a gathering place for film lovers to nerd out on everything from gear to new obscure releases. Drew, 23, in New York City, also sees participation in these cinema circles as a way to pay it forward. “I consider myself a part of the *Film Comment* magazine community and the Criterion Channel and Mubi channel communities,” he says. “These communities are extremely important to me because I know that my paying for subscriptions to these publications/channels is keeping the love of cinema alive for me and generations to come.”

But sharing a love of the craft is just one element of the Critics Circle. For many, sharing their creations—and seeing the creations of their peers—is the most important part of

“With Vimeo, users are able to connect with people who share the same passion, acting almost like the LinkedIn of the filmmaking world.” —Lily, 17, Connecticut

these communities. For novice filmmakers, Movie Movies is a place to do just that. At no cost, budding directors can upload and share their films, gaining an audience as well as comments and critiques. This film sharing is also happening on the channels of Vimeo, the filmmaker’s YouTube. “With Vimeo, users are able to connect with people who share the same passion, acting almost like the LinkedIn of the filmmaking world,” says Lily, 17, in Connecticut, who considers Vimeo a significant form of media in her life. “Users can support other filmmakers by browsing their work, following them, and leaving comments below their videos. Sometimes during my free time, I just log on to Vimeo and watch the week’s featured videos.” ■

METHODOLOGY



To explore Generation Stream, Hulu partnered with Culture Co-op and utilized the following combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches.

CULTURE CO-OP 

Trend Exploration

Leveraged Culture Co-op's trend research and Hulu's existing data to understand Generation Stream at a high level.

Culturesetter Projects

In-depth projects on TV and movie streaming preferences and behaviors among 20 diverse "Culturesetters," a handpicked group of individuals at the forefront of culture, ages 16 to 44, who only or mostly stream their video content. Culturesetters reflected 12 U.S. markets including New York/Brooklyn, NY; Washington, DC; Burlington, VT; Denver, CO; Iowa City, IA; Atlanta, GA; New Orleans, LA; Dallas, TX; Albuquerque, NM; Los Angeles, CA; San Francisco/Oakland, CA; and Seattle, WA.

Expert Interviews

Interviews with entertainment, tech and generational insiders on the future of streaming and entertainment.

Nationally Representative Study

A 25-minute online study among 2,500 Gen Zs, millennials and Gen Xers, representative of Americans ages 13-to-54, fielded in April 2020.



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