



# GEN Z DATING TRENDS

US Edition

*StudentBeans*



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## Introduction

Gen Zs are known for bucking trends in all areas of life - so it's natural that they're shaking things up on the dating scene, too. From a much-needed rethink of traditional gender norms to a whole new world of digital dating, there is a myriad of ways in which relationships are changing for the next generation. This is your guide to those changes. We sift through the myths and get to the truth of how 16-24-year-olds engage with sex, dating and relationships, taking a closer look at the digital platforms, cultural norms and spending habits that dominate Gen Z dating. Get to grips with how these young consumers navigate the world of relationships - and understand where you, as a brand, fit in.



# DATING AND DIGITAL NATIVES

**Myth:** Gen Zs have turned their backs on IRL dating - it's all online.

**Truth:** They're not as into digital dating as you'd think.

When we asked our network of brand marketers what percentage of Gen Z have signed up to a dating app, most guessed that the majority had, indeed, embraced online dating. In reality, the cohort of 16-24-year-olds is much slower on the uptake than you'd think. 49% of Gen Z have signed up to dating sites within the past year - only a marginal increase from 2019, when 47% had embraced the apps.

Of those that have turned to swiping, there are clear frontrunners. Tinder is the most popular choice - 43% of online daters have used the popular app - with Bumble and Hinge hot on its heels. It makes sense that digital natives would lean towards these app-based online dating networks - their features are reminiscent of the visual platforms that Gen Zs love, like Instagram and Snapchat. But still, 51% have never used a dating app or website before.

There's a good reason for this. Gen Zs are digital natives - but they're not native to dating sites. The now-international business of swiping to find a partner really took off within their lifetimes - while they were building their online networks elsewhere, across Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook.

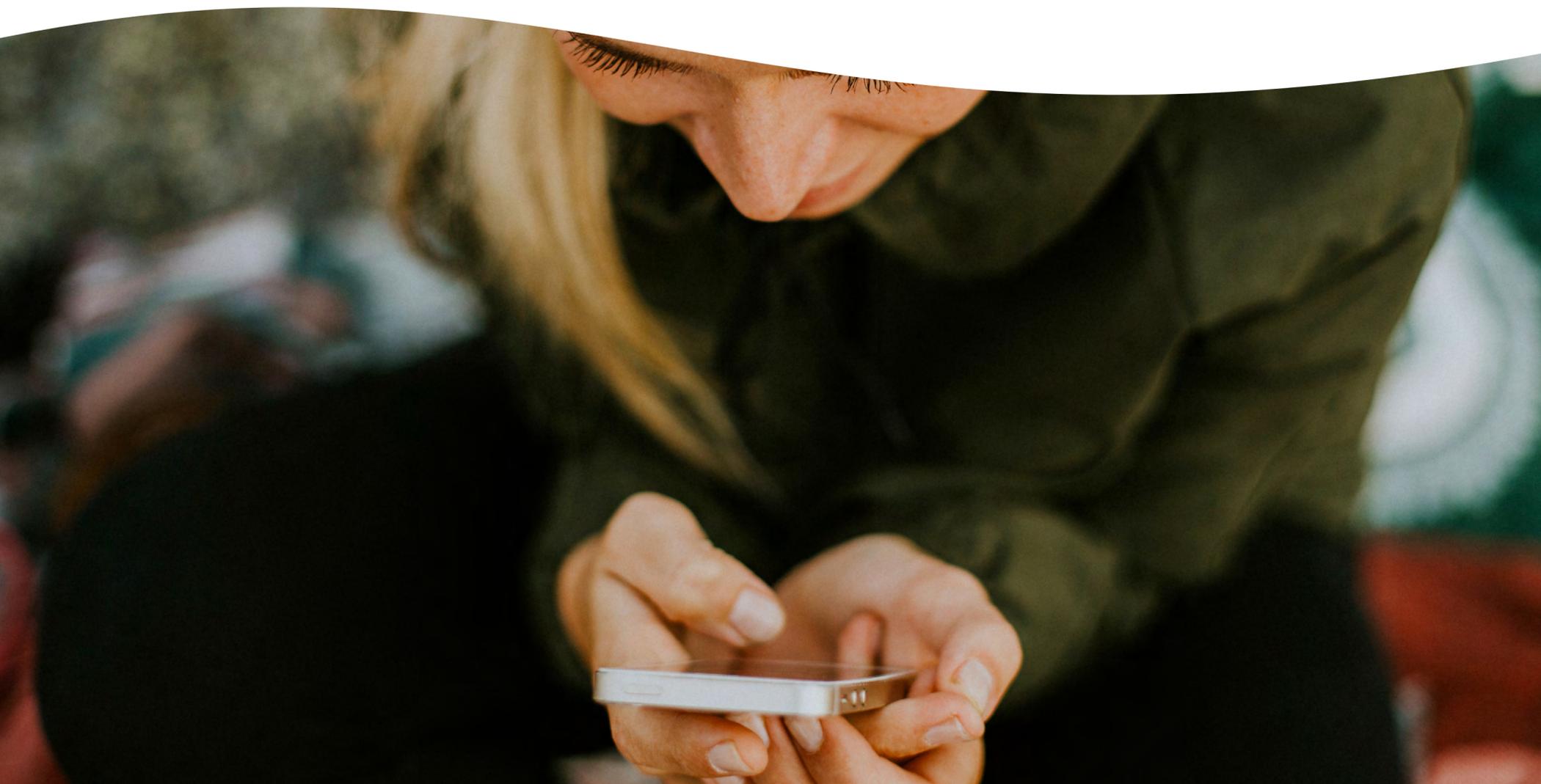
## **For 16-24-year-olds, sliding into DMs is ever so slightly more popular than swiping right.**

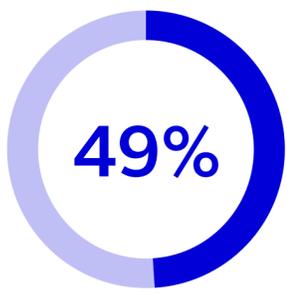
For 16-24-year-olds, sliding into DMs is ever so slightly more popular than swiping right. 53% have used social media to organize a date or hookup, with Snapchat and Instagram coming in as the most popular options. Instagram, in particular, is a catalyst for Gen Z love - 1/5 have had a relationship with someone they met on the app.

Of course, digital dating comes with its own set of experiences, and the 16-24-year-old cohort are shaping their own online cultural norms.

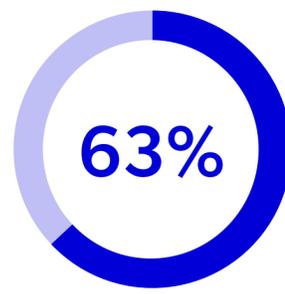
## **Top 5 dating sites that Gen Z have tried:**

- 1. Tinder**
- 2. Bumble**
- 3. Hinge**
- 4. OKCupid**
- 5. Plenty of Fish**

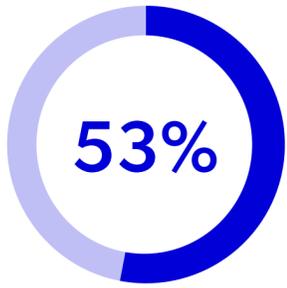




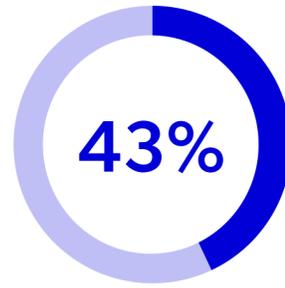
of Gen Zs have signed up to a dating app/site



have used a dating app/site to organize a date or hookup



of Gen Zs have used social media to organize a date or hookup



have had a relationship with someone they met online

Of those who were on dating sites, 63% have used the platform to organize a date or hookup - which indicates that the other 37% are less active, or rather less invested in their online relationships crossing over to real life.

Surprisingly for a generation so tentative when it comes to online dating, technology does play quite a large role in students' sex lives. 75% have received a sext and 72% say they've sent one, with females being more likely to send and receive sexts than males. While phone and video sex is less common among 16-24-year-olds, around one third say they have. And the digitization of sexuality does come with its drawbacks - 71% of females have received an unsolicited nude.

This cohort of Gen Z students has a myriad of ways to tap into the digital world. They've grown up with the internet, and they're more in tune with it than any other generation before them. Millennials have fully embraced the excitement of digital dating - there are burgeoning families the world over who first met with the swipe of a smartphone screen. But for their younger Gen Z counterparts, digital dating is less of a hot new trend, and more something to dip into only if they feel like it.



### What does this mean for brands?

- Gen Z may look as though they live their lives online - but there's a significant majority that still value the in-person dating experience. Bars, restaurants and in-person activities, therefore, are firmly on their radars when it comes to dating.
- Instagram and Snapchat aren't just places to engage with this young demographic - they've also been adopted as de-facto dating sites among Gen Z. As you adapt your social strategy, and select platforms on which to advertise, bear this in mind!



# IS CHIVALRY DEAD?

**Myth:** students pay equal amounts to their partners on dates, regardless of gender.

**Truth:** this is their preference - but in reality, males are more likely to pay than females.

Gen Z is known for redefining gender binaries, and all of the traditional stereotypes that come with them. But in their dating lives, they've inherited decades of tradition, often based around heavily-gendered behaviors. In spite of their clear desire for equality, it's fair to say that different genders still have very different approaches to dating.

## Female students are more likely to be in a relationship, while male students are more likely to be single.

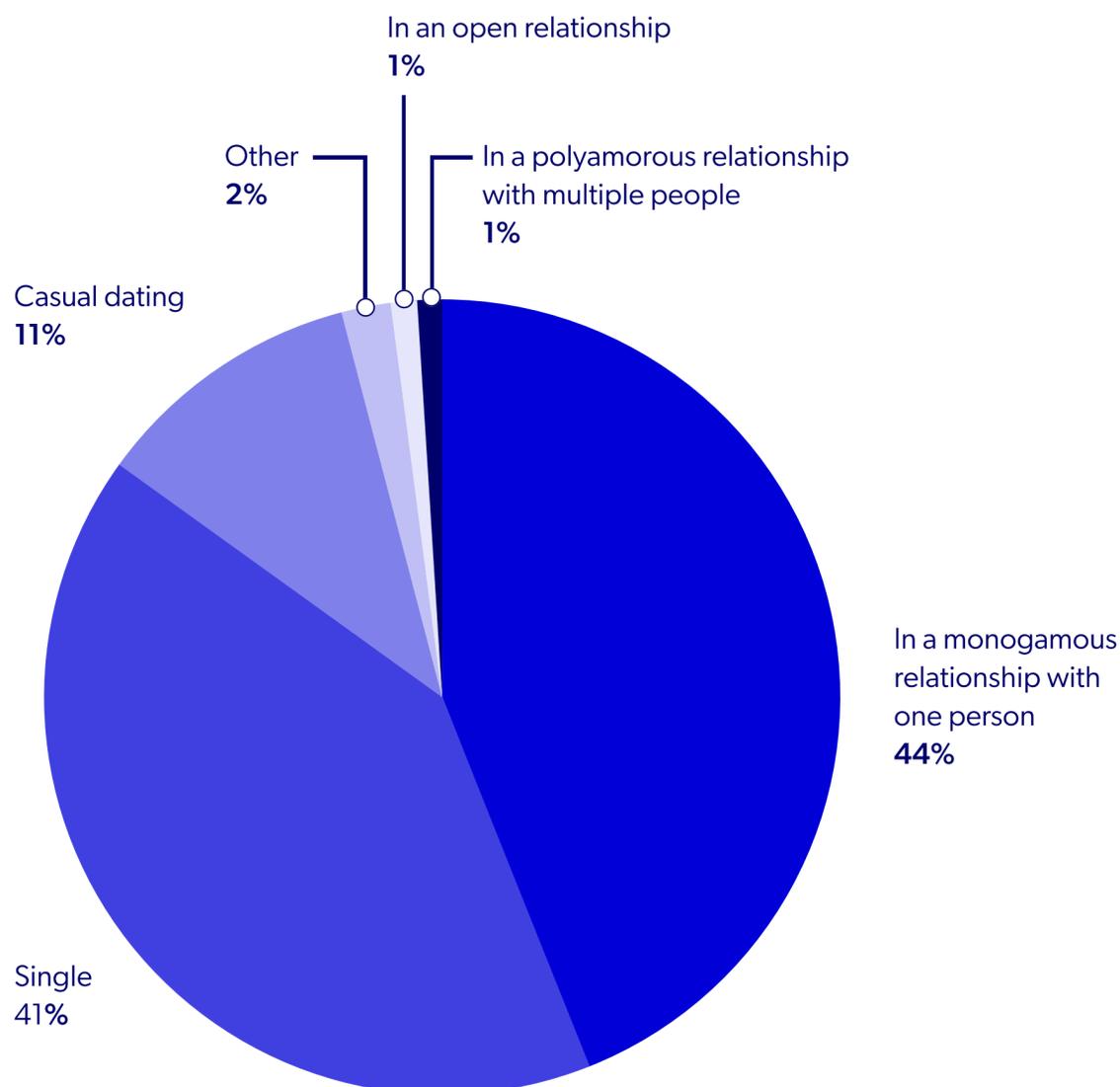
On balance, just under half of students are in a monogamous relationship, with the relationship status of the other 56% split between single students (41%) and those who are casually dating (11%). The remaining 4% are polyamorous, in open relationships, or in other circumstances entirely. But if we view these figures through a gendered

lens, female students are more likely to be in a relationship, while male students are more likely to be single.

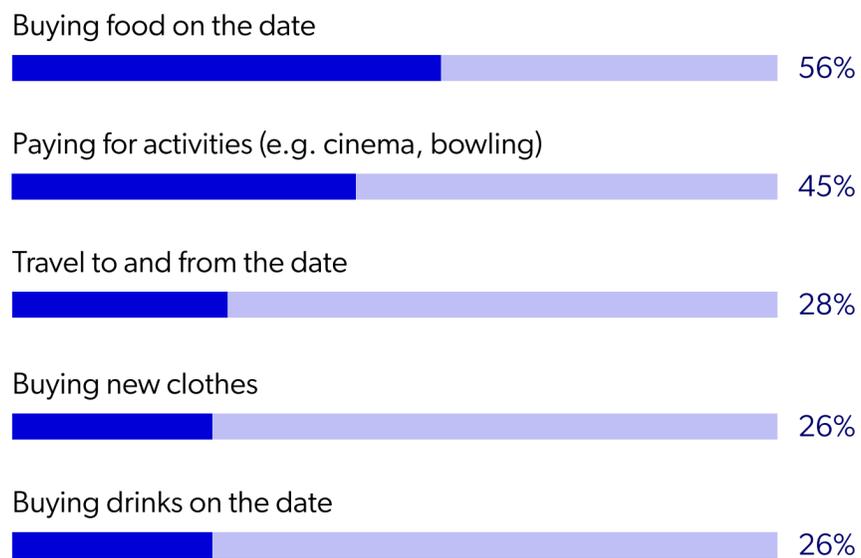
Relationship status has a huge impact on how students view dating. Among those who are single, 52% feel lonely, and 46% are looking for a relationship - which will impact everything from their online dating presence to how they choose to spend money in preparation for dates. That said, 50% of students are happy to be single, and 30% are looking for casual dates - which points to a whole different set of behaviors, within romantic encounters and outside of them.

Gen Z is united in what they prioritize when looking for a partner - all genders put a sense of humor, intelligence and shared interests at the top of their lists. Their lowest priority is finding someone from a similar background to them; just 34% of females and 24% of males listed this as important when they look for a partner.

### Students' relationship status



## Which of the following do you typically spend money on for a first date?



This speaks to the values of Gen Z - on the whole, they're a much more tolerant generation than their predecessors, and this extends to their dating lives.



As we explored back in our first chapter, the Gen Z dating landscape is not exclusive to dating apps - but digital behavior has changed how Gen Zs interact with their potential partners. Ghosting is ubiquitous for students - 98% would be able to tell you that it means cutting off all communication with a friend or partner, with no warning at all. 54% of Gen Z say they've been ghosted, with slightly more (59%) having been the ghoster.



Digital dating brings with it its own set of problems; the majority (71%) of female students have received an unsolicited nude. It's a problem that is less common for males, with 17% saying they've received one. It's one of the more serious issues that this cohort of students are grappling with - consent is as much an issue online as it is offline.

## **Females are more likely than males to want to split the bill, while over a third (35%) of male students would still prefer to pay for the bill in full.**

One of the biggest stereotypes of hetero-normative dating is that the male always pays the bill. But how far have Gen Zs come in challenging that stereotype? Their most common payment preference overall is to take turns paying on alternate dates (43%) closely followed by splitting the bill, which is the method of payment that Gen Z is most in agreement on. But 21% of females would like their partner to pay in full, and 47% of males prefer to foot the bill themselves.

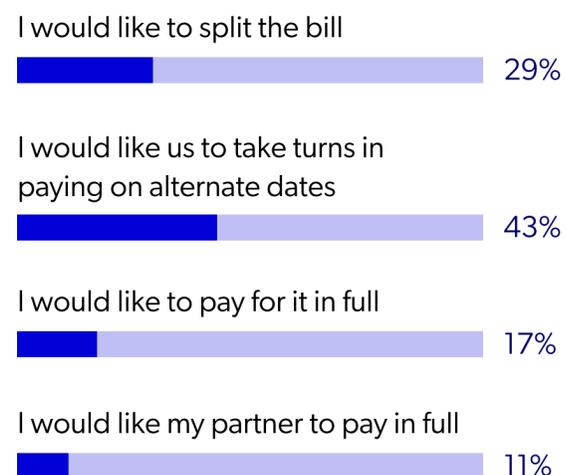
In practice, there's still a significant gap in who pays for what. Males are significantly more likely to pay for food, drinks and activities on a first date - indicating there are still some nods to chivalry among Gen Z, regardless of their intentions. Female students are more likely to spend money on buying new clothes for a first date.

## **On the whole, Gen Z are a much more tolerant generation than their predecessors, and this extends to their dating lives.**

### **What does this mean for brands?**

- First date spending is still affected by gender - males are more likely to be paying for activities, food and drink, while females will be looking out for new outfits.
- However, there are signs that students are looking to transform this dynamic - the most common payment preferences are splitting the bill and taking turns. Brands should keep marketing around dating gender neutral to help them embody these values.

### **How do you prefer the bill to be paid on a date?**





# SEX AND SPENDING

**Myth:** Students aren't willing to spend big on dating

**Truth:** Some will spend as much as \$221 on a first date

As a part of the student experience, sex can't be ignored. 78% of students have had at least one sexual partner, with the majority of those having had two to five sexual partners. As with going out on dates, this is the first time in many students' lives where they've spent money on their sex lives.

Given that they're on a budget, students are more likely to make sex and dating-related purchases than you'd think. On average, students would be willing to spend up to \$70 on new clothes for a first date, and would reserve up to \$43 for food, up to \$46 for activities and up to \$29 for drinks.

On average, they're willing to spend up to \$93 on a first date - but with all costs considered, some will spend as much as \$221.

On average, students will spend up to...

**\$70**

on buying  
new clothes

**\$43**

on buying food  
on the date

**\$46**

on paying for  
activities

**\$29**

on buying drinks  
on the date

**\$33**

on travel to and  
from the date



## Sex and dating during the pandemic

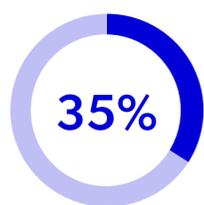
The pandemic has transformed every aspect of life - but what did student dating look like during 2020? Here are the key insights.

While the majority of students gave dating a miss during COVID-19, of those who did choose to go on first dates, in-person meetups were the most popular. 25% had an outdoor date and 22% met up indoors, compared to the 11% who went on a video date and 8% who tried a phone date.

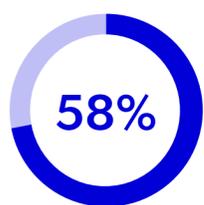
Students' attitudes towards dating in the pandemic are fairly relaxed. 56% think hugging is acceptable, and the same percentage think it's okay to meet indoors. 41% think that kissing is acceptable, and 30% were comfortable with having sex outside their household. On balance, males are more likely than females to be okay with any of the above activities.

While 51% of students say their sex lives have suffered due to COVID-19, 31% have seen no change, and 18% are actually having more sex.

It's not surprising, then, that student consumers are also willing to make purchases from adult brands. The percentage of students who own sex toys (35%) is not insignificant, indicating a growing market, especially among females, for whom the figure rises to 37%. Lingerie is much more popular - 55% of females have bought it for themselves, and around one-fifth of male students say they've bought it for a partner.



**35%** of students own sex toys



**58%** of students have bought or received lingerie



Despite clearly being interested in sex and dating-related purchases, students lack brand awareness for a number of top adult retailers. There's a lot more that these brands can do to position themselves as accessible and affordable to this whole new cohort of consumers. The challenge is providing them with the incentive (and perhaps the discretion) to make their first purchase.

There is another expense that factors into 65% of students' spending - contraception. 35% of students say that they pay for contraception personally, with 30% saying their partner pays for it. Males are more likely to personally pay for contraception - 56% say this. The most common contraception choice among students is condoms - 59% of students use them - followed by the contraceptive pill, used by 37% of students.

### Gen Z: who pays for contraception?



### What does this mean for brands?

- Adult brands could do more to position themselves as affordable and appealing to student consumers.
- When it comes to dating, students are willing to spend big across multiple verticals. Fashion, food & drink and entertainment brands, take note!

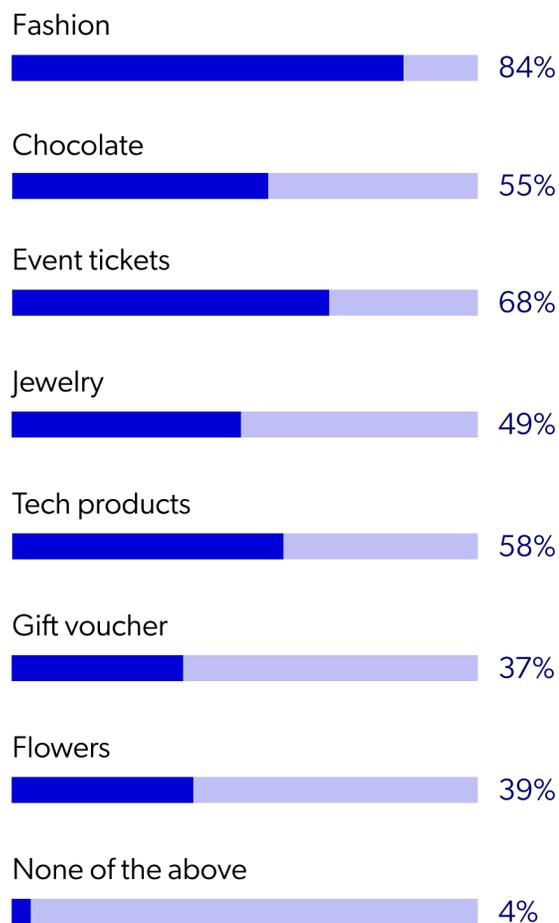


# GALENTINE'S IS THE NEW VALENTINE'S

**Myth:** Students have moved away from more traditional Valentine's Day gifts.

**Truth:** not necessarily - males are drawn to fashion and tech, while females are still coveting flowers, chocolate and jewelry.

## Which of the following would you consider buying as a gift for a partner?



Like the rest of the population, Gen Z is ambivalent about Valentine's Day; for those in a relationship, it's a chance to celebrate their partners and indulge in some romantic gift giving. For those who are single, it's perhaps one to ignore. 64% of Gen Zs in a relationship celebrated Valentine's Day, compared to 21% of those who were single.

That said, February 14th is a thriving time for food, drink and gift brands - 66% of those who celebrated went on a date, with 57% each giving a present to a partner or a loved one. All fairly standard ways to spend Valentine's - but it's in Gen Z's gifting choices that they differ slightly from other generations.

## On the whole, Gen Z prefers fashion to flowers.

On the whole, Gen Z prefers fashion to flowers. 84% would consider buying a fashion item as a gift for a partner, compared to just 39% who would consider buying a bouquet. Female students were more likely to buy their partners fashion, events tickets, tech products and gift vouchers - while males are drawn to the more traditional chocolates, jewelry and flowers.

But how does that match up with what Gen Zs would like to receive on Valentine's Day? Females are drawn towards the traditional gifts that males are likely to buy - flowers, chocolate and jewelry top their lists. Males, on the other hand, are in the market for fashion items, tech and chocolate. Brands should align their Valentine's gift guides to these interests.



With options like tech and jewelry high on students' Valentine's Day wishlists, it's not surprising that they're willing to spend big. Students would be willing to part with as much as \$167 for tech products and \$150 for jewelry, with events tickets (\$145) and fashion (\$108) following closely behind.

With 2020 finally over, Gen Z students are very clear on how they want to spend Valentine's Day in 2021. If it's safe to do so, they'd prefer to leave Zoom in the past -75% want to go on a date in person and 36% would like to meet up with friends in person, compared to just 12% who have a Zoom call planned with friends, and 9% who would like to go on a Zoom date.

## Over one-quarter of students say they've celebrated Galentine's Day in the past.

Students who aren't in relationships are slowly and surely reclaiming Valentine's Day, finding ways to celebrate platonically. 62% would consider buying themselves a Valentine's Day gift; an option that's particularly popular with females. Over one-quarter of students say they've celebrated Galentine's Day in the past - a friend-focused alternative - with popular activities being dinner (65%), gift-giving (38%) and going out for drinks (35%). Students may still be fans of Valentine's Day in the traditional sense - but, as Gen Zs, it's no surprise that they're finding new ways to make it their own.

**What's the most you would spend on a Valentine's Day gift for a partner?**

**\$167** Tech products

**\$150** Jewellery

**\$108** Fashion

**\$145** Event tickets

**\$67** Gift voucher

**\$38** Flowers

**\$21** Chocolate

### What does this mean for brands?

- Make sure you're in tune with what they're gifting - females are hoping to receive flowers and jewellery, while males' wishlists are topped by fashion and tech. Chocolates are a winner regardless of gender.
- Gen Z is slowly reclaiming Valentine's Day as a celebration of love - not just the romantic kind. Make sure your messaging speaks to Galentine's and self-love as much as it does romance.

# Success stories

Whether you're looking to expand your student reach this Valentine's Day, or you're an adult brand looking to tap into 16-24-year-olds' spending year-round, Student Beans has end-to-end solutions to connect you with this thriving demographic. Take a look at a couple of our recent success stories to see how we can help you, too.



## Success story: Lovehoney

Adult retailer Lovehoney was well-positioned to be a hit with Gen Z - and they chose Black Friday as their chance to make a strong impression on this cohort of digitally native consumers. Knowing that students enjoy the exclusivity of stackable discounts, our account managers worked with Lovehoney to create a strong stackable offer that combined the usual student discount with Lovehoney's Black Friday discount. Proving that adult brands have a place in students' baskets year-round, not just on Valentine's Day, Lovehoney's codes and revenue shot up by just shy of 200%.

**176%**

Uplift in codes

**177%**

Uplift in revenue



BLUEBELLA®

## Success story: Bluebella

For lingerie brand Bluebella, February 14th is a red-letter day - and last year was no different. Working closely with Student Beans, Bluebella decided to make a lasting impression on student consumers to drive their revenues and boost brand awareness among this crucial demographic. Our dedicated account management team boosted Bluebella's student discount to 20% around Valentine's Day. But we didn't stop there. Bluebella opted to work with our in-house media team, to drive code issuance upwards and create a huge buzz around Bluebella. It was a resounding success; Bluebella came away from Valentine's Day with uplifts in revenue, sales and codes - as well as almost 1.5 million impressions from their media campaign.

**138%**

Uplift in sales

**150%**

Uplift in revenue



# Your Valentine's Day campaign checklist

Campaign name:

Launch date:

What student goal can your product help with?

Which Gen Z value does your brand align with?

What is the key message behind your campaign?

### Stage 1:

#### Launch your discount

- Integrate Student Beans Connect
- Launch a boosted discount for Valentine's Day
- Make boosted discount stackable with student discount
- Link student discount in your website header
- Launch exclusive Valentine's offer, e.g. free gift, free delivery

### Stage 2:

#### Plan your content

- Create a gift guide or shopping list based around your key products
- Secure your branded content spot with Student Beans

Content ideas:

### Stage 3:

#### Secure your media placements

- Secure your spot in the Student Beans homepage carousel
- Schedule a Student Beans Homepage Takeover
- Select your discount tiles on the Student Beans website & app

### Stage 4:

#### Promote your student offering

- Book in your tactical paid social campaign with Student Beans
- Enable Student Beans push notifications
- Schedule your Student Beans solus email
- Select your Student Beans newsletter tile

### Notes section

# About Student Beans



We bring together student verification technology, student marketing solutions, and student research to help brands better attract, convert, and retain more 18- to 24-year-old customers.

## Student Verification

Our award-winning student verification technology enables brands to run their own gated student offer programs.

## Student Marketing

Our market-leading student marketing solutions enable brands to reach and engage a global youth audience.

## Student Research

Our unique access to students enables us to identify key trends and empower brands to better engage with Gen Z.

## Our story

Student Beans was founded in 2005 in Birmingham, UK, by James and Michael Eder. As young university graduates themselves, the brothers saw a gap in the market for a digital student loyalty platform that would give students exclusive discounts on the brands they love, and connect retailers to this key consumer demographic.

Quickly becoming a part of everyday student life, Student Beans revolutionized the concept of the student ID for the digital age. We launched our award-winning verification technology, enabling brands to ensure their student discounts are only available to verified students. Today, we partner with thousands of the world's biggest brands across fashion, technology, food, entertainment, and more, and power a global network of students in over 100 countries.



 @sbforbusiness

 Student Beans

Find out more about our [Student Verification](#), [Student Marketing](#) and [Student Research](#) today.