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Gen-XL

And how they are living it up like never before

"Middle age is a bridge between the aspirations of youth and the serenity of old age, a time of self-discovery and unexplored potential." - Ellen J. Barrier

From work to relationships and recreation, Gen X have always rolled with the punches – adapting to changes to live life, the best way they could. **Currently enroute middle age, they are now re-inventing the second chapters of their lives with a bang.**

The "I know what I am doing" generation is experiencing a mini renaissance. They are reinterpreting cultural and social conventions to suit their evolving ideals. **Gen X is starting to live life not just large but extra-large, earning the title of 'Gen-XL'.**

As the world rolls into the second decade of the 21st century, this generation is evolving yet again. This time, for themselves. They've followed the script. They've lived on IST- Indian Society Time. These 40-55 year olds are now rewriting the rules and reclaiming possibilities. **Possibilities that are helping them (re)kindle passions, (re)fresh perspectives, and (re)con-nect with others. Society no longer has a say-it is their life, their way.**

This article explores six emerging trends that show how they are living it large in their relationships, identity and work life, redefining middle age as we know it.

Want to know more? Let's start from the beginning middle.

Un“adult”rated

Gen-XL are shedding labels and revealing their full selves.

Conventionally speaking, entering the middle-age meant settling into socially idealised constructs. At home, a Gen-XL was expected to be the ideal child to their parents, a responsible parent to their kids, and a loving spouse to their partner. In the outside world, they were expected to be proficient professionals.

But the zeitgeist is changing. Equipped with better finances, Gen-XL is liberated from parenting and career pressures. Being un-glossed and unfiltered is the new normal. Taking cue from their Millennial and Gen Z children, Gen-XL is erasing the script of middle age.

To begin with, they are building friendly equations with their children. True Elements (in collaboration with TBWA\India) capitalised on this unfiltered parent-child bond to dramatize the transparency wired into their products. Known to forego the limelight, Amir Khan often features on daughter Ira's social media stories, casually sharing anecdotes. Even on-screen relationships, like Shefali Shah and Alia Bhatt in 'Darlings', show an unfiltered, open and frank parent-child relationship.

As Gen-XL embrace their authenticity, how can brands liberate themselves from the 'family trap' to spotlight them as unique individuals?



Midlife Crisis Catharsis



Building the big picture, one small win at a time.

In the past, midlife became a time of self-reflection, and pondering whether one went big or went home. It was either a time of great contentment of having made the most of life, or a time of regret about not doing enough. Whatever the case, being in one's 50s was the consequential finish line. The typical day in the life was eat, sleep, rest repeat.

But Gen-XL are not one to kick their boots off and snooze. It is taking cue from millennials to break the age barrier, and fulfil dynamic goals they couldn't get to any sooner. This is taking over the typical, slow and stationary "day in the life of-" Gen-XL. Competing with no one but themselves, they are now aiming for the personal high score in their hobbies, making daily life more fun. Be it health, cooking, handicrafts or music.

Online, they are taking opportunities to add more dimension to their lives- giving them the satisfaction of new beginnings. Gen-XL constitutes 28% of the user base for personal fitness tracking apps. They use the shareability feature to flaunt these milestones on Instagram and Facebook.

Creators like Shanthi Ramachandran (@Shaanthram) are taking on the culinary world by building digital diaries of their culinary achievements on social media. Offline, 40-50 year olds are the majority of marathon runners in Mumbai.

This is a big opportunity for brands in BFSI, healthcare and tech segments, to create offerings that help Gen-XL seize the second act and rewrite the rule book.



Re-minded

As children don their graduation hats, parents prepare to go back to school.

With stability and routine consuming their lives, the boundaries that defined the intellectual world of the middle-aged people became hard-lined and limited. They understood their capabilities and were content with their comfort zone. Education was just an avenue to a dream job, reserved for the young.

Today, Gen-XL is unwilling to keep their pencils down. Their relationship with education is undergoing a metamorphosis. For them, education is a constant in life - and not just a gateway to a job. Their learning is not limited to class-rooms and colleges. Gen-XL is going beyond to leverage online education and distance education to tread new paths or hone the skills they already possess.

Universities and institutions are responding to these demands. More than 90 Indian universities are now offering adult education programs. Ashoka University recently started Ashoka X, to offer programs that accommodate their schedules and varied lifestyles.

With education becoming age neutral, how can edtech brands create nuanced offerings that are compatible with their learning styles?



Silver Sexuials




Gen-XL are sexy and they know it.

Being in one's 40s and 50s was marked by accepting the wrinkles and pigmentation while occasionally trying out 'anti-ageing' solutions. Either way, keeping up one's appearance was low effort and low involvement. The pursuit of attractiveness was a young person's goal.

Today, Gen-XL is not relegating itself to the background. It is pursuing the beauty goal with an edge of authenticity. It is boldly embracing the salt and pepper look to change the beauty mould. Gen-XL is going the extra (large) mile to present themselves to the world, their way.

It is taking up hard-core exercise to look fit while motivating others on social media. Celebrities like Arundhati Roy, R. Madhavan and Milind Soman are re-gaining fame for their commitment to fitness and embracing their greys. Shows like "Modern Love Mumbai and Modern Love Hyderabad", spotlight love at this age, exploring relationships across the spectrum of sexuality.

Now that silver is the new sexy, imagine a condom company or a dating app no longer showing a 20-something, but a 40-something.



Retiring Retirement

Slow blue retirement are bowing out of Gen-XL's lives.

In the past, people worked towards retirement. It was the full stop. The dream. The end goal. The plan was to work through the prime, and retire with a pension and (hopefully) a decent bank balance. It would mark the start of their 'sunset years' - a more slow and free life where building a business or a bank balance took a backseat.

Today, the sun does not set when it comes to Gen-XL. It is too busy living it large. It is leveraging its hard built clout to kick off new stints – from start-ups to new-age investment avenues. Gen-XL is changing the definition of what it means to retire.

Powering their quest is "GenX Ventures", a new start-up studio only for age group 40+ entrepreneurs. It is equipping them with a multifunctional core with modules that address early-stage challenges.

It comes as no surprise that India has seen a drastic increase in the number of start-ups founded by this generation. Falguni Nayar, founded Nykaa at the age of 50, after an illustrious banking career. Ankur Warikoo, after his stint as the Co-founder of Nearbuy, became one of India's leading Educator and content creator at 39.

With retirement becoming restarts, how can brands enable and own a new meaning system of 'sunset years.'



Squad Searchers



Gen-XL wants friendships, kindled and re-kindled.

In the past, Gen-XL's social circle was limited by biological ties and physical proximity. Today, they are inspired to see beyond their families and neighbours to build their own squad.

Boundaries of friendships are blurring. For a start, Gen-XL is using social media to rekindle school and college friendships. New friendships are becoming ageless, anchored more in mutual interests than life stage. It's no longer odd for Gen-XL to have friend who is a decade younger. Such friendships are their guideposts to keep up with the world, and what they love to do.

Their social nature is also guiding the digital footprint Gen-XL leaves. It is gravitating towards health-first social apps like Strava and Nike Run Club to share progress and exchange notes. "Warrior Moms" is connecting Gen-XL to crowdfund for air pollution. Facebook Groups like "Saree Speak" are bringing together saree lovers in this cohort.

It is helping them catalyse deeper connections by creating a like-minded community. Mutual interests are becoming the foundation that gives their social life an extra-large meaning.

With Gen-XL aiming to build their squads, what if malls, theatres and restaurants actively created communities deeper than "membership programs" becoming the stage for deeper connections?



Levelling-up



Squad Searchers

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Freeing-up



DISTILLATE

Gen X. A Generation that has seen significant periods of transition and has learnt to roll with the punches. But Gen X during middle age is an entirely different cohort. They are in reclamation mode – not in vociferously rejecting societal ideals, but by simply choosing to live on their own terms. This is what truly makes them Gen-XL.

As un“adult”rated individuals, they are bringing their true self to the table. This also powers their quest to be squad searchers. By anchoring new bonds in mutual interests, they are rejecting the archaic perception that they are too old to make friends. With ageless friendships, they are showing that they don't have any qualms about being old, or older.

At a time it was believed that they are 'set in their (read society's) ways, they are letting themselves go, for the better. With a refreshed relook, they are dropping off idealism to become unglossed. No wonder they are embracing themselves as silver sexuals. They are taking age as it comes instead of trying to press pause or rewind. Clearly, Gen-XL is pro-aging.

Their quest to achieve mid-life catharsis sheds light on their enthusiasm to constantly beat their personal best. By enthusiastically donning the student hat to be re-minded, they are easing into 'post work' life, ensuring their journey is still “in-progress” and not a time of radical transition. By retiring retirement, they are not just imparting personal wisdom to others- Instead they are using that experience and equity to make their own lives better.

This is how they are making it big, without making noise about it. This is how they are living it up for themselves. This is how they are not just living it large, but extra-large.



Methodology

▪ Interviews

Members of the age group 45-55
Geography- tier-1 Urban settings
across India. Interviews were a
combination of online and in
person interactions.

▪ Physical observation

Get-togethers, professional envi-
ronment, play environments that
engaged the Gen-X. We looked at
their behaviour, interactions and
conversations.

▪ Social media

Content they were making and
engaging with. Also, their com-
ments, shares, online behaviour
along with who they are following
for social and lifestyle updates.

Sources

Social Media

@just_neel_things
@bhadipachiaai
@ankurwarikoo
@falguninayar1
@sonali_swami
@milindrinning
@arundhatiroyfc
@shwetatiwari
@palaktiwari

Statistics

University Grants
Commission
Unsplash

Platform

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