Speaking in Signals: How Gen Z Creates New Commitment Rituals

Gen Z is the most romantic generation in decades. Eighty percent of Gen Z singles believe they'll find true love and 74% believe they'll get married, compared to 57% and 43% of all singles respectively. They haven't rejected romance—they've created an entirely new language for expressing it while they are exploring connections.

The ceremonies will come eventually. For now, Gen Z is sending signals—micro-commitments that stack into seriousness without requiring the formal milestones they're not yet prepared to undertake, a way of vetting themselves and others before embarking on a relationship with more clarity. They soft launch relationships on social media before they hard launch them, a means to signal connection, but one that provides enough autonomy to be used uniquely by different singles. They assess emotional competence and social skills as dealmakers or dealbreakers. They build networks and communities as the runway to romantic relationships. These aren't replacements for marriage and commitment—they're the prerequisites Gen Z has created while working toward traditional outcomes on their own timeline, micro-commitments that come with clear communication.

Vibes Over Vows: The New Language of Commitment

Gen Z hasn't abandoned commitment ceremonies—they've created intermediate rituals to signal seriousness before they're ready for permanence. The soft launch has become a modern relationship milestone: 46% of single Gen Z social media users soft launch and 37% hard launch their relationships, compared with 12% and 10% of single social media users over the age of 45. Soft launches are playful signals to have friends join in on the early “butterflies” stage of a new connection. Additionally, 81% of single Gen Z social media users that have hard launched a relationship—identifying their partner and sharing about their connection over social accounts—believe it’s an important indicator of commitment. These aren't superficial social media performances—they're Gen Z's way of making relationships public and real without requiring engagement rings or marriage certificates.

The data shows that Gen Z singles are more likely to use newer social media platforms, like Snapchat and TikTok, than older generations. Fifty-four percent of Gen Z singles report using Snapchat, compared to just 30% across all generations, and 73% of Gen Z engages with TikTok, 30% higher than the average across all ages. Gen Z’s social usage shift is clear: a priority for spaces and channels that enable community-first connection, ongoing dialogue, and authentic interaction around shared interests. They value community over broadcasting, sustained conversation over performative announcements, authenticity over curation, the kind of environments where they can build networks, engage in continuous conversation, and develop voice-based intimacy before any romantic consideration enters the equation.

Vibe Literacy: The Ultimate Green Flag

We asked what gives Gen Z singles "the ick"—that instant turn-off that ends romantic interest—and emotional competence and social skills emerged as the determining factor: twenty-eight percent of Gen Z singles strongly agree that the ick is based on lack of emotional competence or social skills, compared to just 17% of older singles. Physical characteristics matter, but emotional intelligence matters more. Can someone read a room? Do they treat service staff with respect? Can they communicate clearly? Do they handle conflict maturely? These social and emotional competencies have become more important for Gen Z than traditional markers like financial success or career achievement. This emotional competence is different from the emotional availability that Gen Z expects from those they date, but the two go hand-in-hand. A recent Tinder survey notes that 56% say honest conversations matter.[1] Emotional intelligence provides the micro-signals – how someone listens, responds, and navigates tension – while emotional availability is the willingness to show up vulnerably and engage in those conversations. Gen Z expects both: the skill to communicate and the openness to be communicated with.

This represents a fundamental shift in what commitment looks like. Previous generations demonstrated seriousness through

formal milestones at structured intervals: meeting the parents, getting engaged, getting married, buying a house. Gen Z demonstrates seriousness through continuous micro-signals: How do they show up on social media? How do they interact with your friend group? How emotionally mature are they in daily interactions? Do they belong to the right communities? For the youngest singles, commitment is proven through accumulated microsignals rather than singular ceremonies, indications that cumulatively provide clear communication about relationships.

Meanwhile, Gen Z singles are interested in romantic relationships and much more. They're open to seeing where connections will lead. The data reveals the breadth of what they want:

- friendships with romantic potential (45%)
- shared community members (37%)
- romantic relationships (33%)
- mentors (33%)
- work colleagues (32%)
- volunteer group connections (30%)

Romance is one strand in a much richer web of desired connections.

Thirty-three percent of Gen Z strongly agree that expanding their social network is important, compared to 20% of older singles. This isn't network-building as a romantic strategy—it's broader connection-building as a life strategy. They're simultaneously pursuing mentorship, community belonging, professional relationships, volunteer connections, and friendships that may or may not become romantic.

Gen Z's platform use and behaviors make sense through this lens. The character assessment Gen Z singles value happens across relationship types: observing how someone contributes to communities, treats colleagues, engages with mentors, and shows up in volunteer groups. These diverse interactions reveal compatibility more reliably than dates because they show authentic behavior when romance isn't the explicit goal.

Gen Z Creates Commitment While Waiting for Readiness

Gen Z singles'signal-based approach isn't rejection of traditional commitment—it's adaptation to their unique circumstances. Only 55% feel ready for romantic relationships right now, and 75% are not in a hurry to find a partner. They're waiting to achieve financial security, emotional wellness, and personal growth before pursuing formal commitment. But humans need connection during that waiting period amidst a drive toward self actualization.

To solve that dilemma, Gen Z has created intermediate rituals that allow them to express romantic interest, build toward commitment, and signal seriousness without requiring readiness they don't yet feel. Network building creates connection without romantic pressure. Assessing emotional competence via dating apps and virtual connection points lets them vet compatibility without commitment risk.

These signals serve a crucial psychological function: they allow Gen Z singles to participate in romance while they work toward readiness for its more traditional expressions. The 74% who believe they'll get married aren't rejecting marriage—they're creating stepping stones to get there. The 80% who believe they'll find true love are finding ways to practice and demonstrate love while they prepare for lasting commitment.

Gen Z singles need tools that celebrate these intermediate milestones. Not just "swipe until you find marriage," but "build networks, signal interest, assess emotional competence, create micro-commitments that stack toward serious partnership." The modern commitment ritual isn't replacing the wedding—it's building toward it through accumulated signals that prove compatibility, emotional readiness, and genuine connection, clearly communicating where they want to go.

This new pathway is what allows Gen Z to be the loudest romantics. They just need permission to speak in signals while they work toward ceremonies.

METHODOLOGY

Third-party research was conducted on behalf of Match Group by The Harris Poll. The survey was conducted online in the United States from September 26 – October 7, 2025, among a nationally representative sample of 2,500 single adults ages 18 - 79. Gen Z is defined as those ages 18 - 29; Millennial is defined as those ages 30- 44; Gen X is defined as those ages 45-60; and Boomers are defined as those ages 61-79.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES

[1]A survey of 4000 18-25 year olds who are actively dating in the US, UK, Canada and Australia between October 2025 and November 2025 conducted by Opinium on behalf of Tinder (“2025 International Opinium Survey”).

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