

“Wine pays the bill for a rite of passage, not for Gen Z”

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Ipsos Generations Report 2026 describes wine as a rite of passage that Gen Z postpones to a more adult age, while spirits stay popular with young people. Two Ipsos experts explain how costs, new social habits, brand loyalty and an overlooked mature target shape wine consumption across generations, from Gen Z to the over-60s.

The Ipsos Generations 2026 report describes a rite of passage postponed over time for Gen Z, which stays close to spirits. **Young people are delaying their entry into the world of wine until a more adult age, amid high costs, new habits of socialising and a mature target still undervalued**, while thirty-five to forty-five-year-olds experience the glass as a

moment of personal decompression.

The Ipsos Generations 2026 report starts from one theme: continuity versus rupture. **On one side, a world that is ageing structurally; on the other, the same generational faults, recycled from decade to decade to voice the same identical fears as ever.**

Aristotle accused the young of believing they already knew everything in the 4th century BC; **today it is Gen Z's turn to be told it has killed wine consumption, after the same fate had befallen Millennials with beer.** Reading the report, we noticed that many of the dynamics described lend themselves to an interesting reading for the wine sector as well, which is never explicitly mentioned in the report. Hence the six questions we put to Cristina Liverani and Chiara Ferrari.

In the past Millennials were accused of having penalised the beer industry, today it is Gen Z's turn with wine: cyclical stigmatisation or a real paradigm shift, also because of young people's tendency to prefer other drinks?

The answer is: both. **There is certainly a cyclical component: consuming less is part of the life cycle,** of the experiences and situations that each generation faces in its own phase of life, and the same delays seen in other milestones (home, family, economic stability) inevitably reflect on consumption.

But the interesting data point is another one: in related product categories, such as spirits, consumption among young people remains higher than among Millennials at the same age. **It is therefore wine, specifically, that suffers most, not alcohol consumption in general.** And this changes the reading: compared with when Millennials were twenty, today there is a much broader offer of alternatives, craft beers, zero alcohol, together with an attention to physical wellbeing that simply did not exist in the same way twenty years ago.

The idea therefore prevails of leaving these young people time to grow, without taking for granted that wine consumption is destined to disappear entirely: **it is, in part, a cyclical matter linked to the younger generations, aggravated by an increasingly Premium and exclusive positioning of some products that ends up cutting out those with lower economic availability.**

The traditional milestones of youthful independence have moved later in time, and Gen Z appears distant from wine, yet many Millennials began to appreciate it only around thirty. How much does age weigh compared with generation?

A great deal, and **it is perhaps the most underestimated point of the whole debate.** Research does not show a teetotal Generation Z, the real picture is different from the one told: what changes is rather the quantities and the ways of consuming. Wine, in particular compared with other alcoholic drinks, remains a consumption tied to a true rite of passage: it is accessed at a more adult age, unless there is a family or cultural background that accustoms them to consuming it.

It is the same reason why, in our own families, we see Gen Z kids arriving at dinner with friends seriously discussing which bottle to bring: **a selective, occasional, but conscious consumption.** Wine is a drink that “inhabits” certain occasions, the meal, the shared dinner, while in out-of-home social contexts young people prefer something else.

Data on workers aged 16-25 show optimism but a weak sense of belonging to organisations. Transferring this fluidity to the wine market: must brands accept the impossibility of building long-term loyalty, focusing instead on their

natural positivity?

For Gen Z the very concept of brand loyalty is called into question: **unconditional loyalty no longer exists**. A brand does not remain my brand by definition: it has to win me over with time, it has to be transparent, it has to give me trust, it has to prove to me with its actions, communication, social, digital, that it deserves that loyalty, which must therefore be aimed entirely at authenticity and transparency, rather than presumed or taken for granted.

For wine, then, there is a further dynamic to consider: **brand loyalty is by nature more “multiple” than in other sectors**, someone who loves red wines can appreciate very different grape varieties at the same time, so the proliferation of products and alternatives inevitably also leads to a proliferation of brands present in the consumer's mindset, without this compromising the relationship with any of them in particular.

The “Consumer Extinction” analysis frames the over-60s as a dormant economy with great spending capacity. While wine concentrates its efforts on young people, is it neglecting a mature target that only waits to be stimulated by exclusive proposals?

Yes, and it is a topic much talked about, but one that companies, on the one hand, want to be told and, on the other, a little less. **The demographic trend is what it is: as long as health conditions allow, this generation of seniors is much more inclined to consume, to treat themselves**, precisely because they have an economic availability that allows them to do so without leading extravagant lives.

Care must be taken, however, not to treat them all as pensioners: many people over 55-60 are not pensioners at all, and working life tends increasingly to extend. **It is a target**

close to wine, less close to other alternative products, on which one could work a great deal both in terms of experience and research into quality, the exact same dynamic observed in the world of fashion, where brands obsessively chase Gen Z trends without noticing that the over-55 is the segment that spends the most by far.

In mature markets, moreover, the demographic destiny is the contraction of the population, not expansion: **wealth remains concentrated in the older age groups**, and sooner or later there will be a natural transfer of assets to the following generations, what is called “wealth dump”, but nobody knows exactly when.

For this reason, the most sensible strategy today is twofold: targeted offers for the most populous age group, already educated to consumption, but also educational work on the younger generations, on pain of their complete exit from the consumption basket when they grow older. **The topic of natural wines, for example, could be precisely one of these hooks:** a proposal that distinguishes young people from previous generations, even just as a curiosity to explore, even before becoming an established habit.

Today's twenty-somethings face the “Endurance Economy”, amid housing pressures and cost of living. In this scenario, is the decline in young people's wine consumption a change in tastes or a forced exclusion from a product perceived as premium?

The purely economic reasoning holds up from a logical point of view, but if it is placed in a context of socialising it changes sign completely. **It is not only economic rationality that guides the consumption of the youngest:** in certain contexts it is simply more functional, more “cool”, more normal to order a spritz rather than share a bottle among five.

Despite this, the economic component weighs heavily, above all for those who in this phase of life manage consumption less autonomously than when one is older and has greater availability, but **Gen Z must not be treated as a single block**: within the same generation coexist young people still living with their families, with low economic availability earmarked for pure entertainment, and a share already in the working world, with a family of their own.

Talking with an eighteen-year-old or with a twenty-eight-year-old means talking with two completely different realities, and generalising, something that often happens at media level, risks losing sight of precisely this internal complexity.

The 36-45 age group, the “Squeezed Middle”, is divided between caring for children and assisting parents. Is wine consumption for this cluster changing its social vocation into a moment of domestic decompression?

The data support this reading quite well. For this target, wine, like other small pleasures, is experienced as **a moment in which to carve out a personal space, a way to decompress the stress of a generation very involved in work** and, increasingly often, squeezed between the care of children and that of parents, which with the lengthening of life expectancy can become a further front to manage.

For this cluster wine consumption often becomes a moment of more intimate socialising: no longer the desire to go around venues, but a dinner with a small group of friends. That said, it must be specified that out-of-home as a whole is not in crisis at all: **the desire of the youngest to live experiences and in-person socialising remains strong**, disconnecting from a world mediated only by the digital, a sign that the theme of experience, more than that of location, continues to be the real driver of consumption.

Key points

1. **Wine is a rite of passage:** Gen Z reaches it at a more adult age.
2. **Gen Z loyalty must be earned** through authenticity, transparency and trust, as wine lovers enjoy many brands at once.
3. **Over-60s are an overlooked target** with strong spending power, close to wine and open to quality and experiences.
4. **Spirits stay popular with Gen Z**, while higher prices and premium positioning weigh on wine.
5. **Ages 36 to 45 see wine as decompression**, a personal moment or a dinner with a small group of friends.