AT&T

aaf national student advertising competition team 718



Executive Summary

Gen Z spends **137 days a year** looking at a screen, because for them, **connecting isn't just important, it's everything.** It's how they navigate the world, build relationships, and share their lives with others.

Yet, when it comes to choosing a cellular or WiFi provider, most 13-to-28-year-olds delay switching to an individual plan. This isn't about the brand itself, but the dread of **another inconvenient bill to pay.** AT&T must redefine its relationship with Gen Z, transcending expectations as a provider—becoming a brand that **empowers them to share, explore, and experience more.**

To reach Gen Z, AT&T must **meet them where they're at** by understanding their priorities and ensuring they know **connection is beyond service—it's support.** AT&T can lead the way by offering tools to stay connected, freedom to embrace new possibilities, and how to navigate both digital and real-life worlds. The time to build that relationship is now, so when they're ready to make the switch, **AT&T isn't just an option—it's the obvious choice.**

Campaign Goals

1. **Increase earned media impressions by 10%** to foster a positive brand perception (brand love/likability) among Gen Z through paid strategy.

2. **Improve brand consideration and recall by 10%** through increased overall frequency.

3. **Increase reach by 15%** through **community initiatives and experiences**, connecting Gen Z with AT&T.

Overall objective: make Gen Z ***crave*** AT&T



Table of Contents

Objectives and Where AT&T Is Now 1
- Executive Summary 1
- Campaign Goals 1

Big Idea and Narrative Setup 2
- The Situation 2
- The Challenge 2

Research Process 3

The Connection Landscape 4
- Truths About Our Target 4
- How to Connect 4

Category & Brand Barriers 5

Personas 6

The Consumer Journey 7

Key Campaign Insights 8

Targeting the Big Idea 9

The Big Idea & Why It Works 10

Media Rationale & Breakdown 11

Media Flowchart 12

The Situation

With a legacy spanning 150 years, AT&T is a pioneer in telecommunications. While it has remained rooted in tradition, its competitors have pivoted to better align with Gen Z. As a result, our **target views AT&T as corporate and distant.**

In today's fast-moving digital world, Gen Z relies on connectivity to navigate constant change, from adopting new trends to sharing milestones. For Gen Z, **sharing is more than a habit—it's how they shape their identity and relationships.** With an overwhelming amount of content at their fingertips, Gen Z has learned to see through traditional corporate messaging, gravitating toward **brands that feel in tune with their reality, authentic, and transparent.**

While most of Gen Z aren't actively seeking to change providers, AT&T must position itself as the brand they **turn to when they're ready.**

AT&T is calling. How do we get Gen Z to ***pick up the phone?***



The Challenge

Our campaign will use a forward-thinking approach to increase AT&T's brand love and relevance among 13-to-28-year-olds. While AT&T has had success with older generations, it needs to **leverage Gen Z's love for sharing** to resonate with our audience on a **human level.**

We will show that AT&T's main priority is empowering Gen Z to continue to share their lives, even beyond the screen. Our audience may not be ready to switch now, but by aligning with their values and evolving alongside them, **AT&T will bridge the gap and keep them connected to every possibility.**

What They Believe ***Now***

Half of Gen Z is striving for independence, while the other half feels forced into it. **Gen Z believes that AT&T has no brand personality or connection to them, and isn't interested in building that relationship.**

What ***We Want*** them to Believe

AT&T is a reliable cellular and WiFi provider that **empowers** independence through every stage of life. Gen Z can rely on AT&T to connect them to the **most important people and moments in their lives.**

Research Process

Secondary Research

August 2024 - March 2025

267 **resources/articles**

- MRI Simmons
- AdMall

Qualitative Research

October 2024 - March 2025

2 **focus groups**

36 **concept testing participants**

142 **1:1 Interviews**

80 **projective technique exercises**
(word association)

Quantitative National Surveys

October 2024 - March 2025

Conducted two surveys to gather data and garner insights on Gen Z under and over 18 years old.

1775 **total respondents**

Ages 18 to 28

1639 **respondents**

- Personal knowledge of cell and WiFi plans
- Level of independence
- Values and priorities

Under 18

136 **respondents**

- Methods of influence
- Brands that resonate



The Connection Landscape

The Journey to Independence

Whether it's landing your first job or getting your own cellular or WiFi plan, transitioning into adulthood can feel **overwhelming.**

*"The definition of adulthood [for Gen Z] may be evolving, but the desire for independence, security, and self-fulfillment remains central to what defines it." —**The Independent***

Shared experiences connect Gen Z, no matter where they are in life. Each step presents unique challenges, but ultimately, our audience is moving toward the same goal: **independence.**

A Post-Pandemic World

The pandemic triggered a fundamental shift in how Gen Z engages with the internet and social media, shifting from sources of entertainment to **essential lifelines for connection.** When the pandemic disrupted in-person relationships, our audience found other ways to connect.

*"Young workers value independence, but do not want to isolate themselves from others. Part of this has to do with the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced a complete shift to remote work and caused many people to completely lose touch with others." —**The Deloitte Report***

Digital spaces became Gen Z's primary way to interact with the world, and this habit became deeply ingrained. Now, in an **era of continuing uncertainty,** our target relies on the internet not only for socialization, but for work, education, and everyday convenience. More than ever, they seek reliability, seamless connectivity, and brands that understand their **digital-first lifestyle.**

How to Connect

Prove AT&T is the Right Choice

Gen Z is entering the workforce with a cost-conscious mindset, however, their brand loyalty extends beyond price. Our target will invest in brands that have **direct and supportive** voices that **align with their values.** A connection needs to be fostered through relatable advertisements, strategic partnerships, and engaging consumer experiences—like interactive pop-up events and community-driven initiatives. Through these executions, AT&T will be able to position itself as a relatable and **authentic brand that resonates** with this generation.

*"By delivering content in the language that resonates most with these audiences, brands can demonstrate a more profound respect for their cultural identity and create a more personal and engaging experience." — **Forbes***

Create Community

Gen Z seeks more than just reliable service—they want to be part of **something greater.** To build brand love, AT&T must foster a **sense of belonging** by creating spaces, on- and offline, where Gen Z can share experiences and engage with new people and perspectives. **AT&T can become a brand that actively strengthens our target's connections.**

*"Building a community isn't as simple as getting on social media and gathering followers. Gen Z is a discerning generation: They can tell real from fake." — **Forbes***

Category & Brand Barriers

Gen Z...

feel negatively toward major corporations.

58% don't trust large companies.

This skepticism stems from feeling that big brands prioritize profits over people, leaving Gen Z craving transparency and genuine interactions.

How to Address

AT&T needs to build an authentic relationship with Gen Z. They want a **straightforward, human, and down-to-earth provider to connect with.**

Gen Z...

isn't leaving their family plans anytime soon.

56% will leave once independent.

33% aren't ever planning on leaving.

Sticking to these plans are cost-effective and convenient. It's challenging to build brand love within a demographic that isn't currently looking for a plan.

How to Address

Build out AT&T's current **brand identity to increase sentiment and relevancy** among Gen Z, so when it's time to get their own plans, **AT&T is top-of-mind.**

Gen Z...

isn't aware of AT&T's current brand.

56% value price, speed, and reliability above other aspects.

For our target, choosing a provider is solely based on benefits. Without a reason to engage, why put the effort into building a connection with the brand?

How to Address

The benefits don't drive brand love, so focus more on the **reasons AT&T's brand is worth it.** Emphasize how **AT&T adds meaning beyond just reliable service.**





Personas

To effectively connect with Gen Z, we've segmented our audience psychographically based on their current life stages. These segments reflect the **diverse experiences** of Gen Z as they navigate the many transitions of life and **discover their place in the world.** By understanding these stages, we can pinpoint the most effective approach to reach them.



The Explorer

13-17

The Explorer is discovering different facets of their identity. Because their daily lives are fairly stable, they prioritize staying up-to-date with the most popular trends.

How to Target:

Influence with older people they know and social media.

Example Characters:

Alex Dunphy ***(Modern Family)*** and Luke Skywalker ***(Star Wars)***



The Builder

18-28

The Builder has set the foundation of their identity and is now deciding how they want their life to look. As they adapt to adulthood, they're becoming more independent but still rely on others for support, especially financially.

How to Target:

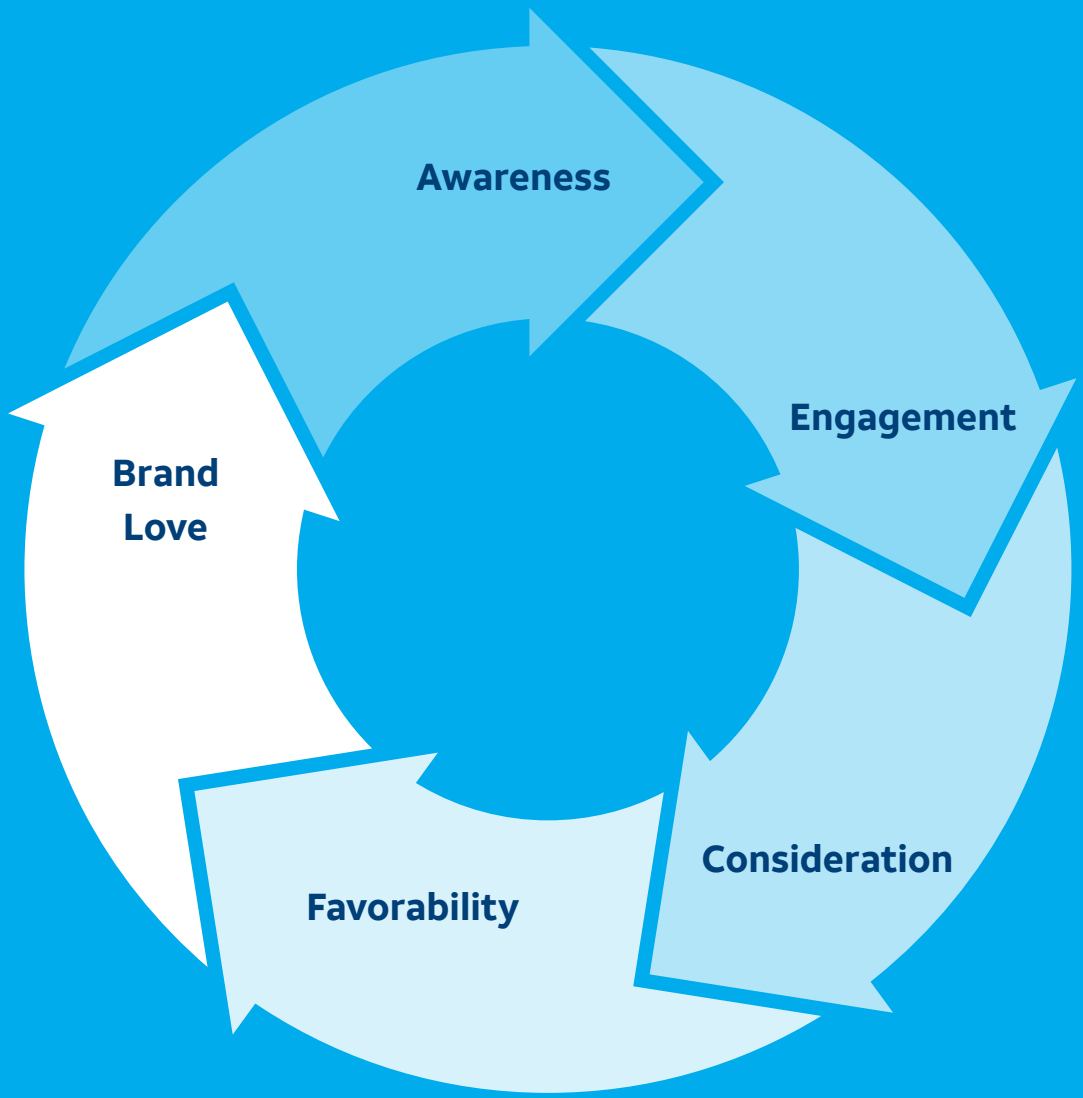
Highlight how AT&T helps them take control, grow, and build their future with independence.

Example Characters:

Jessica Day ***(New Girl)*** and Sebastian ***(La La Land)***

Consumer Journey

To demonstrate our target's behavior as they move through the campaign, we have highlighted **the five stages 13-to-28-year-olds will experience as they interact with AT&T.**



1 Awareness

This campaign will **increase relevancy** and **brand love** for AT&T through multiple media channels.

2 Engagement

Our target will **engage with the campaign** to become more interested in the targeted and relatable content.

3 Consideration

Through continuous exposure of the campaign, Gen Z will consider AT&T as a **brand they connect with.**

4 Favorability

Gen Z will have AT&T top-of-mind when thinking about providers. They will feel that AT&T understands them, leading to **increased positive sentiment.**

5 Brand Love

As Gen Z builds a connection with AT&T, their brand **favorability translates into love.** By aligning with their values and supporting their lifestyle, AT&T becomes the natural choice as a provider.

Key Campaign Insight

Gen Z connects through sharing

For Gen Z, sharing is how they **shape their world.** Every post, message, and reaction is a way to build relationships, express identity, and stay connected in a constantly evolving world. **AT&T has the opportunity to not only power these relationships,** but to **be part of them.**



Position On Providers

Gen Z sees their cellular and WiFi providers as one thing: **an expense.** When it's time to get their own plan, the focus is on affordability, speed, and benefits—**not the brand itself.** With providers feeling distant and transactional, there is an opportunity for **AT&T to bridge the gap** in the market.

"There's just nothing personal about it. It's not like they're texting me asking how I'm doing. They're just like: 'Here's your bill.'"
—Simon, 20

The Family Plan

With 72% of Gen Z still on family plans, **switching isn't a priority.** Since most of our target audience has been on a shared plan their entire lives, they've **never had to explore other options.** However, when they take that step, **convenience will likely lead them to stay with the same provider.**

"We're the first generation to have to figure out how to disconnect from shared plans, like streaming subscriptions. It's not like we can ask our parents about when they first got off their family plans."
—Isabelle, 26

It's also worth noting that 55% of Gen Z would be open to leaving their current plan to join one with their friends.

Gen Z Under 18

51% of 13-to-17-year-olds are highly influenced by people they admire and social media when considering new brands. As a result, younger Gen Z are more likely to prefer and be loyal to popular or trending brands. For AT&T, understanding these preferences is key to **capturing and maintaining their attention.**

"I never choose a brand randomly, I just use what my friends, family, or influencers use because it's convenient and I trust them."
—Evelyn, 15

Targeting the Big Idea



The Strategic Idea

From school group chats to your first remote job, AT&T grows with you, keeping you **connected to what's next.**

The Story

Sharing is Gen Z's love language. From sending memes to swapping playlists, laughs to late-night calls, sharing is how you say, **"I'm with you."** Because it's not just about what you share—it's about **who you share it with.** When you're ready to reach out, **we're here for you.** Whether you're texting, streaming, or meeting up with friends, AT&T will keep you **connected to what matters most.**

Wherever life takes you, whoever you're becoming, whatever story you're telling—**keep sharing.**

The Big Idea

(See next page)

Tone Words

AT&T: ***Human, Curious, Vibrant***

Campaign: ***Straightforward, Supportive, Empowering***

Share On



The Big Idea & Why It Works

Amplify, Not Overpower

'Connecting Changes Everything' serves as the **foundation** of our campaign, with 'Share On' as the **tactical method** we'll use to engage with Gen Z. This extension of the campaign amplifies the core message by focusing on the diverse ways Gen Z connects. With 'Share On,' we position AT&T not just as a service provider, but as a brand that **inspires moments** for Gen Z to share, grow, and connect.

Navigate Gen Z

Gen Z's love for sharing goes beyond daily interactions—it's part of **every** exchange, whether that's sharing locations with family or sending a photo and saying, "This reminds me of you!" Our campaign **celebrates these moments** and reinforces that AT&T is here to **support every shared experience.**

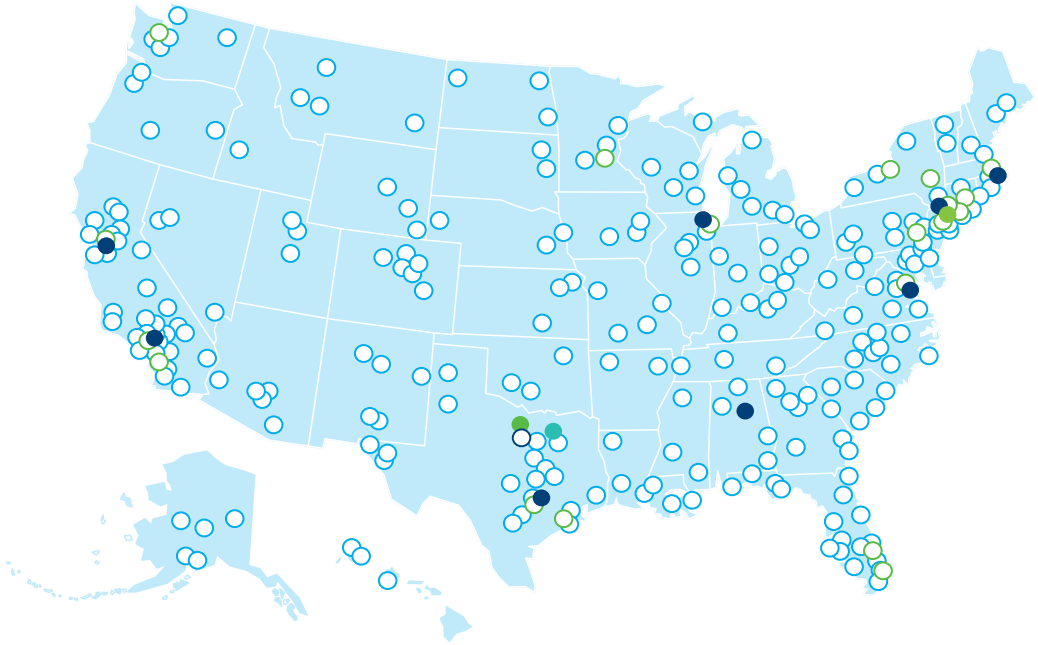
Reposition AT&T's Voice

To meet Gen Z where they're at, AT&T's tone needs to be **straightforward, supportive, empowering, and human.** 'Share On' is clear and down-to-earth, but also opens the opportunity for Gen Z to continue sharing what they love with those who matter most. Through this refined positioning, AT&T reaffirms its commitment to connection with Gen Z as a brand that **empowers their journey.**

A Constant Support

Sharing is a constant and integral part of Gen Z's everyday life. 'Share On' recognizes that Gen Z is **navigating major life transitions,** and AT&T is there to help them embrace change, explore new possibilities, and **stay connected every step of the way.**

Media Rationale & Budget Breakdown



Global Gauntlet
Arlington (TX)

Wins Worth Sharing
New York City (NY), Washington, D.C., Philadelphia (PA), Chicago (IL), Boston (MA), Los Angeles (CA), Baltimore (MD), Rensselaer (NY), New Haven (CT), San Francisco (CA), Austin (TX), Miami (FL), Jersey City (NJ), Newark (NJ), Seattle (WA), Bloomington (MN), East Rutherford (NJ), King of Prussia (PA), Costa Mesa (CA), Aventura (FL), Torrance (CA), Houston (TX), Syracuse (NY), Garden City (NY), Sunrise (FL)

The Blueprint
Boston (MA), New York City (NY), Chicago (IL), Washington, D.C., San Francisco (CA), Los Angeles (CA), Austin (TX), Birmingham (AL)

Out of the Blue Mailbox
Arizona State (AZ), Texas A&M (TX), University of Central Florida (FL), Ohio State (OH), NYU (NY), University of Illinois (IL), Lincoln Technical Institute (NJ), Univeral Technical Institute (PA), WyoTech (WY), Fortis (NJ), Fort Liberty (NC), Fort Cavazos (TX), Fort Moore (GA), et al.

Stop the Shot
Rutherford (NJ)

Share-Onified Stadium
Arlington (TX)

All Hearts & Hands
Dallas (TX)

Media Strategy

Our approach will position AT&T as an essential, top-of-mind lifestyle brand that Gen Z will crave. We use an "always on" mentality prioritizing digital frequency and reach to ensure we are consistently connecting with our target in the ever-evolving digital landscape. Utilizing AdMall and MRI Simmons, we accurately build target audiences, while SRDS/Google Ads allow us to maximize our budget effectively. We engage consumers across all platforms with this omnichannel approach to drive home brand love, consideration, and favorability.

Execution Costs



$75,000,000

Digital	39.0%
OTT/Video	26.3%
Audio	7.3%
Experiential/Outdoor	18.7%
Philanthropy/Partnership	8.0%
Production	0.7%

AT&T x aiEDU Rationale

As AI becomes a second-nature integration into our daily lives, the lack of educational resources for underpriveleged communities furthers the digital divide. AT&T will expand its partnership with The AI Education Project (aiEDU) to provide education on how to use AI **ethically** and effectively.

AT&T Intern Rationale

Our target is not currently engaging with AT&T's socials. To generate curiosity and organic engagement at the beginning of our campaign, we will introduce **AT&T Intern.** AT&T's official platforms will post the intern's unfiltered daily life utilizing "a slice of life with a twist" humor that will get Gen Z saying, "What is AT&T up to?"

Media Flowchart

Phases	Phase 1: AWARENESS			Phase 2: ENGAGEMENT			Phase 3: CONSIDERATION			Phase 4: FAVORABILITY						
Executions	*January*	*February*	*March*	*April*	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*	Total Cost	Impressions/Clicks	# of Executions	CPM/CPC
Digital													**$29,245,335**	**1,865,381,352**		
Social														Impressions		CPM
TikTok													$5,379,412	537,941,190	-	$10.00
Instagram													$3,586,275	440,033,693	-	$8.15
YouTube													$3,586,275	130,409,985	-	$27.50
Twitch													$1,793,137	179,313,730	-	$10.00
Snapchat													$2,689,706	418,305,747	-	$6.43
X (Twitter)													$896,569	138,787,717	-	$6.46
Influencer Strategy																
AT&T Global Gauntlet													$540,424	480,000	32	-
Yes&													$7,018,538	19,489,290	50	-
AT&T Intern													$5,000	620,000	1	-
Digital														Clicks		CPC
Search Engine Optimization													$3,750,000	1,394,052	-	$2.69
OTT/Video													**$19,750,000**	**938,700,124**		
Community Connections																
YouTube TV													$1,975,000	61,183,395	-	$32.28
Hulu + Live													$1,975,000	65,833,333	-	$30.00
Peacock Live													$987,500	32,916,667	-	$30.00
Paramount+													$987,500	32,916,667	-	$30.00
Mid-Roll														192,850,062		
Disney +	*"Jerry"*			*"Quartet"*			*"Paperboy"*			*"Boombox"*			$3,950,000	158,000,000	-	$25.00
Hulu													$4,937,500	197,500,000	-	$25.00
Netflix													$2,962,500	118,500,000	-	$25.00
Prime Video													$1,975,000	79,000,000	-	$25.00
Audio													**$5,500,000**	**275,000,000**		
Ways We Used to Share																
Spotify													$3,750,000	187,500,000	-	$20.00
Apple Podcasts													$1,750,000	87,500,000	-	$20.00
Experiential/Outdoor													**$14,030,666**	**43,599,708,064**		
Out of the Blue Mailbox													$2,741,170	388,699,750	250	-
Wins Worth Sharing													$3,652,563	29,013,911,764	-	-
Stop the Shot													$311,680	4,100,000	1	-
The Blueprint													$4,644,313	14,191,996,550	-	-
AT&T Stadium Share On-ified													$2,680,940	1,000,000	10	-
Philanthropy/Partnership													**$5,974,000**			
AT&T x aiEDU													$1,300,000	-	-	-
AT&T x All Hearts and Hands													$1,074,000	-	-	-
AT&T x Doordash													$3,600,000	1,200,000	-	-
AD SPEND TOTAL													**$74,500,000**			
Production																
Film Commercials													$400,000	-	4	-
Commericial Music Licensing													$100,000	-	4	-
PRODUCTION TOTAL													**$500,000**			
GRAND TOTAL													**$75,000,000**			