Unusual Group’s 2025 Study Analysis Reveals ‘The Imperfection Signal’ as 2026’s Brand Blueprint

Monday 24 November, 2025

Unusual Group today announced the term, **‘The Imperfection Signal’**. The term is derived from the consultancy’s analysis of three key 2025 studies, revealing that Gen Z now trust and engage more deeply with brands that show visible flaws, spontaneity and cultural self-awareness. This reflects a measurable behavioural shift for this generation, imperfection is no longer a weakness, it’s a credibility marker.

Analysis by Luke Tobin, CEO and Ali Newton-Temperley, COO at Unusual Group starts with findings from NielsenIQ’s 2025 study. The study shows that Gen Z’s brand choices are anchored in authenticity, belonging and self-esteem, preferring content that feels unfiltered, rather than engineered.

This shift in preference is further reflected in evolving media behaviour. According to the Attest Media Consumption Report (2025) Gen Z gravitates toward short-form, humorous and lo-fi content, indicating a decisive move away from glossy, high-production campaigns that once defined brand prestige.

Challenging longstanding marketing assumptions that polish equates to professionalism, the data shows that Gen Z trusts brands that embrace their rough edges. Whether through an unscripted behind-the-scenes moment, a candid explanation, a humorous mistake or a creator-led clip that feels spontaneous rather than scripted, this content has a greater impact on Gen Z, than a polished production

Completing the analysis, VisionOne’s Gen Z Insights 2025 shows that hyper-curated or overly perfected content instantly switches Gen Z off. This response engages what Unusual Group calls their ‘authenticity radar’, a fast, instinctive filter trained to detect and dismiss anything that feels contrived or insincere. Together, these three studies underpin Unusual Group’s new term ‘The Imperfection Signal; which Tobin defines as "a brand’s ability to demonstrate honesty, agility and cultural awareness through content that embraces realness, spontaneity and visible imperfection.”

Data Signals a Generational Flip in What Counts as “Good” Branding

Raised on TikTok, YouTube and participatory creator culture, Gen Z has developed what Unusual Group describes as an ‘authenticity radar’. Where previous generations saw polish as professionalism, Gen Z sees it as inauthentic.

“Gen Z doesn’t just want authenticity as a concept, they want to see it, feel it and watch it happen in real time.” said Tobin, CEO of Unusual Group.

The data shows that even small flaws, typos, lo-fi production, unscripted moments, signal that a brand is honest enough to show its human side. According to the consultancy’s analysis, imperfection communicates three critical trust cues to Gen Z, transparency, cultural fluency, and humanity.

Brands demonstrating these signals consistently outperform others on trust, relatability and shareability. Metrics that now determine whether a brand earns Gen Z’s attention or is instantly scrolled past.

The New Brand Playbook: What the Data Says to Do

Based on its 2025 analysis, Unusual Group recommends brands:

- Shift from polished content to participatory content that feels human and spontaneous.
- Let creators lead and let their imperfections show.
- Replace flawless corporate tone with human tone.

Media:



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- Design for short-form, humour-driven environments, where Gen Z's attention truly lives.

As Gen Z enter their peak spending years, brands clinging to flawless presentation risk appearing out-of-touch. Brands need to embrace their mistakes and creator-driven storytelling to build deeper trust and cultural resonance, particularly in fast-moving digital environments.

"Imperfection isn't a liability anymore," added Newton-Temperley. "It's a signal of humanity. And in 2025, humanity is what Gen Z is buying."

Together, these three key studies, according to Unusual Group, reshape the definition of what "good" branding looks like. Instead of perfection signalling professionalism, imperfection now signals truth. Unusual Group's 2025 analysis concludes that 'The Imperfection Signal' will define brand behaviour moving into 2026.

Agencies interested in learning more about partnership opportunities can visit unusualgroup.com or contact hello@unusualgroup.com

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About Unusual Group

Unusual Group is a founder-first collective that partners with exceptional marketing and creative agencies through minority stake investments. Founded by three-time exited entrepreneur Luke Tobin, Unusual Group provides shared infrastructure, collaborative growth programs, and strategic capital whilst founders retain operational control. The company is headquartered in London.

About Luke Tobin

Luke Tobin is a three-time exited founder best known for scaling Digital Ethos into one of the UK's fastest-growing digital agencies before its multimillion-pound exit. He serves as an advisor to agency founders navigating growth and exit challenges, and is a recognised leading voice on entrepreneurship and M&A strategy.

Company Contact:

Unusual Group

E. hello@unusualgroup.com
W. https://www.unusualgroup.com/

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