



BENEATH THE TREND

GENERATION NATION COMPANION REPORT

Holiday Values



First, a little history ...

In 2019, Quester conducted a landmark project in conjunction with 747 Insights and Collaborata:

GENERATION NATION 2019: Defining America's Gen Z, Millennials, Generation X and Boomers

This study provides a comparison of attitudes and behaviors across 4,012 respondents in these four cohorts, to expand upon current intelligence and cut to the core of what it means to be an American in 2019.

Aided by technology, media, politics, and more, we can see Generational values shifting at a faster pace than we've ever seen before.

The study is both insightful and actionable. Contact us to learn more about subscribing to Generation Nation.



We set out to not only collect information about each of these generations, but also to develop a deep understanding about who they are, and their experiences.

▶ Today we are looking at attitudes and behaviors around the holidays to see what's on people's minds during this time leading up to and throughout the holiday season — we're hauling out the holly.



WHAT WE DID

We set out to learn about people's thoughts on the holidays and gift giving to uncover their true thoughts on the reason for the season.

HOW WE DID IT

We asked 416 people across four generations about the holidays, their general thoughts with a focus on the current holiday season that's fast approaching. And when they shared their intimate feelings on things, we probed a little deeper using an AI-delivered conversation.

WHAT WE ASKED

We asked them to tell us about the upcoming holiday season ... the ups, the downs ... and about their plans ... and about their gift-giving philosophy ... and then we dove into brands and retailers to find out what people need from them to make the holidays (specifically the gift giving) better. We finally circled back by asking people about their own personal ideal gift in hopes to truly understand what's important to them.

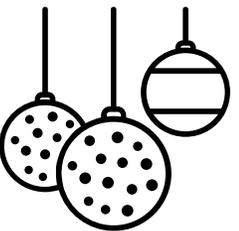


Here's what we found ...

The key thing we were after was to learn about how people spend both money and time over the holidays. And what do they value?



But real quick: We thought we would find all the jolly holiday fun, but it turns out the holidays are kind of a double-edged sword. All the more reason to dig in.



“Happy holidays” isn’t wrong ... it’s just complicated and feels incomplete



It’s an emotional time

We spend time with loved ones and count our blessings (and we do appreciate and celebrate all those blessings), and that triggers all the feels ...



But we don’t acknowledge that this can magnify the feels like sadness and loneliness (blessings and loved ones aren’t always there).



It’s a time to relax and enjoy yourself and your loved ones

Of course! It’s the holidays! Time for the holiday magic!



But somebody has to, you know, make the magic happen (sorry, it’s not really magic). And that can be a ton of stress and pressure ... which is not terribly relaxing.



It’s the most wonderful time of the year!

It’s still a favorite time for most — the food, the decorating, the gifts, the delight, the fruitcake!



But is it supposed to be this material and commercial?

And just kidding on the fruitcake. No one mentioned it because it is the worst. And so weird.



So how does this context impact what they value? And what they need? And how you can help them? Let’s break it down ...

What are they (all generations) excited about?

The things people look forward to aren't surprising ...



Bonding (43%)



Food (38%)



Traditions (30%)



Gifts (28%)



And not surprisingly, across the board, it's the **people you're with (81%)**

The appreciation for these people only increases with age



There's also all kinds of great **squishy emotion (52%)**, like love and joy, filling hearts across generations—particularly among females

Language Nerd Note: Another fun fact, emotion and food is pretty much also what we look forward to every day



Some fun facts about variation:

- Women are really focused on decorating. And gifts. And food.
- Tradition is less of a focus for Gen Z
- Millennials are much more likely to mention TV and movies
- Boomers are more likely to mention religious components of celebration



▶ It's not all elves and mistletoe though ...

What are people NOT looking forward to?

34%  Negative emotions, like stress, are most often mentioned ...

and while it may not be surprising to learn that holiday stress is most often mentioned by females, it's also more often mentioned among younger generations.

Other Key Holiday Dislikes Mentions:

30%



Family — who you see and who you don't (especially among younger generations)

*"My family arguing when we are all in one room. They don't know how to control their alcohol."
(Gen Z)*

18%



Money

*"I can't buy the gifts I have in my heart to buy. Everyone always buys me something so nice and I like to reciprocate. Presents are not always cheap to buy."
(Millennial)*

17%



Shopping

*"I find least enjoyable the shopping part. I do not care for shopping plus I know that the people who don't have money to shop will be feeling bad. I don't like to think about children who get no gifts."
(Gen X)*

Older generations feel the holidays have become "too commercialized"



And remember those people who enjoy gifts and gifting? That 28%?



27% put **GIFTS** in the **least enjoy** bucket

Interesting, right?

What are their plans?



53%

Plan to spend quality time with family



13%

Pass the time with various group activities

- 45% Eat like the apocalypse is coming while pleasantly smiling through the ugly sweater contest or “just hanging out”
- 27% Exchange **gifts**
- 25% Have some type of **gathering** that gets everyone together
- 13% **Go on a holiday** and get out of dodge

Being with loved ones can be overwhelming so people get in some **retail therapy, play games** (naughty and nice) and do **outdoor activities**

- 13% **Decorate** their homes — the tree gets “lit”
- 5% Celebrate through their **religious beliefs**

Language Nerd Note: We don't usually point out percentages of 5%, but that's kind of noteworthy (surprising?) to see religion mentioned so low for holiday plans. Right?



It's the holidays. The best laid plan are, well, plans. People head into the season with good intentions and strive to make positive lasting memories for all involved.

How will they shop?

1

We start

Around Black Friday and Cyber Monday — you can't beat the prices

At the last minute right before the holidays

Start? We are always on the look-out for gifts, grabbing unique items and great deals all year!



2

And we always

Tell each other or make lists (sometimes at Thanksgiving gatherings)

Focus on one big gift (or experience or money or gift cards) instead of "lots of toys ... she'll lose interest in quickly"

Draw names for Secret Santa or a gift exchange

Block off a day or chunk of time to do shopping (but "prefer to avoid all the madness")

3

Because the goal is

Not spending money on things people don't need or want

Keeping it simple — often with gift cards or cash (or at least a gift receipt) ... Something practical!

Creating a memorable experience

Showing how much I/we care about the recipients through meaningful, "sentimental" gifts



Qualitative overview of various steps in the process

There's no one way to shop, but there's always **strategy** with one **common goal** ...



It's creating the magic by making a connection with the recipient/s — it's saying "I see you. I know you. Your happiness is my magic."

What do they need when they're shopping?



33%
Price

Sales, deals and a general outcry for lower prices, as well as free shipping



Even though we asked them to think beyond price, 33% still went there (affirming it's always a thing!)



Make it easy ...
they have magic
to make!

Speed and efficiency matter with gifting, and online is popular — you avoid so much hassle. And **in stock matters** because you don't want to find the perfect gift and not be able to get it

- 23% Online**
- 18% A convenient experience**
- 13% Items in stock**



But also — they want
you to supervise the
making of the magic.
Please.

People want help finding the right gift — **they need guidance** from sales associates and retailers; want to describe the recipient (age, gender, personality) and be steered in the right direction

- 11% Better customer service**
- 11% Recommendations**

*They need to actually wake up and open more than two registers. This is a huge problem in almost any store. They will have thousands of people shopping and virtually no staff to deal with the customers.
(Millennial)*

So we know how they want to shop — but what do they want to *give*?

The old adage “it’s the thought” still holds true ...

28% Highest goal for all generations is to give something *meaningful*

23%

Get them what they “really want” but also something they will enjoy — this could be what they ask for, what the giver notices they like, or something they consider their favorite

Boomers (16%) are a little less likely to care what you want, compared to Gen Z (28%), Millennials (21%) and Gen X (27%)

Gen X (45%) and Boomers (45%) are more likely to talk about family and children/grandchildren as being the focus of their philosophy compared to Gen Z (28%) and Millennials (33%)

8%

Useful — the aim here is something they will use and has the solid air of practicality — **something they need**



Gen Z (27%) and Millennials (23%) are in agreement that gifting is a solid way to show you love and care for another compared to Gen X (13%) and Boomers (12%) who are either jaded or have come into wisdom



What does meaningful mean?

From the heart, unique to the individual, an inside joke. Shows you took initiative — an intimacy behind it.



It’s not about the presents. Growing up I wanted the fanciest new shoes or the hottest new toys. My parents worked long hours to provide whatever we wanted but somehow I always wanted more. As I grew older I started to realize the true meaning of Christmas should be spending time with family. Time is something we can never ever get back. So choosing what to do with it wisely would be smart. Presents should come from the heart and not from your wallet. Many times I have bought people expensive gizmos and gadgets only to realize that a simple heartfelt gift would of meant more.
(Millennial)

AND what would THEY want? What does their ideal gift look like?

We get less material as we get older ... or at least we say that. So is all that shopping (and stressing) delivering what our people really want?



Gen Z

27% Money. It will solve problems like college debt and you probably won't get me the right gift anyway



Millennials

36% Quality time with family and friends — watching the happiness unfold, joy in togetherness



Gen X

24% Quality time with family and friends — “nothing fancy” — time together over food and laughter



Boomers

22% Quality time with family — kids unwrapping gifts. Time for reflection with everyone in one spot



20% Something meaningful showing love or that they are “seen”

9% But then games and gaming systems or **5%** — a phone! Or (5%) a new car!

8% Time with friends and family especially those they miss over the holidays

7% And maybe a really great trip

15% Trips or tickets to an event or experience — or (3%) a respite from my daily grind. This is harder than I thought

12% Gifts that are meaningful: photos, memories, personally practical items

10% Cash is good — I'm knee deep in debt and see little relief

4% I will take a phone, and really, any sort of computer technology

14% An amazing trip — especially with family because time is moving too quickly

14% Unconditional love and the happiness of others — especially children and grandchildren; and (6%) good health

12% Money. To donate to charity, to finally secure financial stability, to pay off mortgage and debt

7% Do not want or need anything

17% A trip or vacation with family — creating memories

15% Health — ease the pain

11% Love, friendship, attention — good conversation, someone to hug and to not feel disregarded; **8%** peace in the world and in theirs

9% Don't need anything material

So — bottom line — what can you do to reach people during the holidays?

People are craving *meaning* ... that's the real "holiday value"



So help them go beyond a good gift to a **meaningful** one; don't just make it easy to shop, make it **easy to connect!**

Elevate their shopping and gifting experience



Use technology to make gift recommendations for their loved one

- Shoppers enter basic **demographics** and **preferences** of the gift recipient, and **you tell them exactly what to purchase ... for free**
- Remind shopper **what they spent or bought last year** (because you're probably blasting them with emails anyway, right?)



Provide a **customer service rep** to guide (and point and carry and do all of it) shoppers to the perfect gift for their unique recipient



And then, help them **personalize** that gift with notes, gift wrap, and recommendations to tie gifts to experiences

And don't forget to cover the basics, which will help ease their holiday stress



- Online **ease and convenience**, **free and easy returns**, **guaranteed delivery dates**
- Easy ways to **evaluate products** and **compare prices**, **free gift wrapping**
- Stellar **customer service**

So, holiday values ... we value the magic, the meaningful connections, among those we love. It's just all the stress (and the money!) required that makes it feel less than magical. It's the ho-ho-hoping everything falls into place.



That could be the end, but it's not fair not to share some stories for understanding and inspiration. And we love them — so here is our holiday gift to you ... way better than that damn fruitcake.

In their words ... feelings during the holidays



Gen Z



I absolutely love this time of year. It can stress me out and make me sad because my family isn't together anymore which sometimes gets me depressed around this time of year. Besides that, I love the holidays and all that they have to offer.

I guess the main difference is that I won't be spending it with either of my grandmas this year. Normally we go to my dad's mom's house but my mom's parents come too. But this year my dad's mom passed away and my mom's mom just had a stroke and is now in a comma. So honestly I think no matter what we do this year it's not really going to feel like the holidays.

I'm only worried about the fact that I will not have enough money to buy my son the presents he deserves.

I'm feeling a lot happier about the holidays this year. My parents are more open to the thought of my boyfriend being around a lot more and that always makes me happy. So having him around my family too makes me excited to spend it with him and maybe even his family.



Millennials



Around this time my feelings are happy. I genuinely enjoy the holiday season and it has a positive effect on me.

Sometimes they're good, sometimes they're bad. My son passed away and I miss him extra around this time of year but it's nice that my family understands I might not always be in the spirit.

This holiday season is going to feel different because my mom is making less money which means not as many gifts which is also fine and I know she loves me. I also have to think about things I need for college more so I can be prepared.

My son is getting to the age where he understands what Christmas is and it's exciting to see him get excited over Christmas morning and Santa.



Gen X



Well, there was an illness with a family member early this year so this will be a special Christmas because they may not be around to have that many more so I will really be making sure they get all the favorite foods and gifts and whatever else they may ask for.

Nothing is really different this year. I look forward to it but my mom has Alzheimer's and I cherish this time with her because eventually she will not remember who I am.

It's pretty sad because we are getting older and the event will not be the same. Some relatives will not show up for dinner.

I suppose I am moderately more excited this year because now that I'm out of college and am able to work I can spend a little more money on presents and on helping our family decorate our home.

Well, my family is getting smaller just because our older generation is passing and I'm realizing that our time on this earth is small we need to get together and spend what time we have left.



Boomers



Everything will be traditional. I always look forward to Advent and the whole Christmas season. Nothing will noticeably change — it always is a variation of our family traditions. The house smells so good from the baking and cooking and looks beautiful. Decorations change but there are always some that don't — antiques from grandma's and special things collected over the years.

For the past five years I have to act very happy in front of the family. But I really wish holidays would not come around. God needed my wife more than I did I guess. For thirty-eight years we were always together and I have seen the pain in a kid's and grandkids' eyes.

As I get older the holiday season is more important watching the younger generation come along and enjoy the season. It is an enjoyable time for me.

In their words ... the gift-giving plan of attack



Gen Z



I really want to give the best gifts ever. I wanna make sure they're all very personal and show how much I love and appreciate the person I'm giving it to.

I buy gifts for my parents and two siblings normally from Amazon. I will also buy one of my cousins a gift because my family is big. We each get a cousin to buy a gift for so that everyone gets something and no one goes bankrupt.

My overall plan of attack is gift cards. It is impossible to know each person's reaction, so gift cards and cash work because they can go out and buy whatever they want.

This may sound awful but I don't really plan for any form of gifting to anyone I know. It's not entirely because I don't want to give anyone anything for the holiday but money has always been somewhat nonexistent in my wallet and I feel as if anything I make will never be good enough for the people around me.



Millennials



I plan to buy for close friends at work and the family members I get during secret Santa. I try to start saving around this time of year. I make a specific list of items the person might like and I always shop on the second Saturday in December.

Since this year I am not doing well financially I plan on doing more sentimental gifts that can be done at a lower cost.

I plan on shopping for things that are sentimental and less expensive. I plan on shopping on Black Friday to see if I can get deals or do online shopping primarily on Amazon to save on expenses.

All our family members make lists ahead of time and share them with everyone to give an idea of what we want for Christmas. I however have already started buying presents so that I don't have to rush as the day gets closer. For family I generally buy one 'big' present and one or two smaller presents. For my best friends I am making gift baskets with similar smaller items like fun socks, candy face masks, as well as two personalized presents like eyeshadow for one friend and a card game for the other.



Gen X



I start looking for ideas and by dropping hints about what they may need throughout the year or hear them talk about something and I write them down and look for sales starting in October. I will always shop on Black Friday and Cyber Monday for deals.

I'm busy doing lots of surveys so I can get gift cards to buy Christmas gifts with. I am saving money for a vacation after Christmas so I don't have much money to spend so I am trying to get gift cards to use to buy gifts for people.

I start buying early. I do not wait until the busy shopping season starts. I prefer to avoid all the madness. I look for deals online and in different stores. I don't wait for holiday sales. I'll still shop during the holiday season but maybe half of my shopping will be taken care of early.

We used to buy presents for everyone, now we're just buying presents for the kids. Again, we're trying to just get together with family and spend as much time together as we can. The presents are only being bought for the kids — no more gifts for adults.



Boomers



I try to give the grandkids something fun and something that will be a memory for them, such as a trip to see them, etc.

We will continue to curtail spending on excessive and unnecessary gifts. We've done this in previous years and it seems to bring more pleasure and less stress to all involved.

We will spend less on the grands due to retirement. They now give us specific items they want so it is much easier. The rest of us just gift each other with thoughtful but small gifts. Other than family we help with sponsoring a needy family so they can get the things they need and a few bonuses.

I began Christmas shopping in May 2019. I look for deals. My adult son likes sneakers so I always look for something unique for him. My daughter-in-law is the most difficult to shop for so I have to listen to her when she is talking to others to get clues. My grandchildren give me clues by getting excited about toy commercials they see on TV.

In their words ... ideal gift



Gen Z



A happier family somehow. Making my family work together and be peaceful for once would be the best gift in the world.

The most valuable gift someone could ever give me is 1M. That will give me financial freedom and overall freedom of my life. Money is what I want but the freedom is what I need.

The gift that would bring me the most joy is financial stability. Obviously that's a hard gift to give but we can't pay for my sister's college and my mom struggles to pay rent every month so I just want to take that burden away.

A gaming pc because my PS4 is not good enough to play competitively. Having a computer that could give me better FPS and smoother game play so I'm able to play more competitively.

Something handmade because I hate when people spend money on me and it shows thoughtfulness and deep thought and effort. I would really enjoy ditching the gifts and spending it on gifts for kids in need that are less fortunate.



Millennials



The gifts that bring me the most joy are those that lend to an experience instead of a tangible gift. An example would be a ticket to a show, outing or trip.

I lost my father this summer. Anything that would remind me of him or a framed picture would be the best gift we could receive this holiday season. We have had a very rough year... we can be thankful for life and take a break from all the stress and bad things.

They could pay off all of my debt. ALL of it. Student loans, my rent for the next year, my car repairs, delinquent debt, household debt. I'm full of it.

A relaxing few days off ... no stress.

More gifts with technology objects in them like smartwatches, laptops and handheld portable devices; different tech updates with newer tablet like device designs.

*Health . Weight loss. And a Gucci bag.
Health because I really don't feel one hundred percent every day and I really want to.*



Gen X



Whether it's a birthday or Christmas or any other holiday, the best thing I want is the tangible presence of the people I love and a sincere hug and words that make me feel loved, valued, nothing more — that's going beyond heaven for me.

I would love to receive plane tickets for a tropical location to escape winter. Spending time with my girlfriend on a beach is a beautiful thought. I'd love to have plane tickets to go see her.

Love, emotional security, physical security, financial security. Too many bills piling up, debt restricted choices in life — drudgery, hunger and exhaustion.

The only thing I want for this Christmas is for my wife and son to be healthy. I want to grow old with my wife and see my son grow up be a wonderful man and find a loving wife.

Unconditional love and not leaving me when times are hard. Because people who are ride or die for you are a gift that keeps on giving.



Boomers



All my kids and grandkids together and enough money to accommodate each one. All the kids playing with each other; grownups getting along. Not rushing to get things done just enjoy their presence.

I just want to spend time with my family. I am 72 and time runs out eventually on all of us. I would love a paid cruise to Alaska or somewhere fun. I would even love a Disney cruise vacation. I would want to go with a friend or, better yet, my son and his family. All I would really want is to be included in an experience that could build memories.

I don't like anything that is material. My health is the most important thing I would like to receive. To be stronger and have more energy in the coming months would be a blessing.

Some real good friendship and small talk. I am alone.

I need nothing for myself, but I would love to see the homeless find homes or all the kids missing their lost parents at the border find them.

In their words ... online shopping



Gen Z



Ordering online is more convenient and you can get better stuff, but waiting for shipping sucks.

Positive is, I'm almost always able to find what I want online especially when I get specific with my gifts. Negative is it always takes time to be delivered and it runs the risk of not being what I truly want.

Online shopping allows you to find what you're looking for very easily and is almost always in stock, but the cost of shipping can outweigh the pros and doesn't always take in-store sales into account.

Suggestive search options, literally anything is an option ... shipping is so unpredictable. Will it be early? Will it be late? Will it even be shipped? Also the probability that what you ordered could be in the wrong size is like one thousand.

Many options from lots of sources, don't have to leave your house, very convenient, reviews are available, you can get better prices than in-store sometimes ... you can't see all the options in front of you at once, you don't know what it will be like until you actually buy it. Online stores are a great resource.



Millennials



I absolutely adore online shopping. You can shop in the comfort of your home in your pajamas. You don't have to be involved in crowds of people and crowded malls. Standing in line is so hectic. There is nothing negative about online shopping. I think that's the best thing since sliced bread.

It's all about online shopping. No lines and no driving.

Online shopping is quick and easy. But then you don't know exactly what you're buying. You can't feel it.

I personally like the in-store shopping experience. I like the feel of all the people at the store and being able to physically see the items. Online can definitely be faster and more convenient if necessary.

I love online shopping because you can do it in the comfort of your own home and it's delivered right to your door. You have a wide variety of choices and can compare right there. The negatives are that it loses the social aspect of shopping that I love and you can't feel try the product in person.



Gen X

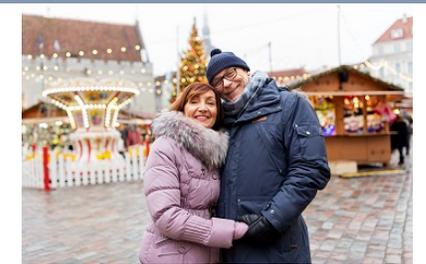


Online is convenient – can be done any time from home without crowds. Can also look around easily for different variations on gift, best prices, etc. And can have gift delivered directly to recipient — no carrying or visiting required. Can seem less personal but I think this is outweighed by other benefits all 'round.

I like the experience of in-store shopping during the holidays. I like the smells, the decorations and the experience. I also online shop — it's convenient.

I prefer in-store shopping. The gift giving experience involves feel and touch. You have to put your heart and soul into the gift to make it special. Online is fine but the feel is the most important thing.

Online shopping is fun. I get to skip the crowds and hassle of waiting in line, can easily compare prices and sales, faster from store to store, reach customer service faster if needed, but the shipping can be the frustrating part. Some charge too much or don't offer two or three-day shipping or it arrives late.



Boomers



I understand people like online shopping so they don't have to go to a store. I, however, do not shop online. I want to see the item, hold it. It helps me to verify I am getting a good quality for what I am paying. I am not happy with all the online shopping; it has killed the department store industry. The online shopping has removed a human factor in our lives.

You can be in your PJs at home and don't have to get ready or fight crowds. You can keep track of spending better. You can't touch or feel merchandise and you don't get to see it until it arrives and it could come late.

I do it all online or let's say I may go to a store and see something I like then I go online and find the same thing at a better price, then I buy it online. I shop Macy's, Target, Joann Fabrics, Sears, WalMart, JC Penney's, Hobby Lobby and Amazon Prime. I have a problem getting around; I have to use a cane or a walker. I find it easy to shop online from the comfort of my home. The goods are just as good or even better, and prices are competitive.

In the Weeds – Conversation & Detail



WHO WE TALKED TO

- 100 Gen Z – aged 13-21
- 102 Millennials – aged 22-38
- 104 Gen X – aged 39-54
- 110 Boomers – aged 55-72



416 Online interviews
with AI moderator



TECHNIQUES APPLIED

- ✓ Customized probing
- ✓ In-depth language review
- ✓ Quantified qualitative language analysis

1

Talk to me first about what's most enjoyable to you about the holidays. Help me understand what you most look forward to.

And what about the flip side? What do you find least enjoyable? Talk to me, in detail, about anything you'd like to change about the holidays.

2

Now, talk to me about how you and your family plan to celebrate this holiday season. Tell me about your plans and activities, and please touch specifically on anything you plan to do differently this year.

3

Still thinking about this year and how it's unique to other years, talk to me about your feelings about the upcoming holiday season. Help me understand what, if anything, might feel different to you this holiday season.

4

So, now I'd like you to tell me about your plans for gifting this holiday season. What's your overall plan of attack? I really want to hear your perspective.

Give me all the details please.

5

So, considering these plans and any past experiences with holiday gifting, I want you to think about your holiday gifting philosophy. Or maybe we'll call it your holiday gift-giving values. Explain that to me ... I want you to get deep.

6

You've got me thinking about the shopping experience, and I'd like to get your thoughts on gifting when you consider online shopping vs. in-store shopping.

For simplicity sake, talk to me about both the positive and negative impact of **online shopping**.

7

Whether online, in-store, or whatever, if you could talk directly to any brands or retailers, what would you share? How could they help you execute your gift-giving plan seamlessly and painlessly? Thinking beyond price, tell me how retailers could better support you, your philosophy, and your needs.

8

This is the most important question of the interview (and my favorite)! Especially considering everything we've talked about today, talk to me about the ideal gift for you.

No, really, what could someone give you that would bring you the most joy this holiday season?



If you're like us, you're obsessively curious about interesting trends. That's why we launched ***Beneath the Trend***.

Beneath the Trend reports demonstrate the depth of information that can be gleaned from Quester's artificial intelligence-backed software moderator.

If you have ideas for future ***Beneath the Trend*** research topics we'd love to hear them!

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