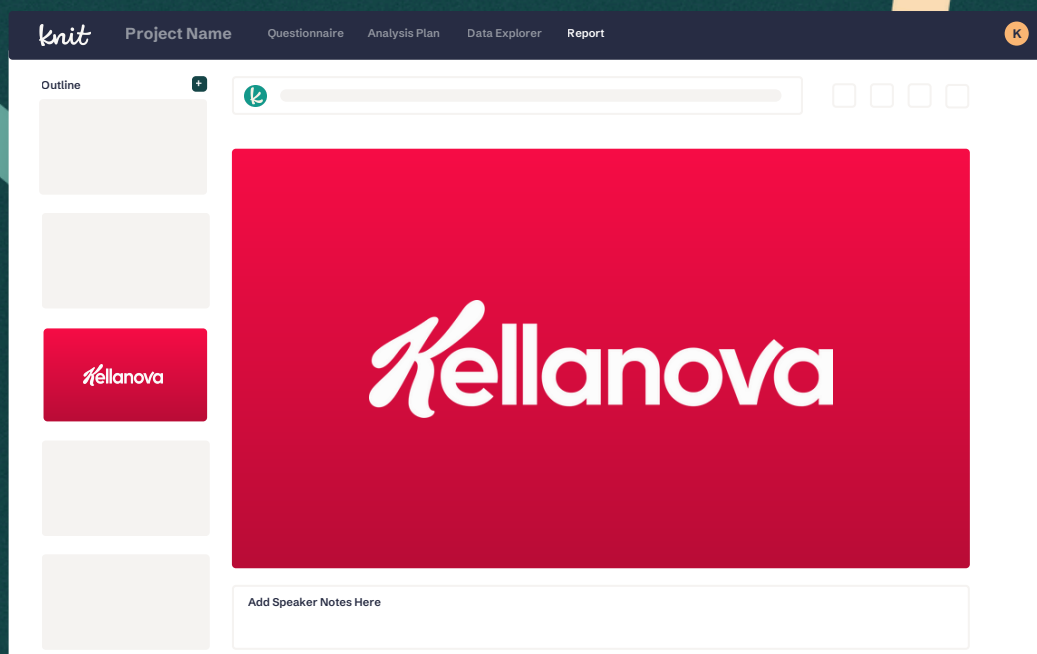


knit | Kellanova



How Kellanova uses
Researcher-Driven AI
to reclaim “cool” with Gen Z

About this case study

At CRC 2025, **Taylor Spaeth**, Senior Manager of Insights & Analytics for Pringles US at Kellanova, joined **Liam Hickey**, Head of Research at Knit, to share how their teams worked together to unlock a clearer picture of Gen Z consumers.

What began as a fairly straightforward brand health exploration quickly revealed something more powerful: **when you give Gen Z the right medium and ask the right questions, they don't just provide data points—they rewrite the story.**



Taylor Spaeth
*Senior Manager,
Insights & Analytics*

Kellanova



Liam Hickey
Head of Research

knit

Watch the full session between Kellanova & Knit:



Watch Now



The Gen Z research gap

For years, **snack brands have relied on traditional 18+ tracking studies to make decisions.** On paper, that seems fine—until you realize that nearly **two-thirds of Gen Z are excluded** or misrepresented by those methods. Teens under 18 aren't typically included in panels, and many 18-24-year-olds still live at home and aren't counted as household heads.

Add to that Gen Z's reputation as the most anxious generation, and the problem compounds. In live focus groups, they often give the answers they think a moderator wants to hear, or they conform to groupthink. The result is that the very consumers driving salty snack consumption—Gen Z accounts for the category's heaviest users—are often missing from the research designed to understand them.

Kellanova knew they needed another way. And Knit offered exactly that.

Why Kellanova turned to Knit

Knit's Researcher-Driven AI approach combines the speed and scale of automation with the oversight and interpretation of experienced researchers. For Taylor's team, three things stood out immediately:



First, Knit made it possible to **safely include under-18 consumers** thanks to COPPA-compliant recruiting and partnerships with specialist youth panels.



Second, its **integration of quant and qual in a single dataset** meant that **candid selfie-style videos** could be analyzed at scale, reducing the risk of cherry-picking powerful but isolated quotes.



And finally, Knit's platform **automatically generated polished showreels**—short, edited videos featuring consumer voices—that Taylor could take directly into the boardroom.

As Taylor put it:

“It really hits different when a Gen Z voice says, ‘Your brand’s pretty mid.’ A CFO can’t unhear that.”



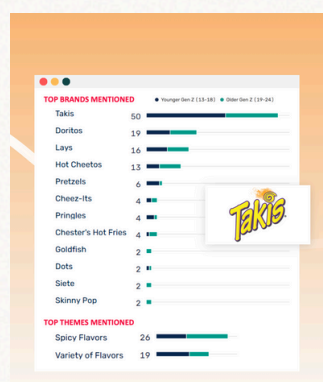
What “cool” really means

When Gen Z was asked—without prompts—what felt cool to them, the results were eye-opening.

Brands like Takis emerged again and again, cited for their bold, spicy flavors and variety. These responses didn’t just confirm a hunch; they **highlighted how different the Gen Z brand landscape looked** compared to the traditional 18+ equity trackers Kellanova had been relying on.

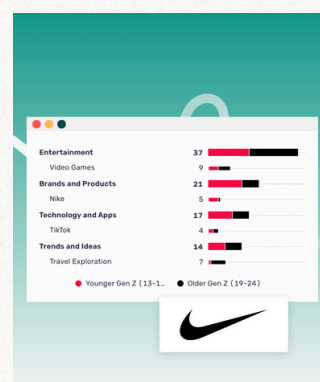
Equally revealing was the way Gen Z used language. Older researchers heard the phrase “pretty good” and assumed it was positive. But in Gen Z vernacular, **“pretty good” often translates to “mid”**—a polite way of saying indifferent, not distinctive, not cool.

And then there was Nike. At first glance, it seemed obvious that the brand would surface. But when Taylor’s team double-clicked into the video responses, what came through wasn’t trendiness. It was consistency. Nike was celebrated for staying true to its purpose, always showing up with the same authentic voice, and maintaining cultural credibility over time.



Takis gets acknowledged for Cool Factor with Gen Z in unaided mentions

Which daily snack brand feels the most cool to people your age right now—and why? Think about what makes it stand out, seems popular, or feel like something people want to be seen eating. 14/25



**Cool Isn't Always New:
The data's story
behind Nike**

What are three things you or your friend group think are cool right now—and why? These could be anything: brands, trends, apps, people, styles, or ideas. Just share what's cool to you and what makes it cool. 14/25

The voices that changed the room




Perhaps the most powerful part of the study wasn't the charts or the correlations—it was the **raw, unfiltered voices of Gen Z themselves.**

- “Yeah, the brand's pretty mid overall.”
- “I'm buying Lululemon now honestly because it was cited in a song I love.”
- “It's not about being the high school jock—it's about balancing your health. That's cool.”
- “We don't just want products, we want stories we can follow.”

For Kellanova, hearing these clips strung together in a showreel made the insights impossible to ignore. What once looked like “pretty good” brand scores suddenly translated into a much starker reality: the brand wasn't breaking through.

From “mid” to magnetic

Taylor outlined three shifts her team is now embracing:

-  **Doubling down on authentic assets.** Gen Z may not know the iconic cues that older consumers take for granted. Reintroducing them with confidence creates new resonance.
-  **Operating at the speed of culture.** By aligning agencies and internal partners, brands can jump into moments like a Taylor Swift album drop rather than missing them.
-  **Embracing niche.** In an era where there is no single “song of summer,” brands must be willing to participate credibly in micro-communities, even when it feels uncomfortable.

Showreels of teens describing what makes a brand “mid” or “magnetic” reframed conversations with executives. Instead of debating whether “pretty good” was good enough, **the conversation shifted to how Kellanova could reclaim coolness with its most important audience.**



Lessons for researchers everywhere

While the project focused on salty snacks, **the learnings apply across categories.** For researchers, a few lessons stand out:

- Don't assume 18+ samples capture your core consumers.
- Pay attention to “indifference” language—it can be more dangerous than overt negatives.
- Beware the bias of live qual with socially anxious cohorts.
- Use unaided measures to uncover cultural salience.
- Pair quant scale with qual richness to move from noise to clarity.

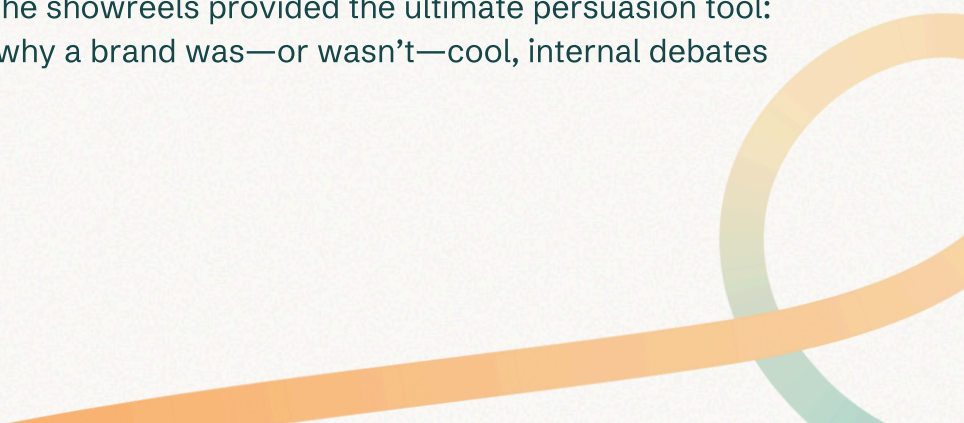
Or, as Liam put it:

“AI didn’t replace the researcher. It elevated them. The platform surfaced the truths faster, so Taylor’s team could spend their time deciding what it meant and what to do next.”

Results that mattered

One of the most compelling outcomes was a clear correlation between “coolness” scores and frequency of consumption. In other words, the cooler a brand was perceived to be, the more often it was chosen. **This gave Kellanova a quantifiable business case for brand equity investment—a notoriously difficult argument to make.**

The project also revealed just how different Gen Z’s unaided brand landscape looked compared to legacy trackers. And the showreels provided the ultimate persuasion tool: when Gen Z themselves explained why a brand was—or wasn’t—cool, internal debates ended quickly.



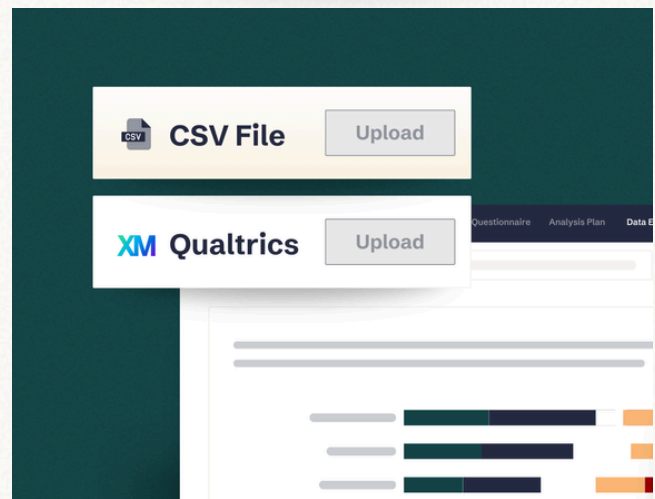
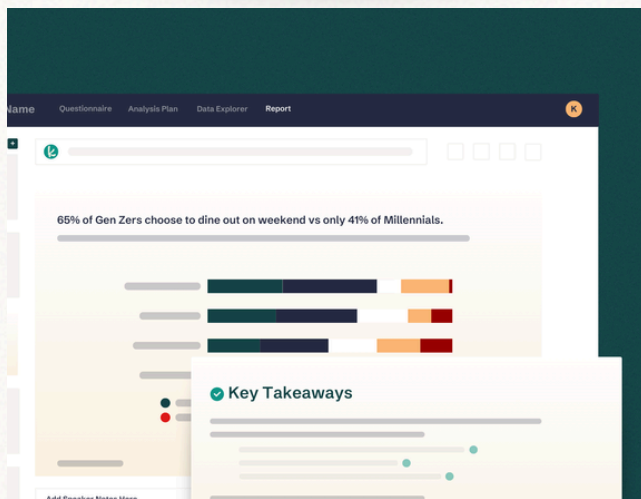
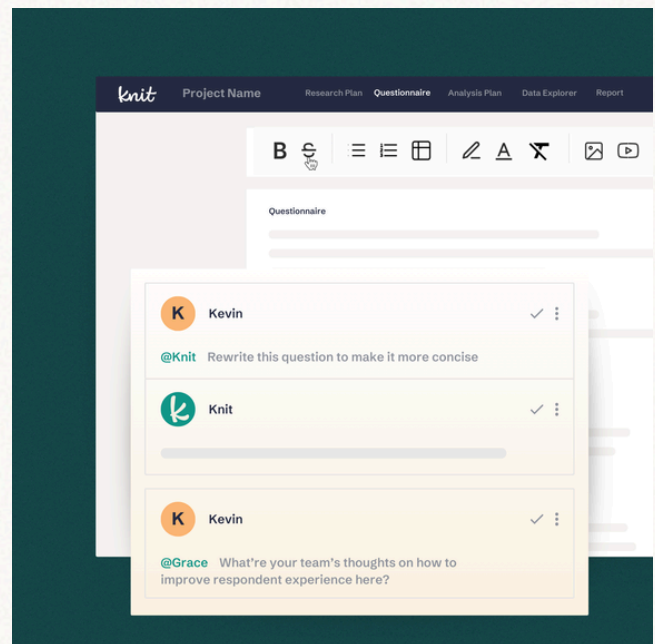
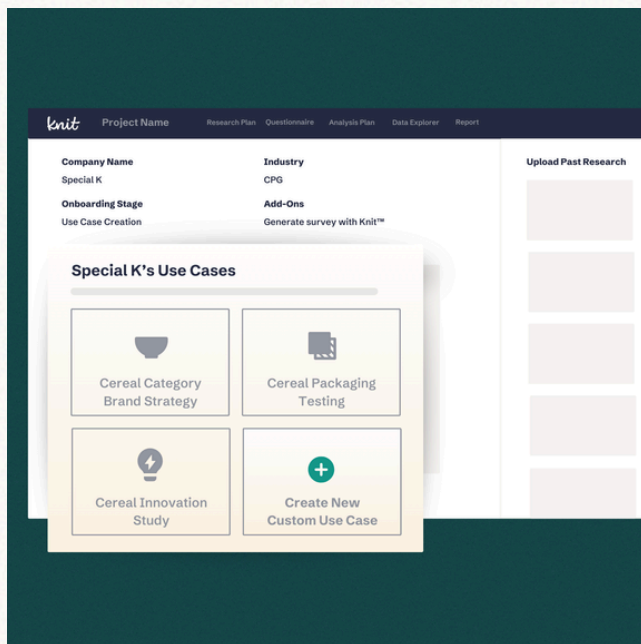
What Knit delivers

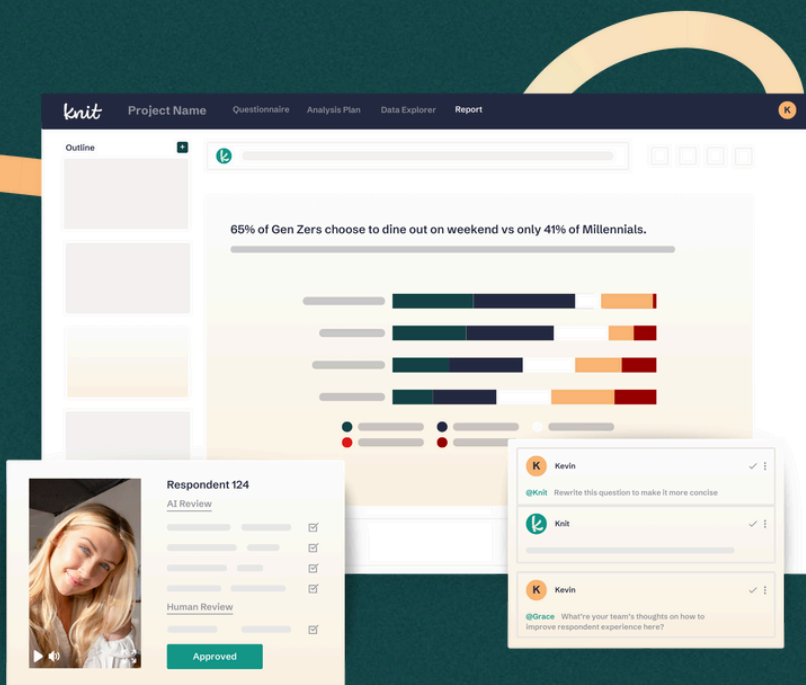
For Taylor's team, Knit wasn't just a vendor. It was an accelerant.

With Knit, they went from survey design to an analysis-ready report in days, not weeks. They were able to revisit the dataset and mine it for new questions without re-fielding. And they didn't just get numbers—they got stories, dramatized through consumer voices that made the data stick.

Or, as Taylor said:

“We didn't need more numbers. We needed voices that made the numbers impossible to ignore.”





Why Not Try Knit?

With that, I've just got one ask:

Why not experience the power of AI-Powered Quant + Video Research for yourself?

Find out how Knit can transform your research process and help you deliver deeper, more actionable insights in a matter of days. Whether you're looking to streamline your existing processes, enhance the quality of your insights, or simply reduce the time and cost associated with market research, Knit is here to help. Join the movement towards Researcher-Driven AI and take your market research to the next level.

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