“YOU SHOULD CHANGE AND NOT BE STUCK WITH THE SAME IDENTITY. ”

—Giselle M., 21
METHODOLOGY

NOT YOUR TYPICAL APPROACH
WE WERE DRIVEN BY TWO PRINCIPLES:

1. RESEARCH ABOUT GEN Z, BY GEN Z:
   To avoid making assumptions from afar, our research team included a significant number of Gen Z strategic planners and interns, working with Gen Z student researchers and interviewers, and calling upon the vision of Gen Z filmmakers. This report reflects the thoughts of more than 1,090 Gen Z researchers and research participants.

2. PEOPLE OVER NUMBERS:
   With a generation that has been “taught to the test” since preschool, we wanted to stay away from encouraging participants to give us the “right” answers instead of true answers. We avoided relying solely on traditional quantitative surveys, and heavily emphasized behavioral data and insights.
WHAT WE DID:

**Social-media identity research**, including Z-narrated social-media profile tours, Instagram and fake Instagrams (finsta) comparison interviews, and Pinterest identity boards, gave us an unfiltered look at online identities (n=119).

**Learnings from a national mobile appnography** allowed us to get an intimate, in-the-moment diary of Gen Z when they were alone with their devices (n=43). This also include a quantitative analysis (n=388).

**Tinder analysis** gave us a deeper look at the romantic lives of Gen Z: how they position their identity in pursuit of emotional and physical connection, and what they’re seeking from others (n=405).

**Gen Z-Led Focus Groups** included student researchers speaking with fellow young adults aged 18-22, enabling us to better observe Gen Z research hang-ups in action, relationship to research, and their posturing to peers. Focus groups were conducted in Norman, Okla. (n=76), among Gen Z kids aged 11-22, and in Fullerton, Calif. (n=17).

**Gen Z creative thinkers/filmmakers** were tapped to help show us who Gen Z is through their creative lenses, revealing thoughts and feelings that are often difficult to articulate in straight research interviews.

**Interviews with 17 first-line experts across the country**, including teachers, coaches, Bible-study instructors, therapists, school counselors, match specialists from at-risk youth programs, pediatricians and more, gave perspective from those who interact with Gen Z in the real world rather than in research settings.

**Insight from Gen Z’s favorite brands**: We spoke with leaders from Disney, Awesomeness TV, BuzzFeed, Nike and We Are Next about how they understand this generation, and how they see this new cohort changing their industries.
A lot of the reason these adjectives (motivated, entitled, over-compensating, overly hardworking, dedicated) describe our Gen is because of the circumstances we’re in. The job market being more difficult, a college degree not having much worth, constantly having to prove yourself more, to make yourself more marketable and diverse, pressure to be diverse and individualistic in what you’re doing with your life.”

—Zoe B., 21

DEFINING GEN Z?

In our zeal to understand them, experts have tossed around a slew of one-sided, absolute attributes about Z: engaged, globally minded, gender-fluid, brand-wary, anti-millennials, throwback generation, savvy, connected, pluralists, independent and pragmatic, and unafraid activists. Though Z encompasses many of these characteristics, the reality is far more complicated and nuanced than initial monikers would have it.

While each generation brings with them a new perspective, new values and new ways of doing things, Gen Z—the generation born between the late ’90s and mid-2000s—is poised to be the generation that upends the way we understand fundamental concepts that, until now, have seemed fixed in our national psyche. A fitting act for the last letter in the generational alphabet.

IS WHAT WE’RE SEEING ‘KIDS BEING KIDS,’ OR IS IT SOMETHING MORE?

More than a stage: the difference between life-stage and generational hallmarks.

A note about generations and generalizations: We recognize that it’s impossible to say with certainty that millions of people have the exact same defining characteristics in common. Generational research is, at its best, directional, based off a series of macro observations. A broad picture painted with a broad brush.

Because this generation is at the peak of their adolescence, special care has been taken to parse out normal life-stage fluctuations—in this case, those of being an everchanging and angst-ridden teen—from clues pointing to a larger generational disposition. Fortunately, Gen Z has been born into such radically different times, their unique way of passing through their current life stage serves as our peephole into predicting their world view moving forward. Think of Z as the “canaries in the coalmine,” and understand that today we are all living in the world that shaped them.
NINE SOCIETAL AND CULTURAL SHIFTS THAT MADE GEN Z, GEN Z

Significant macro-level societal and cultural shifts have occurred and intensified over the last 20 years, all during a critical phase of development for this generation. Even as young as they are, Gen Z has lived through the profound fracturing of what have been considered some of the most important building blocks of identity.

Core identifiers up for interpretation: With millennials at the helm, sex, gender, race and family are now open to ongoing redefinition throughout life. From transgenderism, to “choosing” your family to leaning into various aspects of racial identity over time, who you are on some of the most fundamental levels can change over time.

1. Dwindling privacy: Gen Z is constantly in the public eye during a key phase of personal development, weathering the broadcasting and scrutiny of a previously much more private journey. Often this results in solidifying and curating their “image” at young ages and throughout their adolescence—from having a compelling “story” to tell in college applications to branding themselves on highly professional/LinkedIn-worthy resumes, even for entry-level work. While other generations may remember a time before every life moment was broadcasted, this is all Z has known.

2. Traditional hallmarks of adulthood are in flux: Degrees, marriage, children, home ownership and “being a man”—all paths taken (or not) are increasingly acceptable and on one’s own time, delivering freedom of choice but also leaving little guidance.

3. Age compression and acceleration: Age compression—the concept that adolescents today are behaving in ways traditionally associated with those much younger—is expanding childhood into young adult years. Meanwhile, age acceleration—young girls and boys feeling sexualized, making adult choices and decisions about their gender, career, social stances, etc., are happening earlier in their lives.

4. The freedom and anxiety of no roadmap: Gen Z is finding themselves navigating uncertain pathways to financial security. Witness the decline of the college-degree-to-well-paying-job funnel and the overall questioning of the value of expensive education vs. the rise of the well-endorsed—and well-paid—YouTube personality.

WHAT MAKES THEIR GENERATION VERY UNIQUE
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NINE SOCIETAL AND CULTURAL SHIFTS THAT MADE GEN Z, GEN Z

6 Decline of mainstream pop culture: Media has changed considerably in their lifetime—long gone are the days of the handful of TV channels, magazines and blockbusters shaping the culture. With endless amounts of content (much of it generated by their peers), more choices of platforms, niche interests and topics, and an ever-on world, Gen Z lives in a time where pop culture is not a shared zeitgeist but rather a chosen view of the world.

7 The rise of micro-communities: Enabled by the connectivity of the Internet and social media, niche groups can find each other and build groups, creating more passionate micro-community identities—vegan pansexual feminists need not feel alone in the world—at the expense of a more diverse, large group identity.

8 Shifting toward more community-centric: More than even most Western countries, our national identity has historically focused on the importance and supremacy of the "rugged individual." Some argue that among other factors, immigration from and assimilation of more collectivist cultures, is subtly fueling a greater focus on behaving in accordance with the expectations and well-being of the group.

"EVERYONE HAS SOMETHING TO OFFER TO SOMEONE ELSE IN THE GROUP."
—Niyati S., 17 | Orlando, FL

9 Emotion leads: “You’re entitled to your feelings,” emotional intelligence and an emphasis on respecting the feelings of others—from anti-bullying programs to the mainstreaming of rehab—has put in sharp relief the importance of personal feeling and believing over established “facts” and “truths.”
DRIVING INSIGHT:

FOR GENERATION Z, IDENTITY IS CONTEXTUAL:

In a world that’s always watching and recording, life for this generation has been a performance piece—a world of “personal brands,” YouTube “personalities,” and larger-than-life social media personas. Defining their identity or “brand” is an ongoing editing process requiring Z to publicly try on different sets of selves. They may play up certain parts of their identity in one situation versus another. While not always “politically correct,” they strive to be “situationally correct.” Most important, their careful curation and presentation of their various public personas and profiles is fundamentally at odds with the idea of having one true, authentic self. As willing to shift as they are, Gen Z expects to see the same openness from the brands and influencers they care about.

“...I don’t personally like the advice ‘Be Yourself’ because there are so many elements of a person... I have my friends’ side, I have my student side, I have my business side, I have my creative side. There are so many different sides of me, that being like, ‘Be yourself,’ is kind of like being like, ‘pick one of those labels to latch onto and be that. Just be that.’”

—Maddy C., 16
INTRODUCING
THE IDENTITY SHIFTERS

For this generation, having one static “self” doesn’t make sense in the ever-altering, instantaneous, and always-connected world in which they live. The linear world has fractured into a million pieces. It is globalized and highly niche, broadcasted, instantaneous, always on and always connected. Where an everchanging world says adapt or die, Gen Z has responded by becoming identity shifters like we’ve never previously seen. As well-adapted as they are to this new world, we should expect that the typical “finding yourself” identity phase of teen and young-adult years will last their entire lives; for Z, identity is not a destination—it’s a journey lived every day.

Z defies labels and fixed identities, shifting between contradictory behaviors and attitudes, expectations and reality. Like a Rorschach test, Gen Z is open to interpretation. They change before the eyes of the viewer—the image they show is only a surface level understanding of the full picture. They have been expert curators in the one thing they own wholly: how people see them. They have an unprecedented preoccupation in publicly demonstrating the “self” that is best suited for the environment, the “self” most palatable for the group. It’s perhaps no wonder then that this generation is often noted for their empathy, inclusivity and acceptance: projecting the right “you” means being attuned to the wants and needs of others.

Gen Z is here to shift our understanding: to redefine authenticity, reinterpret the nature of identity, and to renegotiate the meaning of reality and truth. The result is neither good nor bad, savior-making or damning, and our reaction to their upending of identity is perhaps more of a commentary on our generations than theirs.

“...You should change and not be stuck with the same identity.”
—Giselle M., 21

“...You need to have different versions of yourself...it’s not being fake, there’s different aspects to yourself, everyone is complicated, so I think it’s okay to have different selves that you present.”
—Kristopher P., 22

“I think, who they (fellow Gen Zs) present, who they are by themselves, and who they are around their close circle, I think it’s like a pyramid-looking thing. Like three-dimensional, they’ve got like, different sides to them. And if you turn it one way, then it looks a little bit different.”
—Miranda R., 21

“Our generation is the generation that’s trying to ditch certain labels and think outside the box.”
—Kelsey I., 21
CHAPTER ONE

RELATIONSHIPS

MY LOVED ONES, MY AUDIENCE.

Like generations prior, Z largely defines themselves through their relationships with friends and family. But how they define these bonds are uniquely shifted—you choose your family, have friends you’ve never actually met in person, friendships that exist purely as social stats, and romantic partners you never really date.

They play up different parts of their identity based on who they’re with at the time, and how they want to be perceived. Z doesn’t see this as being disingenuous—it’s just a natural part of interacting with multiple “audiences.”
FAMILY & FRIENDS,
THIS IS JUST FOR YOU

“Sisters are long-time friends that know and understand things about you that others don’t. In this life, there are sisters you are born into the same family with, and others that become a part of your family. This (my) sister happens to be one that I grew up with and was born into the same family as, I believe she truly understands my vision and who I am and what I am trying to convey.”

—Dominique V., 20 | Atlanta, GA

“Whenever I’m around family, I’m…a little more cautious of what I say, but whenever I’m around friends, I feel like I can express freely.”

—Robert V., 23 | Los Angeles

“This picture of my son represents my chosen ideal of belonging because before being a mom I didn’t know what it meant to belong to a group of people that I could relate to as much as being a stay at home mom group or first-time mom groups.”

—Anna P., 21 | Carrollton, TX
“I think people’s identities are made of all the different things they are, like culture, sexuality, things that they believe in, things that they’re interested in, the way that their friends and family are like. It’s an amalgam of everything, it’s not one thing.”
—Cassie, 20 | Los Angeles

BRYAN T., 20, A GEN Z CONTENT CREATOR:

“In different groups of people, different friends, and different environments, I act completely in a different way...
Maybe if I’m like alone in a box then I can truly be real.

I really enjoy spending time with people, and I like portraying myself in different ways with different groups of people. I think all of those combined could make a real version of me.”
With the power to both connect and separate, technology has become a third party in any relationship Z maintains. For a generation born into this world, they wield technology to forge relationships better than most. For Z, the phone or laptop camera becomes a gateway promising endless adoration, and an escape from the sometimes unfulfilling or uncomfortable reality of building one-to-one relationships.

On meeting an online friend in real life:

“**You can’t really get to know somebody until you meet them in person.** And like I think one of the biggest things for me to realize that is that I just met a friend that I’ve known online for two years and meeting them in person was a completely different experience, so you really can never know someone till you meet them in person. And even when you meet them in person you’re not even guaranteed to meet like the real them.”

—Aidan J., 16 | San Pedro, CA
Given the choice between fame, power and belonging, only 23% of Gen Z in our national ethnography study chose belonging

Gen Z is more likely to say they trust social media and influencers when they are looking for answers (52%); people who they actually know—like friends and family—came in second (47%)

Where or who do you trust when you’re looking for information or learning about something? Open-ended, N=333

WELL, MY (VIRTUAL) FRIENDS THINK I’M COOL

“ I see kids would rather be on their phone than make a friend. I have to ask kids to put their phone away—they aren’t ignoring it, but they need it to have a conversation. One of the biggest issues I’ve seen arise the most between a Big + Little matches is not breaking through to the kid—a year goes by and they continue to be quiet, withdrawn, not vocal, shy. I think down the road this will be a concern for Bigs, having to put their foot down. ”

—Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Match Specialist For Low-Income and High-Risk Kids | Los Angeles

“They might not feel necessarily comfortable with talking to their parents or authority figures. But to be in front of the camera, ironically, makes them feel comfortable. These insular kids feel that they can just look directly to their camera or their phone and talk directly to their friends, or their fans, etc. in order to get their opinions heard.”

—Megan Bycell, Head of Talent Relations, AwesomenessTV

On why she wants fame and to be an Instagram model:

“ I COULD GET ALL THIS ATTENTION I NEVER GOT AS A CHILD. I STILL DON'T GET IT. ”

—Bella N., 14 | VA
Z APPROACHES DATING AS LEAVING DIGITAL BREADCRUMBS OF THEIR IDENTITY ACROSS PLATFORMS.

You’ll only truly understand who you’ve matched with if you go check out their insta, finsta, Snapchat and Spotify. Even so, with an ever-changing bio and uncertainty whether they want anything serious, dating can be more like playing an avatar in a fantasy game than a true romantic pursuit.

“...I don’t love how superficial it (Tinder) is, and I’m not actually using it to find a long-term relationship. I think it’s more of a hookup app and more of a time waster. It’s like playing a game on your phone.”

—Martina M. 18 | MN

“I have 3 photos of myself, and the bio is more of a joke than an actual description of who I am. I guess it shows I like cracking jokes and I (like) experiencing things. I also plugged my food instagram because that’s definitely a huge part of my personality and what I like...

—Martina M. 18 | MN
What prompts you to make changes to your profile?

"I think I’m constantly changing, so the way I want to be perceived by certain people is constantly changing too."

—Keyla Y., 20 | Bronx, NY

"I like the sense of ambiguity with limited pictures and bios. I find them good conversation starter. These pictures display what I look like but also what I love. My family."

—Miguel P., 20 | St. Paul, MN

In our national ethnography study, 68% of participants were currently or previously active on a dating site, and only 31% had not used them at all.

The most popular dating app among participating Gen Z were Tinder (41%), followed by Bumble (37%).
THE THRILL OF THE CHASE

SAY LITTLE, SWIPE MUCH:
LEARNINGS FROM OUR NATIONAL TINDER STUDY (N=405)

Even though it’s a dating app, only 12% stated what type of relationship they were looking for.

Of the profiles that used emojis, those who were open to interpretation and ambivalent were most prevalently used (33%). This is consistent with the overall wry and meta tone evident on the platform, with people trying to project an image of not taking things seriously or personally, and a larger culture of not being easy to pin down or label.

People seemed to go all-or-nothing in their bios. 48% of Z used fewer than 10 words in their bios, and 22% didn’t use any words at all. Only 18% used more than 30 words to describe themselves.

“Teens these days are having less long-term girlfriend and boyfriend pairings. They are still dating, but casual relationships are much more common, there is less emphasis on exclusivity.”
—Pediatrician in Underserved and High-Immigrant Community | Fitchburg, MA

“Relationships between same sex (couples) is more open than ever before. Kids take sex and casual sex like it’s no big deal…they are spotted in the bathrooms making out and having sex.
Kids making out underneath the stairway. No indiscretion. It’s a problem at school. And, they’re videotaping each other.”
—Graphic-Design Teacher | Laredo, Texas, 98% Hispanic Population.

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—Graphic-Design Teacher | Laredo, Texas, 98% Hispanic Population.
EVERYONE SEES A DIFFERENT Z.
THEY ARE RELATIONSHIFTED.
BELIEF IS KEY TO IDENTITY, BUT DON’T TAKE IT PERSONALLY.

Gen Z is hyper-sensitive to how they will be received by their peers and go out of their way to avoid criticism, especially when their beliefs diverge from the socially accepted norm. If their beliefs infringe on the beliefs of someone else, they deflect risk of blowback by throwing out a “you do you” to protect themselves from judgment. Conversely, if they show feelings of being hurt or appear upset by the beliefs of their peers, they are often batted down as being “oversensitive.”
IN OUR OKLAHOMA FOCUS GROUPS, THE 16–18 AGE GROUP CONTINUALLY REFERRED TO THE ACRONYM Q-TIP, OR “QUIT TAKING IT PERSONALLY.”

THIS WAS USED TO DISCOURAGE OVERSENSITIVITY, WHICH THEY SAID STEMS FROM A LACK OF SELF-ESTEEM.

“I THINK THIS GENERATION IS WAY MORE EMOTIONAL BECAUSE WE TAKE EVERYTHING SO SERIOUSLY. CHILL, IT’S JUST A JOKE DUDE.”
—High-School Respondent | Oklahoma

“I get opinionated, which could be a good thing and could be a bad thing… I am strongly opinionated about things sometimes and I do feel comfortable saying those things in front of my friends, but sometimes they do disagree, and that’s fine, and I’ve never gotten into a fight with a friend about a different opinion, but I do feel like sometimes maybe me and my friends don’t feel like we’re fully allowed to share our opinions because we’re afraid that we’re going to disagree with each other.

I feel like disagreeing with people makes us very nervous because we’re afraid of losing friends. Because being in a place like the internet where you do have a lot of transient friends, maybe friends that kind of come and go or people that you don’t know very well, and that sort of thing, that having a real, authentic friend is rare. It’s very valuable, and we’re very scared to lose that over something as stupid as disagreeing about something.”

—Maddy C., 16 | Burbank, CA, Gen Z YouTuber
For Gen Z espousing a personal opinion is a surefire way to open yourself up to judgment and criticism in our fractious world. By not injecting their own beliefs into a situation—not “taking it personally” (i.e., not having an opinion)—Gen Z is able to navigate today’s hyper-polarized landscape more freely, leaving their core beliefs intact and unchallenged.

"I DON'T USUALLY GO ON FACEBOOK TO SHARE MY EXACT THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS AND GET TOO DEEP INTO MYSELF JUST BECAUSE SO MANY PEOPLE CAN SEE IT."

—Steven C., 21 | Salt Lake City
‘WE ARE THE REPOST GENERATION’:

Insight about Gen Z, From Gen Z:

“YOUNGER GENERATIONS OPT TO SHARE (RETWEET, REPOST, ETC.) EXTREME OPINIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA RATHER THAN DIRECTLY POST THEIR OPINIONS, OVER FEAR OF DISCOURSE IN A HYPER-TENSE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT.”

MODERATOR:

“Hey, Kene! Can you tell me a little bit about the stuff that you liked but didn’t retweet because they were controversial? What were they about? Why didn’t you want to share them?”

KENE O., 21 | COLUMBUS, OH:

“So, the tweets were just really funny yet really offensive tweets that I know it’s not right to laugh at/retweet because they were controversial? What were they about? Why didn’t you want to share them?"

And so it’s a little bit of: “I want to stay authentic, but I’m trying to stay authentic, but I have to be perceived a certain way, and it’s actually bringing me more anxiety, and more depression.

And so it’s that horrible, unfortunate, kind of dichotomy of “I’m going to get out there and try to say what I believe, but it’s also really hard to say that…”

—Megan Bycell, Head of Talent Relations, AwesomenessTV
DESPITE THIS BALANCING (OR PERHAPS, BECAUSE OF THEIR FEARS), GEN Z EXHIBITS A DESIRE FOR POWER AND CONTROL OVER GROUPS.

They walk a tightrope of wanting to influence the group and be seen as special but not wanting to put themselves out there for fear of upsetting people or doing something wrong.

“In my community I’m known as a scary person so naturally everyone doesn’t want to get on my bad side. I’m not sure why I’m scary but it comes in handy when I want things done. Everyone knows my threats aren’t an actual threat but they’re still scared of me in general. It’s nice to know I have some sort of pull over people......(I) feel superior to certain people, like I had power over them.”

—Bella N., 14 | Alexandria, VA

Out of a choice of fame, power or belonging, the majority (58%) of our Gen Z study participants chose “power”—defined as “having the ability to direct or influence the behavior of others” as the trait they most desired.

Influence (26%) was also talked about in terms of “power”—i.e., if they had power, they could influence others, or if they had influence, they would be powerful. Belonging was the least-selected idea (15%), with many feeling they already had it, or that people would want to be associated with them if they were powerful or influential enough.
"SOCIAL MEDIA MAKES ME FEEL SUPERIOR."

—Kyle T. 16 | Norman, OK

"I THINK IN SOME WAYS WE’RE OPTIMISTIC CAUSE WE’RE TRYING TO MAKE DIFFERENCES AND WE’RE IN AN ERA OF MAKING CHANGES AND TRYING TO BETTER EVERYBODY’S LIVES IN SOME WAY AND RAISE AWARENESS FOR THINGS"

—Kayla L., 20 | Los Angeles

"When you have power, you have influence. You have literally the force within you to inspire people and make a difference. And people want to listen to you when you have power. So, I believe that power…is the greater the threat. So yeah that’s why you use power for. If I could have any of those three."

—Dominique V., 20 | Atlanta

“I BELIEVE… I SHOULD RULE THEM ALL"
WANTING TO BE HEARD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE WHILE ALSO GUARDING BELIEFS FROM THE CRITICS.

WHAT IS A KID TO DO?
#ME, MY GREATEST ASSET.

Growing up in a world of Instagram influencers, YouTube stars, and the ability to rapidly share anything online, Gen Z shifts their identity between the realness of Snapchat to the feigned perfection of Instagram, all to show the side of themselves they want to highlight at that moment.
A MORE POWERFUL YOU

Of participants in our national ethnography, 83% were aware of the "finsta," or spam or fake account phenomenon, 46% personally had one, and only 17% had no association with a finstagram account whatsoever.

Not having a smartphone “will significantly hurt your social life,” according to 65% of Gen Zers

(2017 Awesomeness/Trendera Report)

“YOU CAN PRETEND TO BE SOMEONE ELSE (ON INSTAGRAM), AND IT’S EASIER TO BE MEAN TO (OTHER PEOPLE).”

—High-School Student | OK

“MY FINSTA IS MY MORE ‘RAW’ SELF.”

—High-School Respondent | OK

“THERE ARE TWO VERSIONS OF SELF, THE BALANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA SELF AND ‘REAL’ SELF BUTT HEADS.”

—High-School Respondent | OK

The dependency of being young can often make young adults feel powerless—but here enters a potent tool to combat any sense of weakness: sweet, wonderful, magical social media. Gen Z has rallied behind the ability to express themselves on various platforms, and by selves, we mean all the selves contained in just one person.

“THEY TAKE ON A PERSONA IN SOCIAL MEDIA THAT BECOMES BIGGER THAN LIFE, AND BECAUSE OF THAT, THEY GARNER POWER IN A WAY THAT’S UNHEALTHY.”

—Principal at Catholic High School | San Francisco Bay Area

(On his vlogging channel)

“It’s a lot easier to express yourself in a freer way, and there’s always going to be someone who’s supportive of you because it’s all over the world.”

—Rowan L., 16 | Littlestown, PA

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“My finsta is my more ‘raw’ self.”

—High-School Respondent | OK

“There are two versions of self, the balance of social media self and ‘real’ self butt heads.”

—High-School Respondent | OK

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“They take on a persona in social media that becomes bigger than life, and because of that, they garner power in a way that’s unhealthy.”

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WHO CAN YOU TRUST ONLINE NOWADAYS?

SOCIAL MEDIA FUNCTIONS AS A HUB OF BOTH TRUTH AND MISINFORMATION. Z LOOKS TO QUANTITY FOR TRUST: LIKES, COMMENTS AND FOLLOWERS. IF THEY FEEL LIKE THEY KNOW AND LIKE YOU —EVEN IF THEY ACTUALLY DON’T— IT BUILD A SENSE OF TRUST.

“Typically, I trust very specific YouTubers who often fall into the edutainment category on YouTube.”
—Joe H., 20 | Midwest

“I trust accounts that have lots of comments on their posts and where it looks like people are actually engaging in the posts as well. There could be someone who posts something, but nobody likes it or comments on it, so to me that just looks suspicious...However, sometimes it’s hard to find accounts that you can trust because major influencers lie about certain things.”
—Vanessa Z., 21 | Southeast

“I think this is the first generation that really doesn’t seem to have a problem talking directly to companies. Through Twitter, through the power of the comment section on their websites, they will tell you who they are, what they want, and when they want it.”
—Elliott Kennedy, Writer at Nike

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“WHO CAN YOU TRUST ONLINE NOWADAYS?”

“I trust bloggers I’ve followed for a while on which beauty products to try out! I try to stay away from anything sponsored when looking for info.”
—Caroline S., 21 | Midwest
WHO CAN YOU TRUST ONLINE NOWADAYS?

“...We always try to cast a YouTuber or an influencer in most of our premium content... because they LOVE those people.

That, I think is something that’s very different about Gen Z as well - this influencer space is very important to them. It really comes down to: you feel like you’re kind of their friend, you feel like you know them, you feel like they’re a lot less untouchable...

It really breaks down that wall of separation between this untouchable figure of an actor/actress and someone who’s sitting literally in their living room you know, and I think that whole set up of just people literally on their cameras, on their computers, just shooting wherever they’re at - it just makes it so much more accessible to teens.”

—Emily Loren, Communication and PR Specialist, AwesomenessTV
Creating a filtered and unfiltered version of self on platforms, especially Instagram, is the new norm in choosing how much of “you” you want people to know. Smaller groups get the more intimate details, larger groups, the most buzzworthy. The most accurate representation? Somewhere in between the idealized, followership-designed account and the spam or finsta account (which ironically, means the more “real” version of you—not the fake one).

“We have different accounts for different audiences. We make our accounts so that we can please whomever will be viewing them... It is not possible to see the real person at the center of it. It’s only a piece of the whole picture. They are still real but being viewed from a way you can not see the whole view.”

—Aidan J., 16 | San Pedro, CA

On this generation’s behaviors and attitudes:

“...It’s less of a blatant contradiction and more of a massaging of who they are and what things are. Constant negotiation of what you’re going to say. These kids are very savvy in manipulating how they present different fronts on different platforms... they’re expert curators in how they present an identity where and who your audience is and what they see.”

—Digital Media Anthropologist | Los Angeles
“There’s this clear understanding of by platform they really understand – is this a veneer of me? Versus this platform is really just for the 15 people I really care about...They’re going to want to see this sort of authentic self. And I think depending on which platform, they change. that because they clearly understand who their audience is.”

—Edwin Wong, VP of Research and Insights for BuzzFeed

“You’re not going to do the same thing on Instagram as you would on Snapchat as you would on Facebook so I think it goes the same for a teen and I think personal branding is really important to them....”

—Emily Loren, Communication and PR Specialist, AwesomenessTV
They are voraciously watching the actions of their peers—and hope they are being watched, too. The pressure is real to keep current with friends and the world, with being in the know and establishing connections as primary motivators. Each platform and your followership dictates the hat you put on and the behavior—like liking your mom’s post on your unused Facebook to be a good son or daughter vs. keeping your Snap streak going so you remain BFFs.

“I love Instagram. I like getting insight on what other people and how they’re living their lives and I get to show other people what I do and how I live my life. So, I like that connection that I get with strangers.”
—Fatima A., 18 | East Coast

“I never use Facebook. I barely even touch it. That’s just me. I haven’t touched my Facebook ever since 2000. I don’t know, 2004.

My mom, she just tagged me in posts, and that’s how my page is filled up with all this crap. I don’t use it and I never plan on it because it’s not really my thing. I don’t like Facebook that much. Only things I use Twitter Snapchat Instagram.”
—Justin M., 16 | Mobile, AL

“I often look at buzzfeed news for updates on what is happening around the world currently, and if it seems like an important issue that I’m interested in learning about, I’ll google it and use different news sources.”
—Zoe S., 16 | East Coast

“I actually really love Facebook, right there with Twitter. I’ve used it for years and years and years.

Normally when I come to Facebook I like to look at my friend’s posts. I like to see what’s going on...I like to like post sometimes, I like to ‘love’ posts.

I like to upload pictures of me and my family and my cat, of course. And just things that I find funny. I’m not afraid to post multiple times a day. I love to post things about food candy and controversial relatable things.”
—Anna P., 21 | Carrollton, TX

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—Anna P., 21 | Carrollton, TX
"Some people think of (Snapchat) streaks as a time marker of friendship. When they meet a new friend, they add them on Snapchat and start a streak. 500 days later they celebrate 500 days of streaks.

To other people streaks are just a fun or annoying feature that counts how many days in a row you’ve snapchatted a person. To me personally, I always keep less than 20 streaks so it doesn’t cloud my phone with notifications."

—Bella N., 14 | Alexandria, VA

"I love watching youtube mommy bloggers and I also use the what to expect blog to talk to moms my age and moms around me! Also the occasional thread on twitter about something mommy related.

Often, we talk about controversial topics (pros, cons, etc) and other times just supporting each other during hard times and questionable times."

—Anna P., 21, Gen Z Young Mother | Carrollton, TX

TRENDING UP

WITH THE JONESES.

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NATIONAL STUDY OF GEN Z AND MILLENNIAL SOCIAL MEDIA:

How often do you engage on your Social Media accounts?

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<th>MILLENNIALS</th>
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Which Social Media accounts do you have?

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<th>MILLENNIALS</th>
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TRENDING UP WITH THE JONESES.
THE POWER OF A POST

Z has taken note of the keys of success from start-up brands and influencers. Social media is a place to start your empire by building your personal brand across platforms. We spoke with kids as young as 13 who were worried about maintaining the aesthetic of their accounts, and archived content that didn’t match their current personal brand. Juggling the imperfect self and the personal brand of “you” isn’t easy, but they’re convinced there is a reward to it: mini-celeb status, trust, influence, power and more await. Z sees their identity as a resource to be monetized—if they can be artistic, desirable or cool enough, a following will lead to influence—and after that, the sky is the limit.

“I want to be a(n Instagram) model... And I feel fame could just really boost my goal... And honestly, fame is just amazing.

I get all this attention I never got a child. I still don’t get any attention.

I got (could get) sponsored deals and everything... You know honestly I just see it as something that could really help improve my life.”

—Bella N., 14 | Alexandria, VA

“I try to keep my Instagram aesthetic pretty simple and clean. There are a good amount of pictures of me and friends. It’s nice to get a lot of likes, definitely boosts my confidence. I’m usually following influencers, friends, and sometimes brands.”

—Andie W., 22 | Chicago
THE POWER OF A POST

"My mission is to spread self-love and self-awareness throughout the world by sharing my story and helping others share theirs..."

I'm ready to launch a (social media) movement of self-love and discovering, (for) who you are and where you come from...I also share affirmations on my platform for others to see."

—Dominique V., 20 | Atlanta, GA, Who Lists Her Job Title as Business Owner

"The brand that I believe best represents the majority of other people my age is Snapchat..."

Snapchat captures the immediacy that our generation thrives on, technological evolution, and publicly constructed self-image over the internet."

—Emily, 23 | East Coast
WHEN BEING KNOWN MEANS BEING POWERFUL, SOCIAL MEDIA BECOMES AN IDENTITY TEST LAB.
Multiculturalism is one of the most prominent markers of this generation. Not only is there more racial diversity, but there is also greater overlap in cultures, making personal identity multilayered and complicated. For many, navigating multiple cultural or ethnic identities comes with challenges of fitting in the “box.” With their keen sense of group dynamics, Z often struggles with their own identity among their varying cohorts—to play up, play down, or push against what is expected of them.
WHEN WHO YOU ARE IS NOT X ENOUGH
(OR Y, OR Z)

Many Z identify with multiple ethnic or racial identities. And with the keen sense of group dynamics this generation has, there is often a struggle with owning one’s identity among their varying cohorts. There is a pressure to play up, play down, or push against what is expected of them, both in intimate circles and society at large.

“WHO IS ACCEPTED AS THE STAND-IN AS THE ‘EVERY MAN’ HAS CHANGED. THEY WANT A MULTIPlicity TO HONOR THE MULTIplicity OF THEIR IDENTITY.”

—Digital Media Anthropologist working with LGBTQ and low-income Latinx families | Long Beach, CA

“YOU DON’T FIT INTO AN IDEAL BOX. I THINK THAT’S HOW I’VE ALWAYS FELT, ESPECIALLY BEING FROM TWO DIFFERENT CULTURES.”

—Sam Y., 21 | Los Angeles

This generation is more racially diverse than any prior group and expects to see it supported and reflected by the brands they buy.

(Mintel, May 2018)

“In communities where there’s like less Latino people, I feel like I have to downplay that...But when I go back to my community, I have to pretend like I’m more Latina, even though I don’t speak Spanish and stuff. So now I’m like in the middle.”

—Sabrina C., 20 | Los Angeles
**THE LABEL DANCE**

Z is resistant to anyone else labeling them—because others so often get it wrong. Among themselves, they often struggle to avoid offending others by saying something perceived as less than accepting or privileged. We heard so many pauses and carefully chosen words whenever Zs shared their thoughts on other groups; painfully inclusive and accepting, they aren’t always sure how someone wants to identify, and trying to avoid mislabeling others is highly stressful.

"The hashtag #praisintheasian was made for people to embrace their culture. I use it every now and then to show I am proud of who I am. Many others also use it, in showing how ‘the model minority’ stereotype doesn’t affect who they really are."

—Khushi S., 14 | Orlando, FL

"People are struggling with the pressure to put yourself in a box—‘I’m a mixed-race couple,’ ‘I’m gender-fluid,’ etc. – people are asking so many questions about what are you, who are you?

They are both empowered to speak out about it and burdened by it."

—Clinical Psychologist | Boston
On what worries her about the world today, and 10 years from now:

"I’m worried about the lives that are under attack. I think about it everyday. The intersectionality of my identity already puts me at a worldly disadvantage, but I find myself always thinking about the beings who don’t occupy the privileges that I do, and how I can I make myself of use to them."

—Keyla Y., 20 | Bronx, NY

On his ethnicity and the workplace:

"Everybody has preconceived notions, whether or not we think we do. And our ability to come in with understanding rather than judgment I think is the best way to compensate for those differences and be able to get along with everybody I think that’s something I try to do on a daily basis."

—M. Chow, 21 | Boulder, CO, Who Identifies as African American and Caucasian

"I’m very, very fortunate to not have to think twice about my race. I do think it’s unfortunate race plays such a huge part in where we live, who we are, and even our identity.

There are certain things like gender and religion and politics and even race that are part of identity and, think how we... sorry I’m trying to think before I say it, how we determine identity should really only be for ourselves and not for others.

But I feel like the society we live in is very quick to assume the identity of others."

—Izelle G., 22 | Los Angeles
For Zs of lower socioeconomic status, or from rural environs, another layer of navigating the larger world comes into play, balancing the uncomfortable labeling of being "working class" with their own pride and relationship to the term.

"I’m from a really small rural town in Oregon – and I was kind of ashamed of that going into college, I didn’t really want to tell people where I was from, I was like: ‘Oh, I’m an hour from Portland.’ But it gives me a lot of insight I never really thought that I had beforehand and so, I would say it’s a big part of who I am but it’s not my bread and butter."

—Hannah K., 21 | Mount Angel, OR

Growing up in a lower middle-class family has definitely shaped my identify. It made me realize how different groups of Americans look at each other.

Most of my friends now were born on the coast, and have homes in the Cape or the Hamptons. Many of them look to working class people in the Midwest as uneducated and uncultured.

Growing up the way I did, I thought that people on the coast were elusive, cold and greedy. Now, having experienced both cultures, I realize that both groups have no idea what it’s like to be on the other side. It’s made me empathize with the poor and the rich. Hahah it’s been a weird ride."

—Emily A., 22 | Boston, MA, Who Recently Went From Mid-Lower Income to a $150K Job
MORE DIVERSITY MEANS MORE SHIFTING BETWEEN THE LABELS THAT ARE GIVEN AND THE ONES THAT ARE CHOSEN.
GENDER AND ORIENTATION TAKE CENTER STAGE.

Gen Z has grown up amid bathroom battles; Caitlyn Jenner’s public gender transition; James Charles as the first male CoverGirl model; and the rejection of gendered toys. Coming out is now a social-media broadcast event, while decisions to question, label and identify gender and sexuality are occurring at increasingly younger ages. Gender and orientation are talked about as a construct: subjective, fluid, and maybe less important in defining who you are than we assume.
YOU DO YOU, AND THEY DO THEY.

Z has already been wrapped in the trappings of being the gender-fluid, all-accepting generation. For the most part, they do seem to embody this; however, their feelings about gender are far more complicated. Some feel a deep tension between a generational zeitgeist of avoiding labels and passing judgment of any kind and their own discordant discomfort and beliefs. Privately, accepting non-traditional genders (and orientations) is not easy for many members of Gen Z. Despite that uneasiness, Gen Z still largely waves the banner of “you do you,” and feel that acceptance and allowing individual choice is paramount.

When listing out what attributes compose a typical person’s identity in focus groups, gender was not brought up by respondents. When asked why, a 20-year-old lesbian college respondent from Fullerton, Calif., said:

“ I DON’T CARE (ABOUT MY GENDER), I DON’T WAKE UP AND SAY ‘DAMN, I’M A GIRL.’ I KNOW FOR OTHER PEOPLE IT MUST BE MORE MEANINGFUL FOR THEM. ”

Fifty-six percent of Generation Z knows someone who goes by gender-neutral pronouns of “they,” “them,” or “ze,” compared to 43 percent of those aged 28-34.

(JWT 2016)

“I don’t know, I’m probably going to be very disliked. But I feel like you’re either male or female, if you want to present yourself a different way, you can do whatever you want.

But, I feel like, in my head, you need to accept that people are going to be for you or against you, so just be open to people that are just going to dislike you. And I don’t agree with any of that at all, like I’ve seen recently a hate crime and I’m like, ‘Well, why would you hate someone so much?’ And yet, I don’t understand it, I don’t, but I’m very accepting, you know, but I just believe in male or female, so yeah. ”

—Izelle G., 22 | Los Angeles
In Oklahoma focus groups, the Gen Z college-student researchers comfortably asked questions about depression, bullying and loneliness but refused to question fellow Gen Z students about gender “for fear of being offensive.”

“Gender is fluid, so I mean, it changes. I mean, one of my roommates is gender fluid, so it depends on the day and how they feel.”

—Charity C., 20 | Los Angeles

“It’s not for me to judge. Like, I’ll have my opinions. But like, I think like for me as a person, it’s not for me to judge like how you present yourself or like whether you decide if you’re a boy or a girl, or like it’s not my place to tell you if you’re right or you’re wrong.”

—Sam Y., 20 | Los Angeles

YOU DO YOU, AND THEY DO THEY.
35% of Z identified themselves as bisexual to some extent, compared to 24% of Millennials (JWT 2016).

**ACCEPTANCE AND DISCOMFORT**

Only 35% of Gen Z say they’d support a non-binary prom court or a transgender prom king or queen. That number jumps to 42% for millennial adults. (Prom Across America, Yahoo Study, 2017)

**ORIENTATING THEIR FEELINGS ON ORIENTATION:**

Where campus Gay Straight Alliances and LGBT clubs may have been the new kid on the block for millennials, Z has grown up in a world where acronyms like LGBTQA+ and words like heteronormativity and cisgender are familiar. They understand the various shades of sexuality and the layered nature of intersectionality. Like gender, Gen Z’s personal relationship is one of outward acceptance but perhaps a bit of personal discomfort as well.

“(They have a) high degree of sophistication in what LGBTQ means, the monolithic understanding of gay is blown up, not all gay is created equal. Intersectionality is a conversation, black trans lives matter. Think the queer kids I talk to understand it better.”

—Digital Media Anthropologist Working With LGBTQ and Low Income Latinx Families | Long Beach, CA

“I’m part of the LGBT community as a queer man, I’m also originally from Venezuela which makes me a part of latin community as well… I think whenever I explore these subcultures I’m getting to know myself even more, so I would say I’m the same person but a better version.”

—Guillermo P, 22 | Fort Lauderdale, FL
ORIENTATING THEIR FEELINGS ON ORIENTATION:

Aidan is a gay makeup artist and character actor, particularly for characters in the fantasy Harry Potter series.

"Harry Potter has helped me a lot of ways... one of the reasons I'm so fond of it is just because it helped me through all of this different stuff in my life, like coming out as gay...and just friends that have, you know, done bad things to me."

—Aidan J., 16 | San Pedro, CA

On what she is worried about 10 years from now:

"I'M AFRAID FOR MY TRANS SISTERS AND THEIR UNTOLD/ MISUNDERSTOOD NARRATIVES."

—Keyla Y., 20 | Bronx, NY, Who Currently Identifies as Pansexual
KEEPING MY LIPS SEALED ON YOUR CHOICE, THEY/THEM.
SOCIAL ACTIVISM & POLITICS

ACTIVISTS...NOT ALWAYS WITH ACTION.

The media paints this generation as political activists, and for those who are involved, they truly are—voting, marching, and keeping watch on a portfolio of issues dear to them. Most, however, are still testing the waters, and many more are less willing to rock the boat. They claim to have strong beliefs and may repost political statements, but in general, they rarely move these beliefs into meaningful action, like voting, or even paying attention to the news.
After saying they were politically active and their generation was going to change the world, we asked a focus group of Gen Z what they were doing: Are you voting, sharing things on Facebook, protesting, marching?

THE UNANIMOUS ANSWER: "No."

Respondents feel that their beliefs, and the passion behind their beliefs, Is a form of being politically active—even if they didn’t share or act on them.

"This image is my boyfriend and I at the first women’s march in 2017 after Trump was elected. I chose this picture, because I’m a huge advocate for women’s rights and empowerment, and I surround myself with men who believe in women’s empowerment as well.

I went to the march with my boyfriend and his male roommates, and they were the ones who told me about it...again this was right after the inauguration, and so I didn’t know anything about protests.

I honestly didn’t even know it was a protest, and that’s why I didn’t wear pink or make a sign. I was so proud to be at that first march representing what I believed in with hundreds of other men and women who wanted to stand up as well. Incredible day that I’ll never forget."

—Emily A., 22 | Boston
NO CLUE? NO PROBLEM.

They know they’re not informed. They wish they were. But, even without knowing what’s going on, they still feel their generation will be the one to right the wrongs of the world. Many believe themselves to be the generation to change the world and break away from the old guard. The reason they feel this way, despite their inaction or low involvement? They put great stock in the strength of their beliefs, and many think their beliefs alone will create change.

“IT WOULD BE KINDA’ COOL TO KNOW WHAT’S GOING ON, BUT I FEEL LIKE I’M TOO FAR BEHIND.”

—Brendan P., 18 | Los Angeles

“I TRY TO KEEP AWAY FROM THE NEWS. IT’S DEPRESSING AND EVERYONE IS OVERLY SENSITIVE.”

—High-School Respondent | Norman, OK

“My students have very little interest in current events. I have to convince my law students to watch the 6:30 PM world news daily.”

—High-School Teacher for Students Aged 14-18 | Venice, CA
POLITICAL POSITIONS = POLARIZATION

Fearful of what staunch political stances have done to the world and the divisiveness it’s caused, Gen Z is hesitant to adopt hard positions or party monikers, and instead rely on “you do you,” as an out to avoid confrontation. Some choose to say they are “leaning” or “tend to agree” with a party, even if they won’t adopt their name or platform.

“ I don’t agree with dividing the country in two sides, we should all join together or be individuals.

It’s dangerous to be labeled into such a big piece, I either have to follow all these rules, this is what I have to identify with, I have to be against the other side, it causes too many problems. We should be joining together instead of creating more things to push us apart. ”

—Kayla L., 20 | Los Angeles

“The political climate in the United States definitely worries me. It is so extremely polarized which can be dangerous. I hope that we can all come together and support what really matters in today’s society. ”

—Paige G., 19 | Hamel, MN
**LESS DIVISION!**

**ALSO, MEET MY POLITICALLY LIKE-MINDED FRIENDS**

Despite the importance they place on diversity and their fears of polarization and one-sidedness, many of the Gen Z respondents we spoke to said they consciously only associated with people who shared the same values, beliefs and views.

“IT COMES DOWN TO POLITICS, I WANT TO BE AROUND LIKEMINDED VIEWS AS ME; MY VIEWS HAVE CHANGED OVER THE YEARS, I WAS A TIGHT REPUBLICAN, AND THEN I’M GAY, SO THAT DIDN’T REALLY WORK OUT. I FLIPPED THE SCRIPT. WANT TO BE AROUND PEOPLE WITH THE SAME IDEOLOGY.”

—College Respondent | Los Angeles

“PEOPLE WILL UNFRIEND YOU IF YOUR BELIEF IS NOT THE SAME AS THEIRS”

—College Student, 20 | Los Angeles

“I WANT PEOPLE TO SHARE THE SAME VIEWS AS ME OVERALL… I DON’T KNOW IF I COULD BE FRIENDS WITH SOMEONE WHO DOESN’T SHARE MY VALUES… I’D WANT US TO BE ON THE SAME PAGE.”

—High-School Respondent | OK

“They know that it’s okay to accept people who are gay or bi or transgender, they try to teach them to be comfortable with it but the kids still make fun of it all the time. ‘You’re a fag,’ is part of their bullying.”

—Big Brothers Big Sisters of America Match Specialist for Low-Income and High-Risk Kids | Los Angeles
SHIFTING ACTIVISM TO BELIEF, AND DITCHING POLARIZATION FOR 'LIKE-MINDEDNESS'
Gen Z is highly motivated by success and achievement; however, they don’t necessarily aspire to traditional career paths nor traditional definitions of what “success” means. Education is still valued, but finding your personal brand is the true key to success because it means influence. They’ve seen countless relatable YouTube makeup artists and comedians skyrocket from newbie to celebrity, showing them they can be successful in entrepreneurial ventures with a lot of hard work—and the right image.
Ambition and success are among Gen Z’s top 10 values.

Ambition, in particular, is much more highly valued by Gen Z than the general population.

(CEB Iconoculture Values and Lifestyle Survey, October 2017)

“Because they’re so entrepreneurial, because they’re doing all these other things, they have all these other identities, I think this generation is being more encouraged to put more of that into their resume in order to stand out.

Otherwise everyone really does look the same, and so if they have these other things, to start to bring that to the forefront as a candidate, bring it to the workplace, and let other people see these different sides of themselves, because it can only enrich the environment within the company that they’re working at.”

—Natalie Kim, Founder of We Are Next, an Open Resource for Students and Junior Talent in the Field of Advertising and Marketing

The job process is becoming more individualized (e.g. what qualities, passions make you stand out?), but colleges aren’t adequately preparing students. When asked by a career coach to describe himself, one Gen Z college student became very anxious, saying “Oh my God, I’m having an identity crisis.”

—Career Coach | Boston

“So now Gen Z is growing up a little bit more…more focused? On wanting to be successful but also doing it in their own way – I think that’s really important for them. They don’t want to have to sit at a desk from 9–5….”

—Emily Loren, Communication and PR Specialist, AwesomenessTV

Ambition and success are among Gen Z’s top 10 values.
THERE’S EXPECTING THOSE 15 MINUTES

There is an undercurrent that somehow, someway, they will become fabulously successful based off their own unique personality (making a career out of your opinion, styles and for just being you). Monetizing your identity in a way that sways others is today’s “making it.” For others, it’s less about the billions and more about living your best life—not a desk life.

“ Well, my personal goal is to be a multimillionaire and start a personal brand of my own. I’m working on it as I work online and help businesses make money through social media.

My professional goal is to help thousands of people reach their goals and covert their dreams into reality with my help and tips.”

—Abhimanyu S., 19 | Lawrenceville, GA

“ These past couple years, I don’t know how I’m going to get to be very successful, but I do see myself being there someday, so I’m very confident that at some point in my life I will get there.

I feel like whatever you really want if you really try to get there, you’ll somehow get there.”

—Brandon P., 18 | Los Angeles

“ So for me I think fame would be the most important... and it’s not fame in the celebrity sense of the word, but more fame and success and happiness.

I want to be extremely well known for my accomplishments in both medicine and hopefully chemistry. And I want to be famous in the academic field.

So admissions officers in different research programs at different medical schools will know about me and my accomplishments and what I have done for the career of medicine or chemistry and that’s more what I would like to be known for and not as a celebrity type of fame in a way.”

—Melodi H., 21 | Knoxville, TN
For Z, the ultimate goal is influence, which in itself, is power. They’re hungry for the ability to make others listen to them, so they can make the world a better place—a place made in their image.

The burning desire for everyone to do as they do, and believe and act in accordance to their will and values, is especially ironic, given how important diversity, individuality and "you do you" is to Gen Z.

"Success to me is being debt-free and knowing that I made an impact on my industry, the world, and people around me."
—Andie W., 22 | Chicago

“What success looks like to me is making such of a difference in this world that I will be remembered for my ingenuity.”
—Brianna G., 14 | Dublin, TX

“I would personally use this (power) for good to do good things in the world. As a teenager, I don’t have that much power, so having power is kind of important especially when you want to make change.”
—Danita M., 17 | Hatboro, PA

“I think they feel like they have a role to play, even when they just start out. And so, because of that, they’re asking these deeper questions around why they’re doing what they do, and is this actually making things better.

Even if you’re not working directly on a social good brand, or you know, working on a client that is directly doing good in the world, I think they’re always trying to find that angle for themselves, in small and big ways, so I think that makes them a lot more reflective and considerate as they choose where they start their careers."
—Natalie Kim, Founder of We Are Next, an Open Resource for Students and Junior Talent in the Field of Advertising and Marketing

"10 years from now I will be influencing the next generation. To never quit and always be the best version of themselves. My brand will be an icon of hope for those that go through hardship and still dedicate themselves to be number 1."
—Sebastian B., 22 | Fort Lauderdale, FL
What's the job you're dreaming of?

“I want to become a professional game designer after my time at NYU.”
—Isiah R., 19 | Brooklyn, NY

“Deployed somewhere in the world flying planes in the US Air Force.”
—Jake F., 18 | Charleston, SC

“I’m hoping to have a good job either in HR or marketing, and hopefully a kid and a husband.”
—Martina M., 19 | Chicago

“Hopefully I will be working in the profession of my choosing and pursuing many entrepreneurial endeavors that allow me the financial freedom to tend to my family and personal goals.”
—Miguel P., 20 | St. Paul, MN

“I think I’ll be in Europe working for the Spanish embassy as a lawyer.”
—Kene O., 21 | Columbus, OH

“A stable career in industrial organizational psychology.”
—Jackson H., 20 | Los Angeles

“I have a big long-term goal of working for a retail company (Belk in North Carolina) with the job title as a Buyer.”
—Mikaela S., 21 | Waxhaw, NC

“I think that I will be working at a tech company as some sort of manager, I hope to lead a team of creatives and helping them utilize new tech to produce product.”
—Steven C., 21 | Salt Lake City
SUCESS IS INFLUENCE, AND YOUR UNIQUE IDENTITY IS THE KEY.
CHAPTER EIGHT

RELIGION

FINDING MY RELIGION.

True to their revisionist nature, many Gen Zs see themselves as less “religious” in the traditional sense, and instead see themselves as “spiritual” choosing not to subscribe to all the rules of a particular religion. After all, they don’t like to be put into a box.
ONLY 20 PERCENT OF GEN Z AND MILLENNIALS REPORT ATTENDING TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS GATHERINGS, WHILE 80 PERCENT SAY THEY ARE SPIRITUAL IN SOME WAY.

(Vice + Insight Strategy Group Survey, 2018)

“"I was a really devout person at first, and I would go to mass every Sunday and I was in confirmation. And then all of a sudden, my confirmation people was like, ‘if you’re gay, bye.’ Basically, it was really bad...And then I was like, well, what does it matter if I’m part of this, if I can still carry these values through my life.””

—Sabrina C., 20 | Los Angeles

“"I’m not religious, like I don’t practice religion right now. But I’m very open, like, I had a Muslim everything.””

—Izelle G., 22 | Los Angeles

“"Millennials and Gen Z have all but rejected organized religion. They are extremely spiritual, but they have found a myriad of other ways to express and nurture that spirituality outside of religion.””

—Julie Arbit, VP of Insight at Vice, via a 2018 Vice Study
MAY DRAW MORE ON CONNECTION THAN BELIEF

Whether they grew up in a faith or found it recently, the communal aspect of religion brings some of the greatest value for the more devout of Z.

“I was born in the church and raised around its principles so it’s a very important part of my identity. And I do not feel like my generation has the same values. Especially on social media. I feel like my generation is ashamed of religion.”
—Kevin P., 17 | Maple Heights, OH

“I got into the Wiccan faith a few years ago. I feel like I finally found the label that fits the beliefs I’ve already had for years. I feel pretty accepted though I do have to explain what it is to people. I found out about Wicca from a book in a spiritual shop and I knew immediately it’s what I had been looking for.”
—Danita M., 17 | Hatboro, PA

“Religion is a big part in my family. And like, I understand that other people have other religions too, but like, at the end of the day, I can find similarities within other peoples’ religion too, and it’s interesting learning about them.”
—Sam Y., 21 | Los Angeles
PINTEREST BOARDS

REFLECTING WHO FOCUS GROUP RESPONDENTS ARE AS PEOPLE

High-school Respondents | Norman, OK
CHAPTER NINE

HEALTH & WELLNESS

THE HEAVY YOKE OF SELF-IMPROVEMENT.

Gen Z is growing up in a time when there’s a choice to identify with different diets—e.g., vegan, gluten-free, etc.—regardless of allergies or intolerances. Today, health choices become lifestyle identities. In a visual, photography-based social world, what you look like and how your health impacts your brand is a topic of public concern. The drive to improve themselves and find success in difficult times creates immense pressure for this hungry generation.
"THEY ARE GROWING UP PUBLICLY. HAVING TO SEE ALL OF THEIR PEERS PUBLICIZE EVERY ASPECT OF THEIR LIFE CREATES AN IDENTITY CRISIS DRIVEN BY A CONSTANT NEED TO BE IMPROVING THEMSELVES."

—Creative Director, Social Media Benchmob

Z are identifying by plant-based health labels more than older generations—12% identify as either vegan or vegetarian in 2017, a 71% increase year-over year.

(CivicScience Research, November 2017)

"I included my mission in life that I have found! My mission is to spread self love and self awareness through out the world by sharing my story and helping others share theirs.

I do photography with people on their journey to self love my mission is to have someone witness the beauty they have had in them all along.

It took me a long time to accept myself and I even went through a phase of comparing myself to others on the internet that I had to stop YouTube for a bit."

—Dominique V., 20 | Atlanta
When it comes to wellness, anxiety is prevalent among the generation, driven by fears of uncertainty in the world today and the future. Social media in particular makes it easier to both find your tribe and to lose yourself to comparisons and always-on news and stressors. As an empathetic generation driven by group dynamics, the weight of the world today is bearing down on their mental health.

“The amount of violence in the world is one of what I am most fearful of daily. News outlets frequently report shootings to the point to where it is viewed as usual. As a student, I am even afraid to attend school when there are big events, afraid of what could be planned. Shootings are not the only act of violence, but also rape and abductions. These are so common that many are not even reported. These cannot not be controlled which heightens my fear of it.”

—Hannah Y., 16 | Camarillo, CA

“I saw an 11 yo last year who couldn’t get to sleep because of the Syrian Refugee crisis.”

—Developmental Pediatrician | MN

“To me, it feels like a lot of Gen Z’s are appropriating the sadness depression of some of their friends, because they are striving to give and receive empathy.

Everyone wants to be loved, so sometimes you need to appropriate what others are going through in order to feel like you are truly relating to them.”

—Creative Director, Social Media Benchmob

“(I’ve) Definitely heard a lot about self-esteem issues and comparison-induced anxiety. I think that the excess of downtime could actually be leading to the depression by way of time spent on social media.”

—Developmental Pediatrician | MN
“Right now, I’m trying to work on my anxiety, it has taken control over parts of my life and I’ve recently started to feel better by doing meditation, and working out and creating healthier habits.

It’s a condition I have that I wasn’t aware of until recently. It means easily overwhelmed by situations I consider stressful and I live in constant worry.

I thought it was a normal kind of worry, but I started presenting physical symptoms a while ago, including panic attacks and shortness of breath when trying to sleep.

I worry about my safety, because I’m living in a city where there have been terrible homicide cases and unfortunately the country hasn’t done much about it.”

—Guillermo P., 22 | Fort Lauderdale, FL

“Truthfully, I worry about everything. From my family, to poverty, to nuclear bombs, to war in the Middle East, and I genuinely can’t help it.

However, one thing I know for sure is that nothing will ever be perfect, so all I can do is enjoy my time here and make as much of an impact as possible.”

—Lydia M., 21 | Snellville, GA
STRIVING TO MAKE
A BETTER SELF
IN A
UNSTABLE WORLD.
While fashion has always been a way for teens and tweens to express their style and assert some independence, YouTube makeup tutorials and Instagram influencers for boutique labels inspire Gen Z to express a new persona from one occasion to the next. Gone are the days of consistently dressing like a goth, jock or prep. The generational mantra of “you do you” extends to the arena of fashion, where Z navigates multiple styles to match their multiple identities. But whatever you chose to wear, the decision should be driven by your own authentic take.
I think they’re a generation that isn’t defined by singular titles...and I don’t think that Nike has specific roles. I think Nike offers a little bit of sport and style. It offers male and female. It offers the past and the future. It really has a little bit of everything, that regardless of what you choose – your role, title, definition to be – Nike’s there to do it.

Their lack of singular identity works well for us because we embrace multiple identities ourselves out in the company. It’s like being within one house and having 10 different closets. I never have to leave the comfort and safety of my own home to try on different hats.

I always know that Nike’s going to be there...And I think there’s probably a little bit of that comfort for Gen Z-ers too that this is a known brand, this is an established brand, it’s a brand that’s easy to be loyal to but it still gives you space to roam at the same time."

—Elliott Kennedy, Writer at Nike

"Do I care about what others think about my styling? Of course not! To be an artist you must create!... Fashion plays a role in who I am because even if I have a basic outfit on I take pride in color coordination and accessory’s.

I am always thinking about ideas or talking about them. I don’t always catch my ideas on paper which irritates me and is something I carry in my personality, along with my passions for creating things. I would hope that my passions are a palpable thing about me."

—Miguel P., 20 | St. Paul, MN

I’m a lesbian, so I know a lot of people in the lesbian community and they try really hard not to be heteronormative.

So I feel like I’m a lot more comfortable with like, not caring about how I dress.

Like if I dress more feminine or more masculine, like, because I’m friends with a lot of people in that community and I know a lot of people in that community, it’s like, everything is cool, do whatever you want."

—Sabrina C., 20 | Los Angeles

THIS GENERATION CELEBRATES UNIQUENESS, USING MAKEUP AS A FORM OF SELF-EXPRESSION AND INDIVIDUALITY—HALF OF THEM CHANGING THEIR PERSONAL STYLE WEEKLY TO MONTHLY

(BeautyCon FOMO Report 2017).
EXPRESS YOURSELF.

Makeup and fashion no longer just project an image of attractiveness and how they want to be perceived, they are viewed as devices for personal brand storytelling and expression. Gender norms for makeup use are changing, bringing to light new opportunities for Gen Z’s daily beauty routine.

(On her tattoos)

“So on my arm I have the growth process of a rose. And I think I’m in constant learning, I’m in constant growth. I’m never full never complete on my side.

I have a tattoo that says Bloom and a whirlwind. And I feel like because of my identities, I had to learn to bloom in circumstances that were meant for me to be human.”

—Keyla Y., 20 | Bronx, NY

Half of this generation claim to use cosmetics, primarily because it makes them feel more confident.

(Mintel, July 2016)
EXPRESS YOURSELF.

Mikaela’s closet

“ I’m a fashion major so I want to be a buyer in the future. And I love the idea of picking items for a store and having someone buy those items based on your recommendations. So, it’s super cool to have the power to and the ability to influence others based on your opinion. ”

—Mikaela S., 21 | Waxhaw, NC

“I’m just really into all things beauty and I really feel like I can really express myself with my makeup and nails. With both I can be as extravagant or as subdued as I want and I really feel like they are indicators of my personality.

I just love painting my face and I love painting nails. It’s just so cool to see a blank canvas go into some unique creation that no one else can recreate exactly.

I just love makeup and nails almost more than anything. ”

—Kene, O., 21 | Columbus, OH
EXPRESS YOURSELF.

—Dominique V., 20 | Atlanta

“...I tagged those individuals and the Dillard’s company because I am an influencer and sometimes I work with photographers and company’s so I tag them.

On that day I worked with two photographers so I tagged them and then another page because they edited the photo.

As for Dillard’s I was not partnered with this company this time, I just tagged them because sometimes my followers like to know where I got my clothing!”

—Dominique V., 20 | Atlanta
EXPRESS YOURSELF

(OR WHOEVER YOU ARE TODAY)
CHAPTER ELEVEN

FROM POP CULTURE TO CULTURAL SMORGASBORD:

With easier access to discovering content than ever before, mainstream entertainment is fractured; Gen Z’s entertainment preferences vary widely and complicate their identity. Gone are the days of pop culture when you can choose what, when and if you engage with things in a way completely different from your peers. The new world of popular culture has become niche, with limited content finding runaway mainstream successes that #breaktheinternet.
They are listening to all kinds of music, no longer identifying solely as a ‘country music person’ or a ‘hip hop listener.’ Genres are still a unifying force. But unlike before, when genres were the defining force, they just have so many options and other elements to help them define who they are.

Musicians now cannot just rely on putting out good music, they have to have a shtick or else they will get drowned out by the sheer volume of content being released. ”

—Creative Director, Social Media Benchmob | Los Angeles

**NINETY-SEVEN PERCENT OF GEN Z FEMALES CLAIM THAT THEY REGULARLY LISTEN TO AT LEAST FIVE DIFFERENT MUSICAL GENRES**

(This is) a picture in supercon since I love everything anime and videogames related. I love finding new games and shows to watch because they always put me into exciting situations, or just make me feel different emotions. I can relate to some characters from games or shows, or if I’m playing something a character can inspire me or motivate me to achieve a goal. ”

—Guillermo P., 22 | Fort Lauderdale, FL
### BOOMERS

1. The Godfather  
2. Jaws  
3. All the President’s Men  
4. Singin’ in the Rain  
5. Rebel Without a Cause  
6. Saturday Night Fever  
7. The Graduate  
8. MASH  
9. Dirty Harry  
10. Star Wars

### GEN X

1. Breakfast Club  
2. Back to the Future  
3. Wayne’s World  
4. Ferris Bueller’s Day Off  
5. Fight Club  
6. Heathers  
7. Dazed and Confused  
8. Reality Bites  
9. Pulp Fiction  
10. High Fidelity

### MILLENNIALS

1. High School Musical  
2. Titanic  
3. American Pie  
4. Toy Story  
5. The Blair Witch Project  
6. Fast and Furious Series  
7. Harry Potter Series  
8. The Matrix  
9. Mean Girls  
10. Clueless

### GEN Z

1. The Dark Knight  
2. The Hunger Games  
3. Spider-Man: Homecoming  
4. Inside Out  
5. Black Panther  
6. Wonder Woman

### TELEVISION

#### BOOMERS

1. The Brady Bunch  
2. The Twilight Zone  
3. The Dick Van Dyke Show  
4. I Love Lucy  
5. Dallas  
6. Sesame Street  
7. SNL  
8. The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson  
9. Dragnet  
10. Leave It to Beaver

#### GEN X

1. The Cosby Show  
2. The Muppets  
3. Roseanne  
4. Star Trek  
5. Seinfeld  
6. Friends  
7. ER  
8. Party of 5  
9. Beverly Hills 90210  
10. The Simpsons

#### MILLENNIALS

1. Full House  
2. Family Matters  
3. Fresh Prince of Bel-Air  
4. Saved by the Bell  
5. The Simpsons  
6. Gilmore Girls  
7. Glee  
8. Grey’s Anatomy  
9. The Walking Dead  
10. One Tree Hill

#### GEN Z

1. 13 Reasons Why  
2. Stranger Things  
3. Pretty Little Liars  
4. Riverdale  
5. Various Musical.ly, Twitch and other series  
6. Various YouTube series

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**BOOMERS**

**Key Themes:** fighting against insurmountable odds, tackling large groups, the original sitcom, problems at work

**Generational Hallmarks:** challenge authority, work-oriented, ambitious

**Relationship to Entertainment:** Boomers grew up in the Network Era with an entertainment oligarchy controlled by ABC, CBS, and NBC; everything was Least Offensive Programming (LOP) content that was catered toward a broad, general audience. Entertainment was curated for this – there wasn’t much of a choice.

**GEN X**

**Key Themes:** rebelling when you’re young, observation of family life

**Generational Hallmarks:** independence, “latchkey” kids, self-reliance, cynical

**Relationship to Entertainment:** The MTV generation, they were raised by TVs as both parents entered the work force. They lived through the rapid rise of cable TV, video games, and the internet, so constant innovation and change is normal for them.

**MILLENNIALS**

**Key Themes:** all the intimate aspects of living with and dealing with family, clear cut protagonists and villains, coming of age/high school drama

**Generational Hallmarks:** “me-first” attitude, people pleasers, coddled kids, goal-oriented

**Relationship to Entertainment:** Channel-surfing era – entertainment was still bound to a certain time of the week and synchronous watching was still integrated into culture. The first appearance of asynchronous watching with DVR.

**GEN Z**

**Key Themes:** coming of age, individual saves society from imminent threat, the trials and tribulations of growing up and friendship

**Generational Hallmarks:** realism, individuality, tolerance, diversity

**Relationship to Entertainment:** End of “channel surfing” era — they choose what they want and when they want it with streaming video on demand (SVOD). Gen Z grew up in a world where entertainment is now incredibly niche yet highly saturated; it’s all about options.
THE NEXT CREATIVE CLASS.

As a creative class, Gen Z directors, musicians, photographers and influencers are finding their voice in a new world of content creation, and in the process, hope to bring their vision of a more positive, joyful future to light through their talents.

“"You’re going to go further and further away from these traditional actors…if you don’t have social media presence, people are going to stop caring about you.

They’re going to stop caring about the huge, seasoned actors—they’re going to phase out and all of these new people are going to come in who have this you know, relatability that we were talking about…and people are going to go watch them because it feels like you’re watching your best friend in a show or in a movie…If you look at the landscape and you look at what’s important to people, I think that’s going to start changing for sure."”

—Emily Loren, Communication and PR Specialist, AwesomenessTV

“I do photography with people on their journey to self-love…my mission is to have someone witness the beauty they have had in them all along…I do this through my photography and video documentaries I am working on making as well.”

—Dominique V., 20 | Atlanta, GA
THE NEXT CREATIVE CLASS.

“...I want (my movies) to make the world a better place... that’s what I love about film... Right now, I believe you can express what you believe defines a life through movies and characters, because a lot of people see things through that very personal experience, and you can really change people’s minds about a lot of things, and make people care more about the people around them. That’s what I want to be doing, and expressing that through film.”

—Rohun, 19 | Filmmaker

“...I want to be a professional drummer. I have performed all over Cleveland with my personal band so I just want to continue to play my instrument and make my name known all over the US.”

—Kevin P., 18 | Maple Heights, OH

“(Cosplay) allows me to express my positive side and allows me to promote my views on the world in a proactive way.

If people look up to me they are more likely to listen. Cosplay gives me my audience and I choose the characters that help me express what I believe in.”

—Aidan J., 16 | San Pedro, CA
ENDLESS ENTERTAINMENT OPTIONS FOR ALL MY MANY ME’S.
Gen Z’s shifting identities have profound implications for marketers, causing us to rethink how we brand, target and communicate.

Following are 10 lessons for marketers to consider as they engage with Gen Z and their impact on the broader culture. Keep in mind, the situation for each marketer will be different. Some lessons will be critical, others will need adaptation, and some may not apply. Just like Gen Z, marketers will need to operate **situationally**. Everyone will need to be open to change—and lots of it.

By taking a page from the contextual identity shifters of generation Z, we believe marketers will find that practicing “situational marketing” will open up new avenues for sharper targeting, richer relationships with Z customers, and a new understanding of all the things their brands can be.
Z shifts their identities depending on the situation. Maybe brands should too.

We’ve long held that a brand has to be consistent—precise, fixed, living within guidelines. For this next generation, that’s not necessarily the case.

Brands will benefit by enabling greater flexibility with their own identities: varying their message, voice, visual cues—even that untouchable logo (gasp!)—to meet differing situations or objectives. A static brand will miss out on opportunities to personalize, dimensionalize and create new connection points with a generation that does not want to be tied down.

Leverage the power of group dynamics.

Social cues from peer groups will decide if your brand or message sinks or swims. Tap into the right influencers and influences to gain a following.

Gen Z practices “situational correctness”—altering their behaviors, withholding expression of their beliefs, and putting a premium on empathy—all in the quest of positive reception and perception among peers. Brands that are attentive to these (often-invisible) social cues stand a better chance at being adopted by the group.

Because they are so attentive to the group, influencer marketing is a powerful tool with Z. Promoting people, beliefs and behaviors that are deemed correct can lead to group adoption. Experiment with content that may catch on, both on a serious and playful level. Be attentive to what is already situationally correct and fit your brand into those pre-existing contexts. Z is far more tolerant of cultural appropriation than other generations.

10 Key takeaways
GEN Z APPRECIATES DIVERSITY. BUT THEY DON’T WANT TO BE DIFFERENT.

Diversity is a core gen Z value. However, in reality, gen Z’s preference is often to be with people who are more like them than not.

Z is comfortable with people of different ethnic backgrounds and orientations. Not surprisingly, marketers will benefit from portraying diverse people, activities and uses. In addition to being correct, diversity signals freedom— which is important to Z’s shifting identities.

When it comes to attitudes and beliefs, however, Z is actually more comfortable with people like themselves. Diversity of belief can create unwelcomed uncomfortable situations for Z and carries the risk of social jeopardy. Brands can help Z feel included by representing values, beliefs and activities that they can see their peers following.

RISK STANDING FOR SOMETHING—SO Z DOESN’T HAVE TO.

Z often prefers to retweet than be the author of something controversial. They appreciate when others take the risk so they can follow.

Although they have strong beliefs, taking a stand opens Z up to criticism and rejection. Z appreciates when others take the lead, so they can assess whether it is safe to add their voice and at what level.

Brands provide Z a way to align with various values, but with a safe wall between them and personal criticism. As Z is tolerant and conflict-averse, brands should prioritize causes that speak to personal freedom and choice. Be for something. Not against.
Z SEeks VALIDATION. LET THEM KNOW THEY MATTER.

Gen Z requires more feedback that they matter to you as a customer, and they are going to need proof.

Z has an interesting relationship with individuality. For them, building an identity is calculated risks—not rocking the boat or putting too much out there—while also making a personal brand worthy of admiration. They want to be appreciated for who they are and what they convey, and rely on peer feedback to get there. Validation and appreciation serve as proof that Z’s relationships are of substance. This is as true for brand relationships as personal ones.

Brands should recognize Z on an individual basis. Be intent about showing appreciation and reward them as customers. Give them control over how and when they interact with your brand. Pick up signals to be responsive to individual circumstance. Find ways to show you see and hear them.

DON’T JUST MARKET YOUR BRAND. HELP Z MARKET THEMSELVES.

Z sees brands as potential allies and resources in their own quest to be known—so help them. Their identity is a resource to be monetized.

From college applications to the quest to gain “followers,” success comes from helping their personal brand of “you” be attractive and full of clout. Even as socially attuned as they are, Z prioritizes power and influence over belonging. Helping Z identify and push their own personal brands is a way to their hearts. This is part of why social-media platforms have been so successful at gaining never-ending attention.

Brands that give Z a platform to express their personality, humor and interests on a large scale will earn undying gratitude. Help them gain new followers, recognition and even revenue. How can they use your brand’s power to extend their own?
Z REJECTS CONFINING LABELS. ENABLE THEM TO BE THEIRSELVES

Using labels like “real moms” or “you’re a smart customer” signal that you don’t get it as a marketer. Personalization is important to Z. But it will only succeed when it avoids rigid labels and lets the audience self-select who they are.

Z want to see themselves across many dimensions and even change from one situation to the next. The traditional method of labeling audience segments and marketing to them as if they are part of a constant, stereotypical group will be rejected. Superficially personalized messages will be seen right through as well.

Instead, develop target definitions that are more open-ended and can be matrixed across different contexts. Consider playing around with stereotypes to show you get it. When it comes to personalization, allow for self-selection. Ask how they want to interact with your brand. And keep in mind that this may change over time and in differing contexts. Z wants to preserve their freedom. Provide the opportunity to do so.

TRUTH MATTERS. AND SO DOES FICTION.

Z has a more nuanced relationship to truth than Millennials. They navigate their world by polishing, editing and even suppressing elements of themselves. Sometimes, a story or persona can be more “real” than the actual thing.

Truth is good. But being transparent and honest are not the only ways to truth. Consider the power of fiction to show truth when marketing to Z. Create stories or myths that express your brand’s mission. Use cues that signal your brand’s commitments and values. Think about how the role of conventions like spokespeople could change? For Z, reality is often virtual. Embrace it.
Z IS A GENERATION OF BELIEVERS. HELP THEM TO BE DOERS.

Z thinks their generation will change the world—but it’s rooted in their passionate beliefs, not necessarily their actions.

When a brand is associated with causes they care about and support, Z feels like they personally are “acting” on their beliefs. Make it easy for them to participate. But don’t expect it.

Provide content, memes and other ways they can participate from home. Offer them badges that indicate that they are supporting a good cause. Recognize that supporting a brand gives Z a sense their beliefs are in action. Even lend your platform out for Z to advocate for their beliefs.

DON’T MARKET TO WHO Z IS. HELP THEM BE WHO THEY WANT TO BE.

Z does not want to be limited by the here and now. Brands can help Z convey their best self...or selves.

Z is hyper-focused on improving themselves, as individuals (e.g., being more aware of their privilege) and as their personal brand (e.g., losing 10 pounds for the ‘gram). For this generation, the goal is not necessarily to be accepted for who you are today but to be supported in your pursuit of what you are trying to be seen as.

Brands should build a bridge to an aspirational future that is appealing to them, and be their partner in crafting their better self.
Mia von Sadovszky
Jess Watts
David Berne
Larissa Chen
Mike Margolin
Matt Cooper
Kate Rosenbaum
Reed Willig
Britt McColl
Sara Morgan
Emelie Claxton
Justin Mashouf
Josh Hamilton
Aninya Athuwalla
Amy Wong
Will Deutsch
Parva Hashemi
Alfredo Chen
Shannon Schuster
Scott Westerfield
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Pete Irwinwale
David Chang
Dave Brezinski
Rebecca Mendelson
Mark Tripp
Eddie Granado
Maria Del’Homme
Rebecca Hearn
Megan Bycel
Edwin Wong
Emily Loren
Elliott Kennedy
Debbie R. Yount
Carolyn Coal
Jade Bawcom
Ravi Jayanath
Susie Perez
Ryan Martin
Michael Chen
Jeff Phungglan
Hillary Plank
Laina Kjeldberg
Judy Cooper
Juliiann Chang
Lili Malabed
Lisa Tororich
Erin Jones
Dr. Peggy Kris
Dr. Laurel Wills
Elizabeth Jayanath
Sarah Graner Maslowski
Cindy Bina
Dora Chin
Dr. Alex Choi
Chealsea Tadros
Alice Slater
Natalie Kim
Chris Gomez
Dean Saguros
Nathan Tamburello
Lindsay Kelly
Ersn Adelson
Cara Fahy
Hana Traffner
Ellen Eastaugh
Abigail Klein
Nicolas Zhou
Doglys Rivas
Kelly Slater
Tristan Gerardo
Brandon Dolan
Paavni Tuteja
Jade Rechler
Joji Baratelli
Rohun Vora
Tenujin Alvarez
Adam Hansard
Joshua Bustamante
Tony Bellanca
Helen Jeong
Maddy Caddell
Miles Chow
Hannah Kloft
Trent Brown
Hana Traffner
Bryan Taia
Gaylord College Account Planning Class
Gina Zhang
Rachel Lipton
CSUF
Dylan Roche
Rowan Lichtenwainer
Nicholas Youkubaitis
Max Westmark
Justin Fineberg
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