

Generation Z on social media, activism, consumerism and emojis

————— Are you passing the **vibe check**? —————



Let's talk about generation Z.

They were born swiping left, they've single-handedly ended the reign of skinny jeans, and have ushered in an era of social change like never before.

They're an anomaly, and an influential one at that.



Who are gen Z?



Born after 1996, gen Z is in the early stages of entering the global workforce and consumer landscape.

The *values, opinions* and *concerns* of this generation differ from their elders - and the same targeting strategies used to attract millennials simply won't cut it anymore.

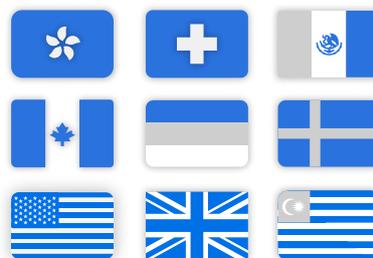
The study

Who did we ask?

Here at Relative Insight, we wanted to work outside of the old clichés and **find out more about this audience to really engage with them.**

To truly understand gen Z's divergence from millennials, we sent out a global survey to 300 respondents from the *UK, United States, Germany and Hong Kong* to name a few.

Where were they from?



Topics we asked questions on:



Sustainability



Spending



Social media



Brand preferences



Activism

The questionnaire consisted of a variety of open-ended questions that helped us dive into the thoughts of millennials and generation Z. We were able to analyse these in-depth qualitative responses to get insight into how each generation views the world around them.

Our comparative analysis helped us **uncover differences in opinions between the two demographic sets** that yielded detailed and unique insights into how each audience discusses *global issues, their daily lives and trends.*

How we used Relative Insight to analyse open-ends.

Historically, open-ends have been seen as a mess of unstructured data which has been difficult to analyse effectively.



That's where Relative Insight comes in.

Relative Insight utilises a comparative approach to text analysis, and our technology works with any written data source, leveraging comparison to reveal the *topics, words, phrases, grammar* and *emotion* that are unique and similar to each group.

Relative Insight easily transforms lengthy survey responses into a **goldmine of language insights**.

By uncovering the opinions and linguistic tendencies of a target demographic, our platform allows you to **speak the language of your consumers** by addressing their unique questions and concerns.

We uploaded survey responses directly to Relative Insight, where we are able to split the file by various attributes **including age, location or question**.

For this analysis, we divided the survey responses into two groups: gen Z and millennials.



Gen Z



Ambitious



Knowledgeable



Passionate



Millennials



Habitual



Prone to generalisation



Obsessed with labels

General insights for gen Z:

For the most part, generation Z respondents provided **thoughtful and educated responses**, in comparison to their millennial counterparts who were more likely to use one or two word answers.

The gen Z audience talked often about how they were always **seeking new experiences and perspectives**, finding ways to broaden their understanding of life and knowledge of the world.

But despite this diversity of experience, **concern for personal image** is intrinsically built into the gen Z mindset.

General insights for millennials:

Millennials, on the other hand, are **creatures of habit who crave consistency**.

It was obvious from the responses that this group knows what they like, and they stick to it.

Many of their responses were surface level, **lacking the nuance and detail we saw from gen Z**.

These top-level insights are important to keep in mind as we explore each demographic in more detail.

Social media

We asked respondents for their opinions on social media, specifically what platforms they use and why.

This helped us understand why different generations are attracted to social media channels, and **where brands should advertise to target specific age groups.**

What did we find?



Gen Z



Millennials

Gen Z

Gen Z finds value in the connectivity of social media. Favoured *Snapchat* and *TikTok*, the younger generation utilises these platforms to stay updated on the lives of friends and family.

Interestingly, gen Z also use social media as a platform to **access global news** and remain up-to-date on current affairs, and cite it as their primary news source.

They want to see brands echo this **community-oriented strategy focused on spreading awareness.**

Both

Surprisingly, our millennial and gen Z respondents were **equally as likely to mention the use of Instagram and Facebook**, and although they use social media for different purposes, they both find value in these platforms.

Millennials

Conversely, millennials are motivated by **alleviating boredom** when it comes to social media.

They seek out engaging and funny content and use these platforms to kill time mindlessly **scrolling for entertainment.**

Millennials are searching for an escape, and brands must create engaging content **that stands out and grabs their attention.**

Emojis

There are lots of myths around the use of emojis and extensive coverage reporting that gen Z think that they're "old-fashioned", "boring" and "irrelevant" but we're here to tell you that the opposite is true.

Every one of our respondents said they frequently use emojis, and every one had a favourite.

Gen Z



Millennials



Both



We can also exclusively smash an emoji myth here, and reveal that the most overused emoji - mentioned across both data sets is in fact the laugh cry face, so that guy is here to stay a little longer.

Spending

Gen Z and value:

Finding out about how gen Z views money gives us a **deeper understanding of their values as a generation.**

Getting insight into spending habits gives us an indicator of where the two generations see **commercial worth.**

Why is this important?

An awareness of these values can give brands the necessary insight to know **who they should target and why.**

We asked respondents: If you had £/\$1000 to spend on any one item, what would it be?



Gen Z

"IDK"
"Save it"
"Spend it on presents for my family"

Our gen Z respondents said they would put their **money in the bank, buy gifts for loved ones or simply that they didn't know.**

These younger respondents continued to provide **thoughtful responses**, unready to jump into a large, but hypothetical financial decision.

This shows how they place little value on high-price tags and material goods. Instead of spending £1,000 on a big ticket item, they would rather use that money for **practical purposes.**



Millennials

"Champagne"
"Designer goods"
"Luxury holidays"

Given the money, millennials would **splurge on pricey bottles, designer goods and trips.**

Although potentially short-sighted, they allowed themselves to use this bonus cash on **luxury and labels.**

This could imply that because they have greater financial security in their daily lives, they think they deserve a treat - or that they put **less cultural emphasis on the importance of saving money**, and they really are the entitled generation.

Brands

Fashion, food and importance of personal brand. As part of our study, we wanted to decipher how brand affiliation differs across generations.

So, we asked our respondents the following questions:

What brands do you identify with?

Why do specific brands appeal to you?

You're going out to eat with friends, what is your default place, and why?

What brands do each demographic mention as their favourite?

"We always try **someplace new**, and rarely go to the same place twice"

"I don't have one"

"I **thrift** a lot of my clothes"

"I don't have one, it **always changes**"

"Independent restaurant because I **don't like chains**"

"I'm still looking for a brand that really represents **my sense of style**"



ZARA

CHIPOTLE

PRADA

PRIMARK

Nando's

ASOS

GUCCI

MONKL

★ PRET A MANGER ★

SAINT LAURENT PARIS

What brands define generation Z?

Unbranded and niche



This specific audience segment steer away from mentioning mainstream designer labels, instead favouring retailers that are **niche and unbranded**.

Examples of brand mentions include *Paloma Wool*, *Realisation Par*, *House of Sunny* and *Lisa Says Gah* – all of which have a homogeneous style and similar "vibe" that favours **patterns and colour**.

Personal brand



Gen Z are 28.5x more likely to discuss their own **personal aesthetic and brand**.

They care about the general appearance of the clothes they buy rather than where they buy it from, using adjectives such as *effortless*, *chic* and *cool* to describe their style.

Ethical



Many of the brands that gen Z identify with operate on a **drop model**, whereby the label creates a limited number of products in order to reduce waste.

Moreover, gen Z were 6.9x more likely to talk about **brands that have ethical practices in place**.

This highlights the fact that gen Z prioritises sustainability and ethics in their purchasing decisions.

"Chill vibes"



In terms of restaurant brands, gen Z are 227x more likely to talk about the *atmosphere* and *ambience* of a place, rather than the name of the restaurant itself.

This proves that brands can no longer rely on their brand name or reputation to attract this new generation of consumers, rather they must rely on the **service they provide, the atmosphere they create, and the actions they take to be sustainable**.

What brands define millennials?

Designer labels

Whereas gen Z favoured a general vibe or aesthetic, millennials like **labels and consistency**. Whether that be *designers*, *fashion houses* or *high street brands*, this audience segment is much more likely to name drop brands which they identify with.

Of these brands, notable mentions include *Prada*, *Gucci* and *Saint Laurent*.

In comparison to gen Z, it's clear that millennials prefer branded clothing and logos because of the **associated status of owning designer items**.

Consistency

This idea of preferring well-known brands also translated to the food sector, whereby millennials are twice as likely to mention specific chain restaurants such as *Nando's*, *Chipotle*, *Pret* and *Franco Manca*.

Clearly, millennials desire consistency in both fashion and food, rather than a generic "vibe".

We also found that millennials are more likely to look for **quick and easy meals when eating out**, which could explain why chains are their go-to.

Sustainability

85% of survey respondents agreed that brands should be held accountable over social responsibility, sustainability issues and climate change. We pushed this further, asking:

Are there any brands that go against your core values, and why wouldn't you buy them?

Gen Z



"Lack of transparency in the supply chain"



"Materials are not eco-friendly"



"Packaging isn't recyclable"



What did gen Z say?

Generation Z's responses to this question were **thoughtful and educated**.

They mentioned concerns which extended beyond top level environmental concerns, **diving deeper into supply chain issues**, as well as materials and packaging that cannot be recycled.

Gen Z are also more likely to distrust brands that fail to be inclusive or those who are endorsed by controversial figures.

This clearly demonstrates that gen Z **understands the intricacies of both sustainability and societal issues** and make it their mission to be educated and informed.

Brands must aim to build trust with this generation, remain politically engaged and substantiate their claims.

Millennials



"Big businesses and corporate machines"



"Negative impact on the environment"



"I don't like what it means for the planet"



What did millennials say?

In comparison, millennials are more likely to speak about the **huge corporate machines** that they wouldn't buy from, showing a holistic understanding of the business world.

Whereas gen Z's response was thoughtful, millennials echo the larger generalised statements they hear from others, discussing the **non-specific harm that big companies cause the environment**.

While both groups agree on this, millennials don't appear as informed. They aren't interested in the same level of detail as gen Z, which implies **surface level concern and little commitment to the cause**.

Brands should keep in mind this image-driven motivation when targeting millennials.

Brand activism

What is the most meaningful form of activism and why?

Gen Z about brand activism:

Raising awareness



I think social media allows the world to become more aware of social issues/problems that are otherwise hidden and not given much thought.

Gen Z are all about creating heightened awareness and education around specific issues, through **rallies, protests and online campaigns**.

But what's interesting is that this younger audience are more likely to think of social media as a **meaningful platform for activism**. Raising awareness and social media go hand in hand.

Signing petitions



If you have enough signatures in the UK it gets debated in parliament and has to be discussed.

Gen Z are also more likely to believe that petitions are an important form of activism as **they have a tangible result** – forcing parliament to speak about the issues and causes they care about.

Gen Z clearly believes in their individual ability to create change.

Advice for brands from gen Z:



1 Actively **explain** what you're doing



2 Always be **transparent**



3 Be aware of how you're **perceived**

Millennials on brand activism:



Donating profits and reinvesting in good causes or products

While gen Z are concerned with the effect they can personally have, millennials believe that **donating profits is the most meaningful form of activism** and that companies should invest in good causes.

This key insight demonstrates how millennials rely on charitable organisations and brands to take action on their behalf, rather than being at front of the fight.

What does this all mean?

In this report, we sought to understand generation Z on a deeper level - the first group of consumers who are intrinsically connected to the internet and were born into an always-on culture.

Who are gen Z?



Thoughtful

Educated and informed

Passionate

Sensitive about aesthetic

Fiercely passionate about the **environment and social responsibility**.

Hyper-sensitive about their own curated aesthetic and personal brand, and expect everyone - from brands to their peers to feel the same.

Who are millennials?



Money talk

Shallow concern

Talk about **money, labels and extravagance**.

Surface level concern for the environment

Like consistency

Like consistency and **know what they want**.

Gen Z doesn't understand brands who lack a digital-first mindset or awareness.

Their perception of brands is different to previous generations, and their idea of how brands **should behave** is in itself an anomaly.

Gen Z only have an interest in brands who can **communicate what they stand for** and put as much effort into their branding as they themselves do.

Communication



It's no longer good enough for brands to simply acknowledge social issues or mimic the language of this young generation.

In order to stay relevant, brands have to actively decide to evolve and **constantly communicate their social stance**.

Authenticity



Not only must brands understand how gen Z talk, but know where they come from and decide **how they can authentically contribute to the conversation**.

Substance



Because gen Z possesses the knowledge to spot fake communications, greenwashed marketing and **unsubstantiated claims should be avoided at all costs**.

Why does language comparison matter?

Social, digital and cultural surroundings ultimately shape a person's views, values and behaviours.

But the gaps between generations are larger than ever before, and people born just a few years apart have a completely different outlook on the world.

The results of this survey and our subsequent comparative analysis, reveal the different mindsets of two generations, enabling marketers to **crack the enigma which is generation Z**.

Through language comparison, we can discover **unique audience insights** that are vital for brands and marketers to understand why audiences act and how they think.

What can you do with these insights?



Brands can then strategically decide how to **target specific demographics** and craft communications which align with the values of a politically aware and socially just generation.

Find out more about Relative Insight's technology, and the audience insights we can help you uncover.

Request demo

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