

# The Gen Z equation

A WGSN project

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# Executive summary

Move over Millennials, Gen Z are ushering in a 'population tsunami'. With current estimates at two billion globally, this demographic is slated to be the single largest group of consumers worldwide in just a few years. While much has been written about the demographic, we wanted to go straight to the source to identify how our clients could better tap into their burgeoning spending power. We interviewed over 40 teenagers aged 16-21 from around the world in countries from Korea to the UK.

While there were similar concerns and influences amongst those we surveyed, it soon became blatantly clear: this generation defies stereotypes and makes its own rules. Rather than speaking broadly to Gen Z, we have identified two micro-segments within the cohort: Gen We and Gen Me. In this white paper we explore both these segments, including:

- What characteristics unite the generation
- How both segments responded to the political and economic uncertainty during their upbringing
- Their relationship with social media
- Their aspirations for education and the workforce

We will finish the paper by looking at how brands can attract both ends of the spectrum, and bridge the gap to create authentic and lifelong connections with Gen Z consumers.

# Gen Z snapshot

There are fundamental differences within Gen Z, but the demographic as a whole is defined by the common circumstances of their upbringing. They are a generation defined by technology, cultural aggregation, fluidity and contradiction. They are a divided generation, yet they are connected at the very same time by these commonalities.

## *Gen Z snapshot*

# The rise of individualism

Uniqueness is a priority for Gen Z. The most ethnically diverse generation in history, difference doesn't scare them as it may have in the past. For Gen Z, there's more emphasis during adolescence on creating their own path, whether that means building new educational systems or their own personal brands.

Gen Z wants to reframe outdated social constructs and create new ones. Brands that do the same will resonate with them. They sway towards brands that celebrate self-expression and empowerment. They don't want brands that cater to everyone, they want brands that cater to the individual.



# The beauty (and backlash) of connectivity

Digital natives from day one, Gen Z have never known a world without the World Wide Web. Their constant connectivity surfaces an alarming but unavoidable dichotomy similar to the Latin phrase “Quod me nutrit me destruit” (“What nourishes me destroys me”). While social media has provided endless opportunities to grow, learn, connect and build, it has also caused some level of damage. Never before have teens been so susceptible to depression, anxiety and suicide. According to a 2016 Monitoring the Future study, 13-year-olds who spend over 10 hours a week on social media are 56% more likely to be unhappy, while 27% of social media users see an increased risk of depression.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>“Monitoring the Future: National Survey on Drug Use,” by Lloyd Johnston et. al.,  
The National Institute on Drug Abuse at The National Institutes of Health, 2016.

# Delaying adulthood

Born in the information age, Gen Z is more intellectually advanced. Yet, they're also growing up slowly and taking longer to embrace the responsibilities of adulthood. It was even suggested in a recent child development scientific journal that the age range for adolescence should be expanded from 19 to 24 years old. Gen Z is engaging in less 'adult' activities (having sex, drinking, getting a driver's licence and working) than any other generation.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> "If adolescence now lasts until 24, what does that mean for the rest of us," by Yvonne Roberts, *The Guardian*, January 20, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> "iGen," by Jean M. Twenge PhD, *Atria Books*, August 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Roberts, *The Guardian*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> "More Americans of all ages spurning driver's licenses," *University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute*, January 20, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Roberts, *The Guardian*.

<sup>8</sup> *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2016*," by the Staff of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> "The Decline in Adult Activities Among U.S. Adolescents, 1976–2016," by Jean M. Twenge, *Child Development*.

<sup>10</sup> Roberts, *The Guardian*.

<sup>11</sup> Roberts, *The Guardian*.

## Sex



The number of sexually active ninth-graders has halved since the 1990s<sup>3</sup>

In 2015, the teen birth rate hit a global all-time low<sup>4</sup>

71% of college-aged men and 67% of college women say they wish they had more opportunities to find a long-term partner<sup>5</sup>

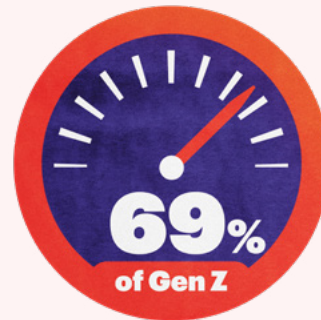
## Financial security



# 100,000

The number of American Gen Zers with mortgages<sup>11</sup>

## Driving



Only 69% of Gen Z had their driver's licence in their senior year, compared to 87% of Baby Boomers at that age<sup>6</sup>

## Drinking



# 20% drop

The fall in drinking among 12th graders in the US<sup>9</sup>

Underage drinking in the UK has halved<sup>10</sup>

## Work/college



The number of eighth-graders working during the summer has halved

Less time is spent on homework by fiscally conservative Gen Zers today<sup>8</sup>

# New definitions

For Gen Z, nothing could be worse than being attached to an idea before being seen as an individual. Remember, this is a demographic that doesn't want to be everybody's demographic.





Gen Z snapshot

# Don't call them Gen Z

Their approach to labels is loud and clear – they don't care about them and neither should society. From The New York Times to USA Today, several publications have explored what Gen Z themselves would like to be called. The results speak volumes; they're bold, ironic, optimistic yet realistic, and über-informed in understanding the complexities of their place in society.

iGen / Thumbies / iGeneration /  
Generation Scapegoat / Meme  
Generation / Delta Generation<sup>12</sup> /  
Memelords / Memennials /  
Generation Snap / Hopeful  
Generation / The Cleaner-Uppers /  
The Last Generation / The Xanax  
Generation / Post-Millennials /  
The Mass Shooting Generation /  
Doomed / Spimes / The Anxious  
Generation / Sisu Generation<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Four separate people suggested Deltas or the Delta Generation to The New York Times in their article,

“We Asked Generation Z to Pick a Name. It Wasn't Generation Z,” by Jonah Engel Bromwich, *The New York Times*, January 31, 2018

Kelsy Hillesheim, a 22-year-old New Yorker, provided the most thoughtful explanation. “Delta is used to denote change and uncertainty in mathematics and the sciences, and my generation was shaped by change and uncertainty,” she explained, mentioning terror attacks, wars, the Great Recession and the 2016 election.”

<sup>13</sup>In the New York Times, Andrea Habibiba, 15, of Houston, suggested the the Sisu Generation. “Sisu is a Finnish word that roughly translate to determination in the face of adversity, and my generation will be facing many adversity such as fixing the economy, global warming, the threat of terrorism and so on,” she wrote.

# Gen Me & Gen We

Regardless of what you call them, you need to understand them. And to understand them, means to accept that they are a **deeply divided** group.

When looking at the generation as a whole, two separate segments emerge that live on polar opposites of the spectrum:  
Gen Me and Gen We

For the most part, Gen Me is highly documented, easily understood and currently being marketed towards by the majority of brands. When you look beyond the surface, though, you discover a new group shaking things up, commanding attention and forcing brands to reconsider their strategy. This new group is called Gen We.

In this white paper, we'll look at Gen Me and Gen We – how they define themselves, their ambitions, rituals, communities and influencers. In doing so, we'll look at how brands looking to tap into both sides of the spectrum can capture their attention.

While segmenting the two groups, however, it's important not to think too linearly. As discussed, Gen Z is all about fluidity and openness. Although Gen Me and Gen We exude confidence and authority in their opinions and beliefs, they're not immune to understanding each side's allure, free-flowing along the spectrum and – either self-willing or unconsciously – contradicting themselves.

# Me to We



Competition



Collaboration



FOMO/Follower Focused



Feelings Focused



Camera



Keyboard



#ootd



#blacklivesmatter



Success



Progress



Style-Driven



Belief-Driven

# Me to We



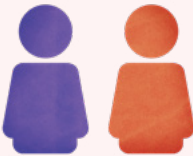
Escapism



Optimism



Sea of Sameness



Same but Different



Self-Empowerment



Peer/People Empowerment



Reaction



Action



Copy



Creating



Filter  
(Anticipated  
Perfection, Rinsta)



Unfiltered  
(Reality, Finsta)

Gen

Me

*Meet Gen Me*

# New feelings

*How Gen Me reacts to the age of anxiety*

It can be easy to overlook Gen Me because they are all around us. Today, they represent the vast majority of Gen Z consumers. While they care about issues facing teens today, they choose to escape from the noise rather than face or vocalise their feelings.



# **“In everyday life, you’ll take a stroll, but in electronic life you’ll take a scroll”**

Paris, 15, Brisbane, Australia

More style-driven, they aren’t afraid to consciously develop counterfeit lives or follow trends rather than set them. For Gen Me, following trends is a way to reach new aspirational lifestyles.<sup>14</sup>

The endless stream and endless feed fuels Gen Me’s endless need for content. And with all their time directed towards the Internet, it’s no wonder Gen Me is emotionally exhausted. The result? They desensitise themselves by submerging themselves in a sea of social media.

*“We don’t have a choice on whether we do social media, the question is how well we do it. Social media makes me feel like I have square eyes and like I’m not living my normal life anymore. I don’t feel like me, you kind of feel like a robot. It’s like you’re in a trance.”* Paris, 15, Brisbane, Australia

As part of their obsession with social media, Gen Me consciously lives double lives; their real identity that surfaces in person, and their fabricated and filtered persona that parades all over their social channels.

*“I’m embarrassed to say it, but there’s a specific niche of Instagram It Girls that I envy. They’re the ones who post pictures of fruits in those netting bags and cutely arranged clutter on their wicker coffee tables. I find myself trying to emulate their posts on a regular basis. I can never get it quite right, though. I’m just too human, lol.”* Tess, 20, Detroit, Michigan

*“On social media, it’s all about being popular, pretty and fake. In real life, it’s not about being rich or pretty or whether you make up, there’s chores to do and everyday life stuff. In everyday life, you’ll take a stroll, but in electronic life you’ll take a scroll.”* Paris, 15, Brisbane, Australia

While anxiety permeates all of Gen Z segments, it’s Gen Me that glosses it over – or even romanticises it.

*“The reason social media causes anxiety is for obvious reasons. People make their lives look so great but in reality, those people’s lives aren’t necessarily as great as they make them out to be. But I think the good thing is that people are starting to be more honest and show their real, goofy sides, too.”* Megan, 20, Long Island, New York

# **“I can never get it quite right, though. I’m just too human, lol”**

Tess, 20, Detroit, Michigan, USA

<sup>14</sup> “An Introduction to the Establishment of ‘Net Red College’ in a College in Chongqing,” by Zhang Ya, *Beijing Youth Daily*, September 21, 2017.

# New ambitions

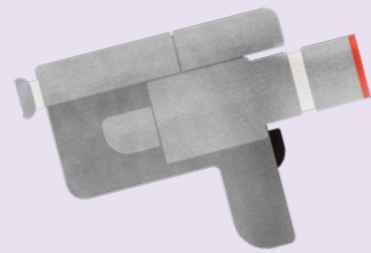
*Gen Me's ambitions, thoughts on education, and feelings about the future*

When it comes to work, education, fame and social status, Gen Me know where they want to go. Their industrious nature means that they are self-made, or at least in the process, aggregating the personal brand they want to project into the social sphere. Pair that with their filtered, curated and polished feeds, and one might mistake them for truly living their best life.

For Gen Me, education means emulating. They're looking to YouTube and Instagram to be guided by their role models. They believe there's nothing they can't learn on social media and are challenging traditional educational paths.

*"YouTube is a whole different world... You can learn how to do your make-up or how to match clothes... It's like you're travelling the world but through social media. It's the biggest community because one minute you'll be on a music video, then two minutes later you'll be on a video about how to make ice-cream. It's like TV for us Gen Z. If you have a YouTube channel you're classed as cool."*  
Paris, 15, Brisbane, Australia

In China, where the wanghong (Internet celebrity) economy is booming, over 54% of Gen Zers listed "livestreamer" as their dream profession. The Chongqing Institute of Engineering, a college in southwest China, even partnered with a local company to offer a three-month programme on how to become a better livestreamer.



**"If you have a YouTube channel you're classed as cool"**

Paris, 15, Brisbane, Australia





With admission based on physical appearance and skills, the course teaches students how to build a persona, style themselves, ask for gifts, create viral topics and manage fans. *“We want to train the students into both skillful performers and persuasive online marketing and salespersons,”* the programme official told Beijing Youth Daily.<sup>15</sup>

When it comes to more traditional forms of education, Gen Me looks for practical, skills-driven curriculums. Companies are creating alternatives to college with accelerated, skill-focused courses and pragmatic tuition plans that don't leave students in massive debt. Education for the 21st century, MissionU offers one-year programmes that aim to place graduates straight into some of the buzziest brands around, including Spotify, Uber and Casper – and have some of their salary deducted to pay back their tuition costs.

Based on the premise that students shouldn't merely learn theory, MissionU is all about real-world experience, and with most US Gen Zers experiencing the recession through their parents, 'real' promises safety in an insecure workplace.

When it comes to work, Gen Me strives for jobs that offer them contentment and happiness. Sure, money matters, but they'll eventually choose their future employers based on a positive and flexible work environment over one that pays more.

*“You need to be in a good work environment and I feel like people need to be happy around you. If no-one's happy and everything is negative, you're not going to want to go to work every single day and you're not going to get as far as people working in a nice environment.”* Jude, 18, United Kingdom

*“Definitely a good company with flexible hours and things like that would be ideal because that can lead onto other things. If you're in a job that you hate and there's loads of hours that are going to take your life away, you're not going to be happy, and for me a social life is quite important,”* adds Jude.

<sup>15</sup> “This School Will Teach You Today's Hottest Job Skills — With NO Tuition,” By Kaitlin Mulhere, Time, December 9, 2017.

As a whole, Gen Zers think outside the box and are natural-born entrepreneurs and innovators who like solving complex problems. From a young age, they forge their own paths and invent new opportunities that may not have previously existed. In 2016, employment website Monster<sup>16</sup> partnered with global research agency TNS on a study that revealed the workplace priorities of Gen Z. It found that Gen Z is the most entrepreneurial generation to date. Compared to 70% of all working generations, 76% of Gen Zers surveyed believe they are the drivers of their career and will work for their own professional advancement. Furthermore, 49% want to start their own business, compared to 32% across all working generations.

*“We will constantly look for ways to streamline processes and procedures... We have grown up in a time where often the middleman has been eliminated so we will look for ways to do things more efficiently when we show up at the office. We truly are a DIY generation and will bring this mentality with us to work,”* says teenager Jonah Stillman.<sup>17</sup> Together with his dad, David Stillman, a generational expert, they two run GenZGuru, a company focused on revealing insights about Gen Z.

In 2017, the father-son duo released a book titled *Gen Z @ Work* that explored the workplace priorities of the younger cohort.<sup>18</sup> Through their research, they found that 75% of Gen Z want their current hobby to eventually become their full-time job. Yet, this should not worry employers. As long as Gen Z gets their work done efficiently, companies who support the younger cohort’s side hustles will see higher levels of retention.

<sup>16</sup> “Move over, Millennials: Gen Z is about to hit the workforce,” *Monster*, August 30, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> “Move over, Millennials: Generation Z Is Here,” by David Stillman and Jonah Stillman, *Society For Human Resource Management*, April 11, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> “Gen Z @ Work,” by David Stillman and Jonah Stillman, *Harper Collins Publishers*, 2017.

*Meet Gen Me*

# New rituals

*Major lifestyle changes for Gen Me*



## Meet Gen Me New rituals

### Social Media

For Gen Me, cultivating a visual lifestyle is top of mind and they are consumed with building their personal brand. Beauty is a crucial device for this group as they contour their identities to fit into the popular mould of cool. Their faces have become their calling cards and their greatest asset. It's no surprise, therefore, that they will shell out big bucks to achieve the coveted look. Female Gen Zers now spend \$368 annually on beauty, with skincare being a leading driver, up 18% year-on-year.<sup>19</sup>

What's fueling the obsession? For some, it's about making money. *"I think having a large social media following is pretty important,"* says 20-year-old Zach from Massachusetts. *"It's great to see when people are able to tap into and monetise their followings."* Tess, a 20-year-old from Detroit, Michigan, agrees, but steers clear of purchasing followers: *"I do know some high school girls who have done so and now have entire 'fan accounts' on Instagram devoted to them."*

YouTube has been around since 2005, and for the most part, Gen Me doesn't remember a world before it. Questions can be answered instantaneously and the platform has emerged as the premier self-help tool for this cohort. According to Google's It's Lit survey, teens ranked the social sharing platform as their top brand in 2017.<sup>20</sup> *"There's so many categories of what you can watch,"* says Paris, a 15-year-old from Brisbane, Australia. From life hacks to beauty tutorials, the possibilities are endless and teens are using the platform to self-educate.

# \$368

How much female  
Gen Zers spend on  
beauty annually



**"I have a borderline  
existential crisis  
about my following  
nearly every day"**

Tess, 20, Detroit, Michigan, USA

Gen Me is sacrificing real-world friendships for those that derive in a false reality. Realstagram is a growth machine that prides itself on selling attention rather than followers. Here, robots are masked as friends playing the part of a community. They essentially look after your account, cultivating a following for you, taking ownership of all of the hard bits. *"It's really hard to not be sucked into the bubble of caring about how many likes you get or how many people are following you,"* says Megan, a 20-year-old from Long Island, New York.

<sup>19</sup> "Piper Jaffray Completes Semi-annual Generation Z Survey of More Than 6,000 US teens," by Piper Jaffray, Business Wire, April 10, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> "It's lit," by Google, coolbook@google.com, 2017. <https://storage.googleapis.com/think/docs/its-lit.pdf>.

# Meet Gen Me New rituals

## Hype Culture

Driven by capitalism, Gen Me spends its time engaging in resell culture. Hypnotised by hype, Gen Me buys into brands like Supreme, Palace and Bape before turning around to promote it almost simultaneously. According to a new study from ThredUp, by 2022, the resell market is set to grow from \$21 billion to \$41 billion and will account for 11% of people's wardrobes. With resell culture set to outpace fast fashion by 2027, brands must brace for this evolving consumption behaviour.<sup>21</sup>

Gone are the days of teens working seasonal summer jobs to make extra cash. With hype culture becoming the new luxury, Gen Me is willing to wait (in line) and willing to pay (online). Now 18, Boris Kunin founded the resell platform Lyne Up back in 2014, earning him thousands of dollars in revenue and real-world experience managing a business prior to even entering university. And he's not alone. Instagram has welcomed a host of reselling entities ranging from large to small, which facilitate the exchange of goods, commanding huge audiences to pay a premium price.



<sup>21</sup> "ThredUp 2018 Resale Report" by James Reinhart, ThredUp, 2018.

## Meet Gen Me New rituals

### Meme culture

*“I only text a few people but sending memes back and forth is a way for me to stay in touch with more people,”* says Megan, a 20-year-old from Long Island. Meme culture has become the new normal. With new direct messaging tools surfacing on social media, kids can easily exchange these images with each other, leading to widespread appeal. Meme accounts have surfaced on both Instagram and Twitter, becoming the expected language for this cohort. *“Memes are unavoidable for me,”* says Zach, a 20-year-old from Massachusetts. *“I don’t follow any meme accounts, but my DMs and group chats are always filled with all sorts of memes.”*

A form of self-expression, memes can also create a reality of self-destruction. With the entire Internet population in the driver’s seat exercising their creativity, there is also danger when it comes to the virality of memes and the effects they can have on an individual or a brand if it suddenly becomes the butt of a joke.

Stemming from the same type of Internet culture, social media challenges have become commonplace. In the age of information overload and unlimited access to the Internet, teen angst has become teen anxiety. Bullying and peer pressure extends beyond the confines of a classroom, and social media lies at the centre of it all. Competition manifests itself online in a way that breeds a negative kind of aspiration, creating a dangerous online culture. A seemingly innocent social media challenge has the potential to manifest into dangerous territory with viral impact.

The Tide Pod Challenge is a recent example of a brand unintentionally becoming the centre of a social challenge, which influenced the creation of a variety of memes. Designed to ease the laundry process, these pods are feasts for the eyes, dressed in a shiny almost candy-like plastic exterior.

Gen Zers are testing their limits, encouraging one another to consume the detergent pods and post the results online. According to the American Association of Poison Control Centers, there were 86 cases of intentional Tide Pod consumption in January 2018 alone amongst teens.<sup>22</sup> In context, there were just 53 in all of 2017. This challenge gained such notoriety that the brand publicly spoke out warning the dangers of consuming the product.

Her: “He’s probably thinking of other girls...”

Him: “If I swap my bitcoins for litecoins, I can move them out of Coinbase faster so I can trade it for ether in the Korean exchanges while prices are down”



**“I only text a few people, but sending memes back and forth is a way for me to stay in touch with more people”**

Megan, 20, Long Island, USA

<sup>22</sup> “HIGH ALERT: Intentional Exposures Among Teens to Single-Load Laundry Packets Continue to Rise,” by Edward V. Walrod, American Association of Poison Control Centers, January 22, 2018.

## Cryptocurrency

Entrepreneurial-minded and driven by status, interest in cryptocurrency is a natural next step for this cohort. *“My friend, who I trust immensely, told me to invest in Ethereum. I had no clue what it was but I put my faith in him and decided to invest about \$5,000 into it,”* says 22-year-old Cory from Miami. While the hype around it may reel them in, their dedication to learning has influenced them to stay. Kids today are not only aware of the possibility of getting rich quick, but also the greater opportunities it gives, and they are self-educating to crack the code. Cory spends 14 hours each day trading cryptocurrencies with the intention of one day opening up his own company. With his vast knowledge, he has taken on a leadership role, serving as a guiding force to others interested in the space via his growing Instagram page that’s dedicated to the subject.

Cryptocurrency is not mutually exclusive to a certain demographic – there are no age restrictions on participation. In 2012, a then 12-year-old named Erik Finman invested \$1,000 that he received as a gift from his grandma, purchasing 100 bitcoins for just \$10 a pop. He began trading the currency and ultimately became a millionaire by age 18. Today Finman owns 401 bitcoins priced around \$11k each, making his net worth roughly \$4.4 million at the age of 19.<sup>23</sup> It’s important to note that crypto lends itself to be an inclusive space that anyone can become a part of. New projects are launching, breaking down the barriers to entry and luring kids in by tapping into the zeitgeist.

ZEN is a popular new video sharing platform aimed at attracting pop culture aficionados aged 14 to 18 and empowering them to earn money.<sup>24</sup> The platform enables users to share content with friends with the intention of monetising through earned ad revenue and zencoin, a new cryptocurrency native to the app.

Like many teenagers and young adults that have come before them, this cohort is deeply invested in video games. According to Pew Research, 90% of males and 70% of females aged 13 to 17 have access to gaming consoles.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, a Piper Jaffray<sup>26</sup> survey found male spend in the Gen Z sector has reached new heights at 13%. Considering the psyche of Gen Me is rooted in escapism, hiding from the realities and pressures of everyday life, the popularity of video games is really no surprise. As Google’s 2017 It’s Lit survey found, video games rank favourably amongst young males for their ability to provide them with the ability to jet off into a faux world.<sup>27</sup> But this is a mindless hobby no more, as kids have started to earn real money by simply fostering their creative skills. One 18-year-old student named Alex Balfanz, currently attending Duke University, reportedly earns seven figures for a video game he developed on Roblox – a kid video creation platform.<sup>28</sup> Another student has also developed a game via this platform, using his earnings to pay for university. This cohort’s creativity, paired with their digital native sensibilities, has enabled them to latch onto skills which have made them millionaires in some cases.

<sup>23</sup> “This 19-year-old bitcoin millionaire offers ‘crucial’ advice for young people looking to invest,” by Ruth Umoh, CNBC, January 24, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> “Zen empowers Gen Z via cryptocurrency,” by James Sowers, Crypto Daily, December 6, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> “Chapter 3: Video Games Are Key Elements in Friendships for Many Boys,” by Amanda Lenhart, Pew Research Center, August 6, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> “Piper Jaffray Completes Semi-annual Generation Z Survey of More Than 6,000 U.S. TEENS,” by Piper Jaffray, Business Wire, April 10, 2018.

<sup>27</sup> “It’s lit,” by Google, coolbook@google.com, 2017. <https://storage.googleapis.com/think/docs/its-lit.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> “How Video Games Turn Teenagers Into Millionaires,” by Brian Lufkin, BBC, March 23, 2018.

*Meet Gen Me*

# New communities

*How Gen Me meets, IRL*

Gen Me are attending IRL events that serve as opportunities to build upon their personal brand and fostering friendships with like-minded people.





## Meet Gen Me New communities

### The line

For streetwear aficionados, the queue outside of Supreme has become a new community centre. Although Gen Me typically uses phones as a shield from the bright shiny beams of reality, the line has emerged as a place to foster connections with those who share the same stamina for FOMO-induced waiting. *“I think people have always tried to bottle scenes, cultures and movements as being very singular, individual events, and the line itself offers an opportunity for kids with a shared mindset to come together,”* says Jeff Carvalho, Partner and Executive Editor at Highsnobiety. While the line surely serves as a marketplace in itself, the community aspect is paramount. *“The line is a place where they can all come together and actually have real hard talk or shoptalk around it,”* says Carvalho. *“In many ways, it’s a judgement-free zone, but it is a tough place.”*

The community has moved online, connecting kids around the world who may not have direct access to a physical store. Through the app Supreme Community, kids can keep up to date on the restocks and drop lists. Reselling extends beyond the parameters of the drop itself, with many kids taking to popular resell sites like Grailed for young men or its sister site, Heroine, for their female counterparts. Another platform, Depop, brands itself as a social shopping female-led community, with 54% of its users aged 14 to 24.<sup>29</sup> On the platform, users can buy and resell their clothes from each other and celebrities who also have accounts. *“It’s cooler than Poshmark. I like looking at celebs’ stuff, too,”* says Megan, a 20-year-old from Long Island, New York.

**“The line itself offers an opportunity for kids with a shared mindset to come together”**

Jeff Carvalho, Partner and Executive Editor of Highsnobiety

<sup>29</sup> “Meet the teens making thousands from selling online,” by Suzanne Bearne, *The Guardian*, October 23, 2017.

## Meet Gen Me New communities

### Retail stores

The physical store has become a community centre luring Gen Me audiences in to capture social imagery. Designed with the square-pegged image in mind, these spaces with their considered lighting, colour, aroma and overall aesthetic have an opportunity to draw crowds and amplify scale across social media. *“My friends and I go to cafes with Instagrammable interiors and take pictures,”* says Hyunjin, a 21-year-old from Seoul.

**“My friends and I go to cafes with Instagrammable interiors and take pictures”**

Hyunjin, 21, Seoul, South Korea

### Coachella

Festivals remain a tried and true way to attract and retain the young cohort. Hyper-curated productions and modern festivals enable a brand to foster one-to-one relationships with consumers IRL. Now in its 19th year, Coachella continues to draw large crowds, with attendance ticking upwards in 2017. Gen Me flocks to the desert clad in the latest festival wear in search of content that they can post online. *“You think of what outfits would look best in the photos with your friends,”* says 23-year-old Nicole from Orange County, California. *“Solo shots are cool, but friends shots are way better. This is sad to admit, but yeah, it’s a guilty pleasure to dream up cool photos in settings like Coachella or on vacation on an island.”* On the other end of the spectrum, kids are looking to document the event purely to share their whereabouts online with their community. *“It wouldn’t necessarily be to brag on Instagram, but I would like to share my experience. And that goes for any sort of event, I don’t think about it necessarily as bragging or stunting, but I do like to document my experiences and turn it into shareable content,”* says 20-year-old Zach from Massachusetts.

## Cons

'Cons' have also proved favourable amongst the Gen Me set, attracting like-minded individuals to a physical space to sharpen their skills and knowledge, and make real-world connections. Beautycon caters to the beauty-obsessed who spend time watching YouTube tutorials, while Sneaker Con, a global event, attracts the streetwear scene. ComplexCon will host its third iteration in 2018. Taking place in Long Beach, California, the event attracts a healthy dose of US Gen Me chasing the latest music, fashion and culture. Within the walls of the Long Beach Convention Center, attendees enjoy panel discussions, musical performances and retail pop-ups that induce hype.



# 81.5%

Percentage of Twitch users that are male

## Video games

According to Google's It's Lit survey, the need for community is a major driver behind the explosive popularity of video games.<sup>30</sup> Twitch, a streaming platform, has risen to prominence in recent years for its ability to allow mass audiences to tune in and watch successful and infamous gamers whilst in action. *"I don't go on Twitch a tonne but it's my go-to source for watching any video game live stream,"* says Zach, 20, from Massachusetts. The streaming site boasts 15 million daily active users who spend 106 minutes watching and engaging in content.<sup>31</sup> Twitch's community skews heavily male at 81.5% with 55% between the ages of 18 and 34.<sup>32</sup>

Arguably one of the most popular games of the moment is Fortnite, with 3.4 million concurrent users as of February 2018.<sup>33</sup> While Gen Me men are engrossed with the game, which drives a sense of anticipated nerves to audiences looking on, their loving partners and families have had just about enough of it. The leading ladies in their lives have taken to Change.org, creating a petition to get rid of Fortnite, a desperate plea to reclaim attention from these distracted gamers. The Change.org document, which reportedly started off as a joke, has since gone viral gaining over 3.2k signatures and a whole host of comments. *"It's taking over our boyfriends' lives and brainwashing them,"* petitioner Chloe DePalma wrote. These petitioners are attempting to implement change on a very superficial cause.

**"It's taking over our boyfriends' lives and brainwashing them"**

Petitioner Chloe DePalmer, writing on Change.org of Fortnite

<sup>30</sup> "It's lit," by Google, coolbook@google.com, 2017. <https://storage.googleapis.com/think/docs/its-lit.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> "Gaming has become a universal part of our entertainment diet." By Twitch Internal Data, Twitch Advertising, September 2017. <http://twitchadvertising.tv/audience/>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> "Nearly a third of PC gamers are playing a battle royale game," by Ali Jones, PC Games News, March 27, 2018.

*Meet Gen Me*

# New leaders

*Where Gen Me looks for style influence*

The Big Four sway the actions, identity and purchases of Gen Me at scale. While the number of influences is narrow, with just four in total, their reach has exploded, blanketing the masses with a manufactured aesthetic.



# “Someone that I look up to is Kylie Jenner because she took nine months of her life off social media for the benefit of her child”

Paris, 15, Brisbane, Australia

## The Big Four

### 1 **The Kardashian effect and the super (social) models**

When the Kardashians opened up their home to the world 11 years ago, no one could have anticipated the magnitude of success they've since achieved. The female Gen Me is predominantly influenced by reigning lip kit queen, Kylie Jenner, who has become a cultural icon and one of the biggest points of reference aesthetically for this sector.

### 2 **Supreme, streetwear and reselling**

Streetwear is big business. In 2017, the hype seemed to reach fever pitch, with consumers clamouring for access to exclusive releases and logo-heavy activewear. Hyped product has become a symbol of status, and streetwear has become the new luxury. Brands are tapping into drop culture to achieve the Supreme-effect and young kids are buying into it. They're prepared for lengthy wait times and hefty price tags to achieve this modern, manufactured and systemic notion of cool.

### 3 **Meme culture**

Memes have become the new language, with kids exchanging them the way they normally would words. No subject or person is off limits and it's not all fun and games. Becoming meme-ified has the potential to not only negatively tarnish a brand in the interim, but to stay within the minds of the impressionable youth for years to follow.

### 4 **From hip-hop to K-pop: a culture without borders**

Subculture no more, hip-hop has hit the masses and continues to bolster its impact on fashion, beauty and youth culture. During politically fraught times, rap resonates. In 2018, 30-year-old acclaimed rapper Kendrick Lamar won the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for Music, an award that had never before gone to a musician outside of the jazz or classical genre.<sup>34</sup>

Today, K-pop is making its transition from a regional youth subculture to a global cultural phenomenon. Thanks to mobile technology, fans across the world have 24-hour access to celebrities' lives behind the scenes. Armed with elaborate social media strategies and style influencers, the 'Korean Wave' is boosting creative and economic growth.

<sup>34</sup> “30-year-old rapper Kendrick Lamar just made history by scoring a Pulitzer Prize for his album ‘Damn’.” by Ruth Umoh, CNBC, April 16, 2018.



We Gen

We

*Meet Gen We*

# New feelings

*How Gen We grows up in the age of anxiety*

Unlike their Gen Me counterparts, Gen We takes an unfiltered and unabashed eye to the political circumstances of their upbringing. Compassion is in their DNA and caring is the new cool. Self-expression comes very feeling-focused for Gen We. After all, it's all about feeling together and vocalising their emotions. They refuse to escape from reality – they would rather face and solve problems, or express and embrace their vulnerability and imperfection.



# “We feel obligated to take care of others through our own experiences”

Cassandra, 20, Maine, USA

Experiencing the worst mental health crisis in history, Gen We collectively lift each other up to remind everyone that “you are not alone in this”. Fully acknowledging the detrimental effects of social media, they are striving to raise awareness of technological ethics and safe spaces for anxious teens. Take Amanda Southworth, a 16-year-old who developed the Anxietyhelper app to provide resources for young people’s mental health. She recently rolled out another app called Verena, specifically aimed at helping the LGBTQ community feel safe. Joining the conversation around mental health, self-care apps are rising as the new (mobile) companion. Aloe App sends daily reminders to check in with yourself, and Claire – The Dear Diary That Replies allows users to chat about how they feel at the moment.

Unlike their counterparts living in a filtered bubble, Gen We accept themselves as who they are and are not afraid to expose their imperfections and vulnerabilities to the world. It’s their way of empowering others – fighting stigmas together to bring about change.

For example, photographer Peter Devito posts his untouched portrait series on Instagram, to empower people by normalising acne. The Ugly Girls Club challenges beauty ideals and tackles the fear of ugly to empower women. Combatting the diet culture that feeds into self-loathing, the Anti Diet Riot Club dives into the body positive movement for emotional well-being.

When it comes to feeling vulnerable, Gen We use their own experience as a tool to help others.

*“Vulnerability has changed from a rawness to more of a healing... Once we come forward with our experiences and let it help other people, we start to heal. It’s about that empowerment and the feeling of ‘I don’t want someone else to go through what I did.’”* Cassandra, 20, Maine, USA

In Australia, 13-year-old Hamish Finlayson builds apps and games to increase awareness and teach his peers about autism, using his own experience of the condition.

Instagram-based collective @blackboyfeelings see themselves as an “avenue for black expression”, exploring the emotional experience of being a young black man in America. In March 2018, the BBC released a documentary, Just Boys IRL, where five teenage boys that met on online game Dota, travel together and openly discuss their struggles with mental health issues. Films like Wonderstruck and Eighth Grade (with a 100% fresh rating on Rotten Tomatoes)<sup>35</sup>, also tap into the sense of vulnerability and loneliness that surrounds teenagers.

<sup>35</sup> “Eighth Grade,” by Rotten Tomatoes, Rotten Tomatoes, 2018. [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/eighth\\_grade/](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/eighth_grade/).



# New ambitions

*Gen We's ambitions, thoughts on education, and feelings about the future*

Similar to Gen Me, Gen We are goal-oriented, just not to the point of obsession. They dream big, but more importantly, they get things done. In their eyes, collective progress is more important than individual success. The importance of college and securing the right job is still somewhat appealing to Gen We, but the values and attitudes these institutions uphold have to be completely upheaved, otherwise Gen We are looking elsewhere for an education.

Gen We teens value safety and financial security, having grown up during the US recession or with precarious and unstable economies. Still, there's a big emphasis on carving out the right path and finding resourceful and entrepreneurial ways to support themselves. With this comes a healthy dose of scepticism towards traditional education.

*"I am quite anti-college for the most part. Mostly because of how colleges have become huge for-profit institutions. Students have become numbers and dollar signs. I have many friends in college who are so stressed out it seems inhumane to me. It definitely doesn't make economic sense to me either. I never wanted to go to college and I don't plan on going. The 17-year-old me was looking at adulthood pretty anxious and overwhelmed."*  
Kayla, 18 (and CEO of GreenBoxShop),  
Miami, USA

**"The education I wanted was learning how to love yourself – not killing yourself"**

Jaehyun Jung, 17, Seoul, South Korea

*"I was living with my single mom who was barely able to make ends meet financially. It pained me to see my mom struggle, but I was also becoming aware that I needed to start creating a path to be able to independently support myself one day. At the time I really wanted to become a certified yoga teacher which was financially out of reach, so I started a Go Fund Me page where I would send people shirts in exchange for donations,"* adds Kayla.

In Asia, teen depression and suicide rates are growing due to high competition from university entrance exams and concern about future prospects – 51% of Hong Kong teens show signs of depression<sup>36</sup> and the teenage suicide rate rose to 4.9% in 2017.<sup>37</sup> As the pressure grows, a growing number of teens are rejecting college to defy a highly competitive education environment.

On entrance exam day in Korea, the stress actually precipitated a demonstration: *"I was 13 years old when I met a friend who wanted to commit suicide because of studying. The education I wanted was learning how to love yourself – not killing yourself. Learning together – not competing with each other. I hope no-one has to lose their lives because of college entrance exams,"* Jaehyun Jung, 17, Korea<sup>38</sup>

Jaehyun was one of the many who took to the streets on the national university entrance exam day of 2017, to voice why they're rejecting college. Eighteen-year-old Pia also explained that she was rallying *"to empower other students who wish to choose the same path as us. I also wanted to show that there are people like us and you need better legislations to support us."* Pia currently lives in a co-living space called Reject House, run by Hidden Bag. This non-profit organisation aims to create a safe space for youth rejecting college and offers a community space for them to gather and socialise. For 19-year-old Sungwoo Park, rejecting college is a way to become the subject of his own life: *"Schools don't really teach you 'why' you have to attend college. I reject conforming to the pressures and expectations society puts on young people when it comes to college education."*<sup>38</sup>



<sup>36</sup> *"Half of 3,441 Hong Kong students polled show signs of depression,"* by Kimmy Chung, South China Morning Post, September 27, 2017.

<sup>37</sup> *"Teen suicide rates grow due to high competition,"* by Lee Kyung-min, The Korea Times, September 26, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> *"Young people who declared rejection of admission on the day when everyone watches,"* by Pak Jeong Ho, OhmyNews, November 23, 2017.

New college programmes are now appealing to the growing desire for social-emotional learning, while introducing less traditional school subjects such as empathy and resilience. Yale University is fostering an emotionally intelligent campus culture. Its president, Peter Salovey, says colleges should hire university staff who embrace a high level of emotional awareness, and train them to cultivate empathy as a way to reorient colleges towards solving real-world problems. Yale's special programmes include a centre devoted to emotional intelligence that works to harness the power of emotions through research and educational approaches, as well as interdisciplinary study opportunities that foster cross-departmental collaboration, such as drama and business, visual art and neuroscience, architecture and environmental studies.

Similarly, Smith College has launched a new initiative called Failing Well that aims to destigmatise failure, foster resilience and teach students how to cope with setbacks through workshops on imposter syndrome and discussions on perfectionism. Other universities such as Stanford, Princeton and the University of Pennsylvania have also adopted on- and offline safe spaces where students can share, cope and celebrate the ups and downs of college life.

Gen We cares deeply about doing good and humanity's impact on the environment, and new alternative forms of education have put sustainability and the environment at the forefront. Kent State University has a new campus garden course that teaches students about food security and big agriculture while allowing them to plan and plant an on-site garden, while Sweet Briar College created a grant-funded sustainability internship programme in which participating students grow produce in the campus garden.

Other campuses with innovative programmes include Western Technical College, Colorado State University and Manhattan College, which has an initiative to transform organic waste into nutrient-rich fertiliser for campus grounds.

Gen We expects companies to promote inclusivity and equal opportunity in everything that they do. This includes office language, policies and recruitment. Otherwise, companies may miss out diversifying the range of skill sets that could be attracting potential Gen Z employees. According to a 2016 study from accounting firm EY, two-thirds of Gen Z cited equal pay and promotion regardless of differences in gender or race as a key factor when it comes to trusting an employer.<sup>39</sup> Growing up, Gen Z has witnessed big corporations receiving negative press about their workplaces. With this, they will care deeply about a brand's integrity and will avoid ones that are not up to par. They want to work for companies that are fair, unbiased and embrace diversity. Gen Zers want to feel safe and respected at work, and see people like them in leadership roles.

*"I don't think that CEOs or people in positions of authority should consign our generation to a specific stereotype, because diversity is really prominent in our generation and you should really consider what makes a person who they really are."* Kristie, 19, New York, USA

<sup>39</sup> "EY research reveals less than half of full-time workers surveyed trust their employer, boss and colleagues," by EY, Ernst & Young, June 30, 2016.

# New rituals

## Major lifestyle changes for Gen We

### Food Transparency

Rising as the biggest spender in the food industry, teens are spending 24% of their cash on food (4% more than what they spend on clothing), according to Piper Jaffray's Spring 2018 study.<sup>40</sup> And when it comes to Gen We, inclusive menus are top of mind. They believe restaurants should cater to all types of consumers and offer more vegetarian, gluten-free and halal options.

Growing up with limitless access to information, Gen We want to know where their food comes from, how it is grown and who made it. They also care deeply about how their eating habits affect the environment.

*"I'm very into farming and food justice. I've been volunteering at local farms in the South Florida area, and the community here is so lovely. Sitting on fertile soil and being hands-on with the fruits of the earth while talking about conspiracy theories with your harvest partner is always so deeply refreshing."* Kayla, 18, Miami, USA

### Activism

Compared to Gen Me, who spend most of their time online to feed self-interests, Gen We are shifting the focus from me to we. They use online platforms to communicate and organise, while ensuring their daily activities bring them purpose. Gen We use their spare time to educate themselves, speak out about inclusivity, diversity and the environment. For Gen We, activism needs to be taken to the street. *"We want to make sure every aspect is linking up to avoid any kind of faux activist connotation,"* explains Cassandra, 20, from Maine, USA.



24%

Money spent by  
teens on food

— VS —



20%

Money spent by  
teens on clothes

<sup>40</sup> "Piper Jaffray Completes Semi-annual Generation Z Survey of More Than 6,000 U.S. TEENS," by Piper Jaffray, Business Wire, April 10, 2018.

## Travel

For Gen We, travel is another way to get out of their comfort zone and look for cultural immersion.

*“The more we understand about how everything is around the world, and how different people work, makes us more tolerant.”*  
Jose, 21, Queens, New York, USA

*“Knowing diversity and experiencing it makes you more creative. I don’t think you can reach your full capacity unless you are aware of things that aren’t similar to you.”* Ariana, 21, Queens, New York, USA

One way to travel is to take a gap year, which has increased in popularity 43% YOY since 2006<sup>41</sup>. Gen Z influencers like Malia Obama and Yara Shahidi also took a year off before entering Harvard. Gap years can give Gen Zers the opportunity to travel more authentically and gain a new perspective or sense of purpose. According to the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA), top destinations for gap years include Thailand, Australia, Vietnam, Peru, New Zealand, USA, Cambodia, South Africa, Argentina and India<sup>42</sup>.

In China, there has been a related shift as university students opt to volunteer abroad, rather than study in the West.

*“If, in the past, Chinese people had a passion for learning about developed Western nations, then they are now beginning to develop a more balanced understanding of other parts of the world. We not only need to learn from other countries’ success stories, we also need to understand the difficulties that less fortunate people face. Only with this understanding can we work together to create a better world,”* wrote Guangzhou University student Chai Bipeng in Sixth Tone of her experience in youth-led volunteer projects.<sup>43</sup>

## IRL

In light of the increasing digital saturation of their lives, Gen We strive to spend their free time with their friends and family. According to WGSN research, favourite weekend activities include eating out, going to friends’ houses, or other intimate settings where teens can interact with each other and spend quality time. *“During weekdays, it’s hard for me to give full attention to my loved ones since I’m busy with my work at school, so I try to make an effort to spend more time with them on weekends. This is not only for the social relationships, but for my own mental health and happiness,”* says Claire, 19, from Bangkok, Thailand.



<sup>41</sup> “American Gap Association National Alumni Survey,” prepared by Nina Hoe, phd, American Gap association; Temple University Institute for Survey Research, 2015. <https://gapyearassociation.org/assets/2015%20NAS%20Report.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> “ABTA reveals top Gap Year destinations,” by Press Team, Association of British Travel Agents, August 13, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> “Why More and More Chinese Students Are Volunteering Abroad,” by Chai Bipeng, Sixth Tone, October 5, 2017.

# New communities

Social media is making it easier than ever before for like-minded teens to find each other, and Gen We is congregating both online and off to demand the change they wish to see in the world.

Concerned with progress rather than success, they crave community and connection. By using social media, they have been able to form micro-online communities to help mobilise support for new causes and issues. These issues and communities can be bucketed under five main themes: mental health, sustainability, inclusivity, rights and safety, and accountability.

## Mental Health

With so many pressures, many young people have turned to online communities for support as they battle mental health issues.

- 1. #Halfthestory:** A project to highlight our most human attributes via social media and reignite human connection in the digital space. It's dedicated to sharing experiences, struggles, entrepreneurial journeys and aspirations.
- 2. Gurls Talk:** a safe space community for women that focuses on topics like mental health and the repercussions of social media. The project was founded by British model, Adwoa Aboah.

## Sustainability

As sustainability continues to be top of mind for this cohort, they are turning to social and each other to rally for positive change.

- 1. @bahamasplasticmovement:** An online movement that successfully persuaded the prime minister of the Bahamas to ban the use of plastic bags.
- 2. @greenschoolbali:** A non-profit private pre-kindergarten to grade 12 school in Bali created to educate tomorrow's civic leaders in sustainable development.
- 3. March for Science:** A worldwide protest on Earth Day attended by people of all ages. This year's march took place in over 200 cities around the globe.
- 4. Girlfriend Collective:** A brand that makes leggings from recycled plastic water bottles from Taiwan.

@recipesforselflove



Scott Olson / Getty Images

@sexybeastla



@galdemzine



g.  
Often ambition, especially career ambition, is seeking outside approval. Whereas, our pursuit of happiness should be very internal.  
Rachel Bloom

@girlboss

@thecovengirlgang



Sarah Morris / Getty Images

@reprorightszine



Community over Competition  
@thecovengirlgang



you don't own me  
@girlboss



## Equality

Acceptance and inclusivity is key to Gen We. A number of collectives and groups strive to cultivate a more inclusive world that understands and celebrates differences. Causes range from race and gender rights, to protecting the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals.

**1. Thatswhats:** Based in the UK, Thatswhats explores girlhood in a digital age, aiming to fight for change, reduce stigma and create meaningful conversations to give young female voices a platform to be heard.

**2. #Girlgaze (@girlgaze):** With the hashtag, anyone can submit their work to this digital media collective based in LA. The digital platform has ventured into an analogue world with a book and the project has achieved over one million contributions.

**3. Phluid project (thephfluidproject.com):** Part community and part retail marketplace, this New York-based retailer aims to cultivate a gender-neutral space, free from judgement.

**4. ReproRightsZine (@reprorightszine):** A free zine initiative to inform readers about the current state of reproductive rights.

**5. Kode with Klossy:** Founded by supermodel Karlie Kloss, Kode with Klossy runs summer camps across a variety of American cities that operate without tuition. The camps are open to selected applicants between the ages of 13-18, who learn the "ABCs of code," according to Kloss.

## Rights & Safety

After a series of high-profile mass shootings in schools, the US is at the centre of a heated debate. Kids have had enough and are tired of fearing for their lives and safety every time they enter a classroom. They've decided to stand up and speak out.

**1. #marchforourlives:** In March 2018, US students from Parkland, Florida, rallied together to create a movement that achieved a ripple effect across the world. In the wake of a school shooting that killed 14 students and three staff, the students created a movement and a march to protest the US gun laws. Dubbed March For Our Lives, the students were able to draw a crowd of 500,000 to Washington DC.

**2. Self-Defence Seminar (@killerandasweetthang):** Bringing URL to IRL, the popular influencer @killerandasweetthang and her loyal platform created a community event to help empower girls with self-defence techniques, including Jiu-Jitsu.

**3. Grrrl Gang Manilla:** An outspoken collective of feminists in the Philippines who speak out about key issues facing the nation.

**4. Girls Against:** Teen intersectional feminists combating sexual harassment at festivals. The group has over 6k Instagram and 18k Twitter followers and has partnered with over 25 UK-based festivals to raise awareness.

**5. #freeperiods (@amikageorge):** A 19-year-old Brit who asked the government to provide free menstrual products to those on free school meals.

**6. SitWithUs:** An anti-bullying app started by high school junior Natalie Hampton from Los Angeles in 2016. The app creates lunch events to invite students who may otherwise have eaten alone. It also invites users to become ambassadors, helping fight bullying and promote inclusion.



# New leaders

## *Who Gen We looks up to*

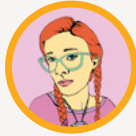
While Gen Me looks up to macro influencers, Gen We looks to each other. It's not about competition for this group – it's collaboration that reigns supreme. Gen We is inspired by the actions of their peers and they empower one another to ignite the change they want to see.

Conscious of the future, this cohort invests time, money and energy into delivering impactful change. Issues like mental health, sustainability, race, LGBTQ+ rights and safety are top of mind, and micro leaders have emerged to drive meaningful impact around these concepts.

In contrast to Gen Me, these niche influencers don't resonate because of their famous face or follower count. For the most part, they've emerged from obscurity cultivating a following not because of who they are, but for what they say – and stand for. While these influencers are mostly unrecognisable, the weight of their messages is intended for the greatest impact.

## Meet Gen We New leaders

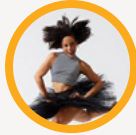
### Mental Health



1. **@makedaisychains:** Hannah Daisy is a mental health activist who uses her illustrative skills to create dynamic posts around healing, self-care and acceptance.

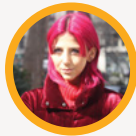


2. **@myfacestory:** Kali is a 22-year-old beauty Instagrammer who made headlines for posting progress shots of her cystic acne treatment. She uses her account to show the reality of dealing with acne and the effects it has on people's mindset.



3. **@blackswandiaries:** Sydney is a professional ballerina encouraging followers to #BreakTheStigma around mental illness while promoting emotional stability.

### Sustainability



1. **@scarcurtis:** Scarlett advocates for sustainability and equality in her writing as the Gen Z columnist for Sunday Times Style. In a recent column, she said: "Let's turn single-use plastic into a social crime like wearing Crocs with socks." She is also a part of the #pinkprotest #freeperiod campaign.



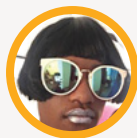
2. **@xiuhtezcatl:** Xiuhtezcatl is an 18-year-old indigenous hip-hop artist and activist working as Youth Director for Earth Guardians. An esteemed educator and speaker, he's also the youngest member to serve on Barack Obama's Youth Council.



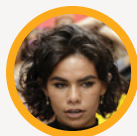
3. **@hailethomas:** Upon graduating from the Institute for Integrative Nutrition, Haile became the youngest certified health coach in America. The 17-year-old speaks about health activism while promoting her vegan lifestyle on Instagram. She also founded non-profit Healthy Active Positive Purposeful Youth (HAPPY), which focuses on providing low-cost plant-based culinary education in underserved communities.

## Meet Gen We New leaders

### Equality



1. **@h\_h\_m0519:** Han is a male model of Nigerian and Korean descent who embraces multiracial identity in a homogenous culture. He empowers his followers to embrace their differences, and was named one of Time Magazine's most influential teens.



2. **@enterthedragon\_:** Aretha is a 16-year old Melbourne student who became the first woman to be elected as Prime Minister for the National Indigenous Youth Parliament. The teen speaks out on issues surrounding Australia's Indigenous community.



3. **@mcsoffia:** Wise beyond her 14 years of age, MC Soffia is a budding São Paulo-based rapper who performed during the Rio Olympics. An activist in her own right, her music is anchored in positive messages of empowerment for fellow Afro-Brazilian women struggling to come to terms with the texture of their hair and the lack of black visibility in society.

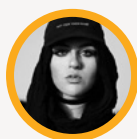
### Accountability



1. **@elisebyolsen:** Elise is an 18-year-old from Norway, who at 13 became the "world's youngest editor-in-chief" of Recens Paper magazine. After resigning to give opportunity to younger teens, Olsen gave a TED Talk at the ripe age of 16. She now reigns as the editor-in-chief of Wallet, which talks about the fashion system and capitalism.

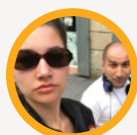


2. **@joshuawongcf:** Joshua is a Hong Kong student, activist and politician who serves as secretary-general of pro-democracy party Demosistō. Wong previously founded the Hong Kong student activist group Scholarism.

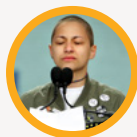


3. **@amani:** Founding popular site Muslim Girl at 17 years old, Amani Al-Khatahtbeh offers up a unique cultural perspective from a modern Muslim women.

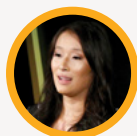
### Rights & Safety



1. **@dearcattallers:** Noa Jansma, a 20-year-old from Amsterdam, used Instagram to showcase every man that catcalls her. With over 327,000 followers and 28 posts, her account aims to raise awareness of the objectification of women.



2. **@emma4change:** Emma Gonzalez and the Parkland shooting victims have turned their personal tragedy into a national cause, becoming national leaders and spokespeople for Gen We.



3. **@nadyaokamoto:** Nada is a 19-year-old student at Harvard University who is seeking to normalise the conversation around menstrual products with her organisation Period. She also started EPlur.org, a place for young people to share stories about how the current administration's actions are affecting them.



**Conclusion**

# Bridging the divide

While Gen Me and Gen We live on opposite ends of the spectrum, there's a middle ground of influencers who bridge the divide. With transgenerational qualities, they highlight how influencers and brands can appeal to both sides and encompass a micro, mass, celebrity and mixed perspective.

<b>Celeb</b> Yara Shahidi Amandla Stenberg Rowan Blanchard	<b>Mock</b> Lil Miquela Ronnie Blawko Shudu Gram
<b>Micro</b> Sophia Hadjipanteli Desmond Napoles Sorsha Morava Alok	<b>Mass</b> Brockhampton Killer and a Sweet Thang Emily Elaine Oberg Ninja

## Bridging the divide

**1. Lil Miquela (@lilmiquela):** With 900k followers, it may come as a surprise that this influencer is not a real person, but a computer-generated avatar that embodies a human-like hypebae identity while simultaneously aligning with important causes like Black Lives Matter. Her identity bleeds the lines between both sectors of Gen Z. She forces her audience to question what is 'real' versus what is manufactured influence.

**2. Ronnie Blawko (@blawko22):** Keep an eye out for another avatar influencer, recently spawned from the creators of Lil Miquela. We chatted to the rising star (page 60) to get the scoop on his digital life. Blawko, as he's been dubbed, shares similar characteristics to his pseudo sister, leaving people guessing about his true identity.

**3. Shudu Gram (@shudu.gram):** Another mock influencer to note is Shadu, the first digital supermodel. She has 100k followers and has been featured by Fenty Beauty. At the moment, she's not outwardly political.

**4. Sophia Hadjipanteli (@sophiahadjipanteli):** With over 169k followers, Sophia is a first-generation Greek Cypriot American who embraces the #unibrowmovement. With a mixed reception, including trolls and celebrity praise, she's been featured by New York Magazine and the Man Repeller.

**5. Desmond Napoles (@desmondisamazing):** Rising to prominence during S/S 18 Fashion Week, this 10-year-old 'drag-kid' from New York sports 55k followers and a filtered identity masked with make-up and sass. He's a prolific LGBTQ+ advocate.

**6. Alok (@alokvmenon):** A trans writer, performer, educator and self-proclaimed fashionista, Alok goes by the pronoun "They". Treading the line between Gen Me and Gen We, Alok projects a style-driven and hyper-filtered persona, while being an outspoken advocate for inclusivity and acceptance.

**7. Sorsha Morava (@sorshamorava):** A vegan and plant-based coach. She projects a hyper-filtered image and is a favourite among the It Girl Instagram set.

**8. Brockhampton (@brckhmptn):** An LA-based hip-hop music collective unofficially led by Kevin Abstract, who celebrates his status as a gay man of colour. Having met online in a Kanye West fan group, the group's songs tackle subjects of male non-normative sexuality. They sport Jaden Smith as an unofficial member.

**9. Killer and a Sweet Thang (@killerandasweetthang):** A self-proclaimed sex-educator, she sports over 403k followers. Her content, while aimed at promoting a safe space to discuss sex, is itself highly sexualised, yet with an unfiltered and vulnerable sentiment.

**10. Emily Elaine Oberg (@emilyelaineoberg):** An influencer, designer and content creator with a cult following, she started her career doing interviews online at Supreme before a brief stint as the head of women's design for Kith. Much of her posts juxtapose meaningful sentiments: think Patagonia mixed with Chanel and Supreme, with commentary on sustainability and a meat free diet.

**11. Tyler Blevins (@Ninja):** A 26-year-old who makes over \$500k per month via interactive live-streaming site Twitch. He was recently joined by Drake and Travis Scott, along with JuJu Smith, for a game that drew a historic 628,000 viewers. He's donated the funds to charity, including \$75,000 to a suicide prevention fund.

**12. Amandla Stenberg:** At age 16, the actor and singer became outspoken about how cultural appropriation was infiltrating pop culture.

**13. Rowan Blanchard:** A front-row favourite, this selfie-loving 16-year-old rose to prominence on the Disney Channel. At age 13, she took to Instagram, writing an essay on intersectional feminism.

**14. Yara Shahidi:** An 18-year old American actor activist. Similar to Amandla and Rowan, she's a favourite among the fashion crowd, yet she also spends her time protesting and rallying for inclusivity and positive change. She recently created Project Eighteen x '18, a creative storytelling platform that aims to empower Gen Zers to get out and use their voice.



## DM Interview

# *Ronnie Blawko*

@WGSN

Are you a real person?  
Are you modelled on a real person?

@blawko22

I'm modelled after myself.  
Every day I be lookin' more like me.

Have you worked with any brands?

No sell-outs here.  
DMs are open, though.

Will there eventually be a whole family?

Having a family is kinda played out. Like people already done it. Kim and Kanye kinda own that lane. I wanna do my own thing.

Do you stand for important causes  
like your sister [Lil Miquela]?

Miquela's not my sister. She called me bro one time on her story and people freaked out. We don't even look alike really. But yeah she's always trying to teach me how to be better. I don't like "causes" like... I wanna support people doing cool stuff. "Cause" feels like it's part of your parole or something. Just support dope shit when you see it.

How old are you?

22 but also time ain't real. I'm 22.

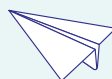
What is the definition of cool to you?

Getting jumped at a Carl's Jr. Or getting divorced at a Dairy Queen.

What are the positives and negatives of social media?

Positives – you can get paid to do nothing.

Negatives – you buy one pair of Birkenstocks ONE time cause your last girl was granola like that and now Instagram tries to show you leather-ass sandals all the time. Y'all can relax.





# Action points

## Gen Z

There are two sides to Gen Z, and micro-segmentation will reign, meaning less is more when it comes to targeting.

Don't play the sidelines, pick a side but be sure to stay true to your DNA.

Purpose isn't a marketing tool, it's a long-term company commitment, a commitment to your brand values.

You can't shoehorn purpose into your strategy.

Use the bridging influencers to connect both Gen Me and Gen We without alienating either side.

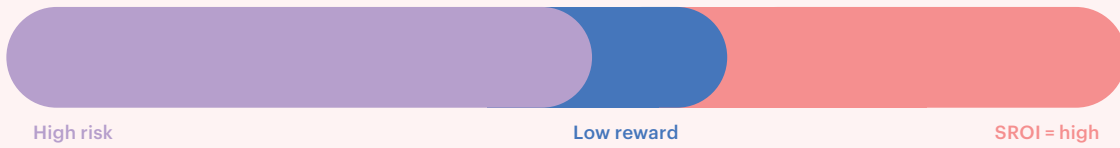
The only way for brands to authentically play in the middle is when the influencer and brand SROI (Social Return On Investment)\* is high.

Consider what role your brand can play in the age of anxiety. Mental Health is a crisis for this generation, and your brand could be a change-maker.

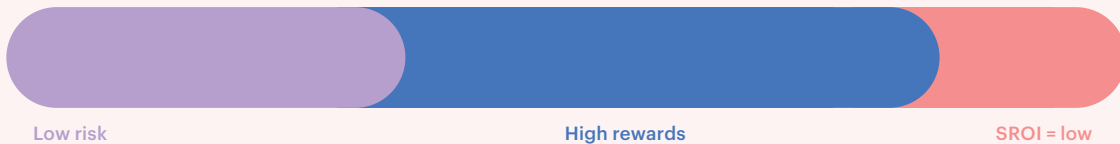
Whether Gen Me or Gen We, this group is hands-on, results-driven and pragmatic, which means they want authenticity and consistency.

# Risk gauge

## Gen We



## Gen Me



### Gen We

- Brands need to bake empathy into all aspects of their business.
- Don't just talk about diversity in your campaigns, represent it in your workplace and with the people you do business with – Gen We will look under the surface.
- Leverage the power of boycotters. Gen We wants to buy into brands that they believe in, not avoid ones they distrust. They expect business leaders to fill in the gap where governments have lost trust.
- Gen We craves connection. Deliver offline experiences, events and workshops that combat the loneliness social media is creating.
- Giving a product to communities only matters when the product is needed. Do trendy shoes or sunglasses really matter to a starving child?
- Look towards new companies like Conscious Period, which donates female sanitary products to homeless women in the US.
- Bake optimism into your communication strategies: 53% of consumers see a better year ahead. Despite the gloom and doom, it's important to stay upbeat yet realistic for Gen We.

### Gen Me

- Create content to help them escape. Think ASMR-led content and Instagrammable activations.
- Lose the corporate vibe if you want to hire youth. They're looking for flexibility and informality.
- Don't chase culture, create it. Gen Me wants to engage with viral moments. Look at brands like KFC and adidas for inspiration.
- For China, look to this segment of Gen Z to be impulse purchasers and triggered by social media.

# Glossary



- #WeVoteNext
- #NeverAgain
- #ILoveYouChina
- #MeToo
- #308Removed
- #SareeNotSorry
- #BlackLivesMatter/#BLM
- #ItsABlackThing
- #HeForShe
- #BringBackOurGirls
- #GivingTuesday
- #LoveWins
- #EverydaySexism
- #NoDAPL
- #MarchForOurLives
- #BikesUpKnivesDown
- #SayHerName
- #TakeAKnee
- #DressLikeAWoman
- #StopFundingHate
- #YouAintNoMuslimBruv
- #TimesUp
- #YemenInquiryNow
- #ReclaimTheBindi





When we started researching Gen Z, I was immediately struck by the diversity of this generation. This is a generation that by its very nature defies stereotypes. They detest labels. They cut through boxes.

While from a research standpoint it is fascinating, from a marketing perspective it is perplexing. How do you begin to speak to a cohort who rejects platitudes and generalisations?

Yet one thing is for sure, they also cannot simply be ignored. Slated to reach two billion in the next few years, they are destined to become the largest spending group sooner than we think. So who is your Gen Z consumer? And what steps do you need to take to capture their attention?

At WGSN, we help our clients create tailored solutions for their consumer – not just based on generational stereotypes but on individual wants, needs and desires. And as you'll have just read, being seen as individuals is the number one priority for this up-and-coming cohort.

If you'd like more information on tailoring your marketing strategy for Gen Z, please don't hesitate to get in touch by emailing your local representative or visiting [wgsn.com/mindset](https://wgsn.com/mindset).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carla".

Carla Buzasi  
Managing Director  
WGSN

# Get in touch

At WGSN we work with our clients to help them develop winning strategies to attract specific customer personas and demographics. For 20 years, our market-leading insight has helped over 6,500 of the world's largest fashion and design companies get and stay ahead of the competition. [Find out more](#)

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