

Who Is Gen Z?

A Sociological Perspective

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GEN Z

A sociological perspective

Don't call us anything. The whole notion of cohesive generations is nonsense.

KIERNAN MAJERUS-COLLINS, 2018, AGE 22, DEMOCRATIC PARTY CHAIRMAN,
LEWISTON, MAINE (BROMWICH, 2018)

Tuning in to Gen Z

Every new generation has a desire to evolve from the one before and Gen Z is no exception. This unique, mobile-first demographic, raised on technology and unprecedented access to information, is impacting every facet of society. Anyone who wants to succeed in marketing, education, or connecting with Gen Z will need to be tuned in.

Throughout this ebook, we share key generational characteristics, insights, and learning attributes that your organization can consider to build credibility and tune in with the unique cultural preferences of Gen Z. While you're learning about these young people, we also encourage you to look beyond merely viewing Gen Z as a set of statistics in a spreadsheet or target demographic that enhances your bottom line and get to know Generation Z, their culture and as people.

Along with the foundational demographic information you'll find in this ebook, we introduce you to Jenk Oz, the youngest Gen Z CEO in Britain; you'll learn how students in Ireland are using virtual reality (VR) in their classrooms; and we share why the Tony Award winning Broadway musical 'Dear Evan Hansen' resonated so deeply with US youth culture. If that sounds like a diverse collection of information, just wait until you meet even more of the individuals who are creating the culture of this dynamic and rising generation.

The Gen Z frequency

To understand Gen Z, you must first understand their lives, digital habits, struggles, role models, cultural touchstones, how they manage Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and figuring out where they fit into a rapidly changing world. However, most of what sets this generation apart is an unrelenting relationship with information, media consumption and mobile technology. During the past few years, we have conducted hundreds of interviews with Gen Z kids, tweens, teens and young adults and have distilled our findings into a list of youth culture attributes. These generational markers are the identifying traits of what will be the most significant global demographic shift in history.

Gen Z generational markers

- **Independent:** Gen Z is willing to work hard for success vs the 'be discovered' mentality prevalent among their older Millennial siblings.
- **Diverse:** As a global cohort, Gen Z is open to all ethnicities, races, genders and orientations. They expect to see those values reflected in their brands, classrooms and media.
- **Engaged:** Gen Z is very politically aware and actively involved in supporting environmental, social impact and civil rights causes. They are focused on making the world a better place and want to align with organizations dedicated to making a difference. Activists like Malala Yousafzai are their role models.
- **Knowledge managers:** Often misrepresented as having a 'short attention span', Gen Z has developed an ability to quickly filter the mass quantities of information that appear on their screens and decide what is worthwhile and what should be filtered and discarded.

- **Pragmatic:** Raised by Gen X parents who experienced a similar childhood shaped by a recession, Gen Z are choosing more pragmatic careers (for example, selecting a legal profession instead of trying to be a YouTube influencer), are financially conservative and are avoiding the social media privacy pitfalls of Millennials.
- **Personal brands:** Unlike Millennials who tended to overshare on social media, young people are managing their presence like a brand; privacy matters and contributes to the popularity of ephemeral social media apps such as Snapchat and Instagram.
- **Collaborative:** Whether it is in the classroom using Skype with students in another country, playing eSports on Twitch or team sports in their backyard, Gen Z has learnt early in life the importance of collaboration in both local and distributed (or virtual) environments.

Defining Gen Z

The bulk of this generation, born approximately between 1996 and 2011 and currently in their teens and early twenties, are a group yet to be fully defined. For Gen Z there is no definitive date, but this range is the broadest accepted in the industry.

Gen Z culture

Overwhelmingly, the primary driver of (most) Gen Z life is finding a balance between their offline and social media identities. Often this results in the creation of multiple social media personas that are a hybrid of both their aspirations and the reality of their offline lives.

Fuelled by easy access to social technologies, streaming media, external cultural and demographic forces, in some ways their childhood is shorter than for previous generations. Yet in others, they remain 'kids' longer than previous generations of teens, with a trend towards delaying behaviours associated with adulthood, such as drug use, sexual activity and driving.

However, one of the major differences between the offline actions of previous generations and the online actions of the youth in this mobile age is the way the internet can now take whatever information they post and amplify it way beyond their immediate group, and potentially even turn it viral. For some, this social media amplification is about propelling them into being internet famous, but for the majority, social media offer a way to be validated. Ultimately, this aspect of being seen and heard and belonging to something bigger than oneself is one of the core motivators for Gen Z.

Raising Gen Z: same behaviours, new tools

As social media natives, this is the first generation in human history that views behaviours such as status updates, texting, selfies, social networking, mobile devices and 'information at your fingertips' as an everyday part of life. In many ways, Gen Z is experiencing many of the same behavioural patterns that their parents did as kids; they are just using different tools and technology to create the same artefacts of youth culture as their parents, siblings and peers

Think of it this way: you may have had a phone (the one with the cord that you could only use in your house and had no web access); they have a mobile phone (the one without a cord and 24/7/365 web access). You perhaps made home movies using a camcorder and shared them on your VHS player; they make videos on their phone and upload them to YouTube, Instagram TV and Snapchat. You took pictures with a Polaroid and shared them with friends; they take pictures with their phone and publish them in real time to Instagram.

You made mixtapes; they make playlists on Spotify, Apple Music or YouTube. You hung out at the mall with friends; they hang out with friends and online communities on Houseparty, Snapchat and Instagram with friends. In the end, they are exhibiting the same behaviours but using different tools to meet their need for self-expression.

A few short years ago, students wrote a mean thing about other kids on the bathroom wall, and the school janitor quickly removed it. Now bullying is shared on Twitter, Snapchat or Instagram, and it is seen by a wider audience and has a more significant emotional impact. One thing is clear: the ways in which Gen Z youth consume information and communicate are fundamentally different from earlier generations. For this cohort, all forms of media are a social experience that can be shared with the tap of a finger.

Gen Z: a phenomenon without borders

Data from Population Pyramid (2017) show that the current population of Gen Z is estimated to be a little more than 1.9 billion, or 27 per cent of the global population. As of 2010, the population of Gen Z globally was 1.86 billion (Population Pyramid, 2017). With the exception of the United States, some of the most significant Gen Z growth is taking place in countries that are either developing or underdeveloped countries.

According to a 2017 study by the World Bank, 42 per cent of the world's population is under the age of 25, with most of that growth taking place in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, comprising almost half (525 million) of the global youth population (Khokhar, 2017). When it comes to reaching Gen Z, it's critical that you adopt a global mindset. Your next significant market opportunity may be in Lagos, not Los Angeles or London. Listed below are the top 10 countries by Gen Z's percentage of total national population.

The supporting statistics included are each country's total Gen Z population and its percentage of the global Gen Z population:

India

- 2017 Gen Z population total 373 million
- 2017 percentage of global Gen Z population 20%

China

- 2017 Gen Z population total 260 million
- 2017 percentage of global Gen Z population 14%

Nigeria

- 2017 Gen Z population total 68 million
- 2017 percentage of global Gen Z population 4%

Indonesia

- 2017 Gen Z population total 65 million
- 2017 percentage of global Gen Z population 3.5%

The United States

- 2017 Gen Z population total 62 million
- 2017 percentage of global Gen Z population 3.4%

Pakistan

- 2017 Gen Z population total 61 million
- 2017 percentage of global Gen Z population 3.3%

Brazil

- 2017 Gen Z population total 50 million
- 2017 percentage of global Gen Z population 2.7%

Bangladesh

- 2017 Gen Z population total 46 million
- 2017 percentage of global Gen Z population 2.5%

The Philippines

- 2017 Gen Z Population Total 33 million
- 2017 percentage of global Gen Z population 1.8%

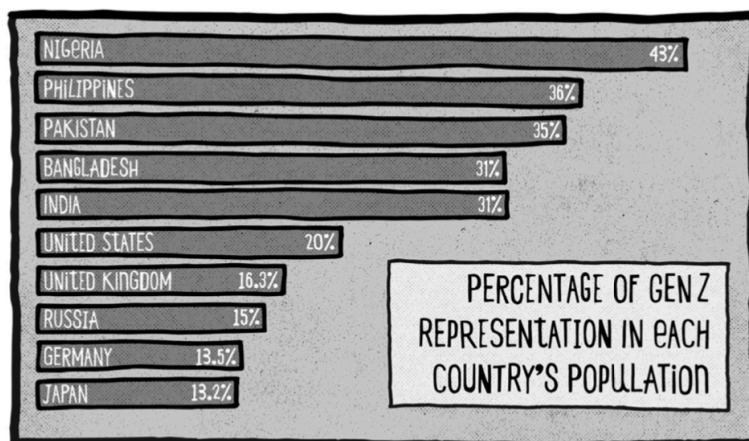
Mexico

- 2017 Gen Z Population Total 33 million
- 2017 percentage of global Gen Z population 1.8%

SOURCE Adapted from Population Pyramid; Singh, 2017

Research conducted in 2017 by Sapient, a global consulting firm (which considered Gen Z to range from 1995 to 2010), found that most of the growth in the younger segment of the Gen Z population is coming from developing and underdeveloped countries. For example, the 2017 research from Sapient points out that in 2010, as much as 43 per cent of Nigeria’s population are classified as Gen Z youth, while in Germany this demographic youth group accounted for only 13.5 per cent of the total populace (Singh, 2017).

Figure 2.1 The percentage of Gen Z in each of the selected country’s populations



SOURCE Data taken from Singh (2017). Illustration by Mike Carnevale

Spotlight: Malala Yousafzai, Gen Z activist

One of the most well-known Gen Z icons is Pakistani schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai, who at the age of 11 started an anonymous diary documenting life in northwest Pakistan's Swat valley. In 2009, there was a ban on girls' education. In her diary, she expressed her desire to continue going to school and for all girls around the world to have the right to an education.

As reported by the BBC (2017), her diary was published (anonymously) and her story immediately captivated the world. It also enraged the Taliban. Her identity was eventually exposed and in October 2012 she was shot during an attack on her school bus. After the shooting, she and her family relocated to England, where she not only recovered but also became an advocate spokesperson for the rights of girls around the world. Moreover, the world noticed.

In 2013, she released her autobiography *I Am Malala* and was named one of TIME magazine's most influential people. In 2014, Malala was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, the youngest and first Pakistani and Gen Z person to win the prestigious prize. For many Gen Z members, Malala is a real-life heroine who has inspired countless numbers of girls around the world to stand up for their rights and be engaged in the world. (BBC, 2017)



For Gen Z, diversity matters

For Gen Z, diversity is more than a buzzword. It is their reality. The most current US Census noted that there had been a 50 per cent increase in bi-racial youth since 2000, up to nearly 4.5 million (US Census, 2010a). The outcome of a sharp rise in multiracial marriages in the United States, Gen Z is the most diverse and multicultural of any generation in the United States. Fifty-five per cent are Caucasian, 24 per cent are Hispanic, 14 per cent are African American and 4 per cent are Asian (US Census, 2010b). Moreover, the number of mixed white-and-black bi-racial and the number of bi-racial white-and-Asian grew 134 and 87 per cent respectively (US Census, 2010a). In the first decade of the 21st century, the Hispanic population continued to grow at four times the rate of the total US population. This demographic shift towards racial diversity will continue to impact the views and perspectives of this generation (Nielsen, 2017).

The most significant influence on their attitudes towards race was the election of Barack Obama as the President of the United States. Propelled into office, mainly by a substantial turnout of youth voters, his election set a precedent and expectation that anyone could grow up and become the President of the United States, regardless of race, gender or background. For Gen Z youth under 15, Obama was the only president they knew until Trump. That consciously and unconsciously shaped their understanding of opportunity and equality. This is not just a phenomenon in the United States. In 2016, Sadiq Khan was elected as the first Muslim mayor of London.

However, for Gen Z, the idea of diversity has also transcended race. Once almost absent from all mass media, LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and others) characters and stories are now commonplace in movies, TV and popular culture. Even terms such as 'gender fluidity' and gender-neutral pronouns are a part of mainstream youth culture (Valens, 2017). A significant number of schools we visit have a student in gender transition. It's a reality that would have been unimaginable as early as five years ago.

As the first generation to grow up in an era when same-sex marriage was considered the norm, equality for their LGBTQ+ friends and family is non-negotiable. Social media platforms such as Tumblr and Twitter have also provided many teens and tweens with access to online communities where they share, learn, support and connect with LGBTQ+ youth outside their immediate circle of friends and family.

Because of this new openness and acceptance of sexual orientations and gender fluidity, youth are feeling more comfortable to embrace the sexual orientations of friends, parents, family and, in many cases, themselves. The key takeaway for marketers to remember is that marketing to these communities is not a right; instead, it is something that must be earned by listening and learning about the many facets of the community, being a brand upstander, creating opportunities for authentic connection and inspiring everyone to be more accepting.

Gen Z, technology and media

Gen Z has a relationship with the internet that is different from previous generations. It is a place where they communicate with their friends, share content and spend their free time, but it is also a research tool and a voice. Armed with a mobile device and a social media megaphone, this generation will use Google to fact-check brands, determine if the product has good reviews, or find out if something is real or 'fake news' in real time. For brands, this means being thoroughly Googled, which is how Gen Z will determine if that brand has any credibility. Brands need to be 'Google-proof!' For example, if your brand is testing on animals or is not being an upstander for LGBTQ rights, they will find out and hold you publicly accountable on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Also unlike older internet users, and contrary to what you may hear on the news, this generation cares deeply about privacy. For example, research conducted by the National Cyber Security Alliance in 2017 found that teens and young adults are more proactive in managing their digital footprint than older adults (Raicu, 2016).

Spotlight: Jack Andraka, Gen Z inventor

In many ways, Jack Andraka is a typical high school student who likes to hang out with his friends, drink chocolate milk and wear red Nike sneakers. However, Jack is no ordinary teenager. As a freshman, Jack invented a test that can detect early onset pancreatic cancer and won the Smithsonian American Ingenuity Award and the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair.

Jack's test, the first of its kind for pancreatic cancer, can detect the disease with just a drop of blood. That breakthrough has led to a flourish of interest from the scientific community along with several patents, TED talks, and talks at international ideas festivals (Tucker, 2012). At just 17, this young inventor is making scientific breakthroughs that will save lives and change the face of cancer research. Jack is an example of how Gen Z, even at such a young age, isn't afraid to take on and find solutions for significant problems.



Gen Z is constantly connected

Mobile phones are the essential piece of technology in Gen Z life. It is the gateway to all things that matter to them (social life, texting, social networking, music, friends, pictures, video and more). The mobile phone is their 'social oxygen' around which all aspects of youth culture revolve. Moreover, the age of smartphone ownership has aged down to the point where it is not unusual to see third graders with cell phones in their school backpacks. The vital role of mobile devices is especially evident for youth living in urban and rural areas where they do not have access to broadband internet service. Minority youth in the United States, for example, bridge the digital divide using mobile devices to connect with their peers on social networking platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and engage with online communities, school work and fandoms (Palley, 2012).

However, this is also true outside of developed nations such as the United Kingdom or Australia. Research conducted by Sapient in 2017 reported that Indian telecom Juxt found that in many emerging markets, such as China, India, Egypt and other African countries, mobile devices are bridging the broadband divide. In India, for example, over 10 million people use mobile phones as their primary access point to the internet, with the majority of those living in rural areas (Singh, 2017).

Gen Z is 'always on'. A study by the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2012) found that US kids between 8 and 18 spend an average of 6.5 hours a day absorbed in media. All totalled, it comes to 45 hours a week (KFF, 2012) spent watching TV or streaming videos, playing video games, posting photos, listening to music and surfing the social web - more than a full-time job.

As a result of this constant connection, Gen Z has learnt to become expert multi-taskers. For example, they do not just watch TV or stream videos on Netflix. That is a passive activity. Instead, they will 'watch TV' and videos on YouTube in real time with friends and fire back commentary via text messaging, social media platforms such as Tumblr or Twitter and creating and sharing visual narratives (screenshots, GIFs, video clips). The primary downside to being 'always on' is sleep deprivation. This generation is attached to social media, and many of them are sleeping with their phones close at hand and texting at all hours of the night, with resultant increased levels of anxiety (Hunt, 2017).

Above all, social media is like a lifeline for maintaining and strengthening relationships with Gen Z. They use social networks to strengthen their existing 'real world' relationships, not to connect with strangers. For most, communication does not necessarily mean having a verbal conversation. A 'conversation' can mean anything from an Instagram 'Heart' to comment on Snapchat or a text message. In *Gen Z: Digital in their DNA* (Palley, 2012), a study of 800 youth in the United States and the United Kingdom reported that most of the Gen Z youth attached more importance to digital connections than to money, music and movies.

They are perpetually connected to their peers, friends, teachers, parents and content through social media apps on mobile phones. Their experience with mobile technology and content creation resources, online communities and digital media encourages them to be open to more diverse backgrounds.

How Gen Z uses visual social media

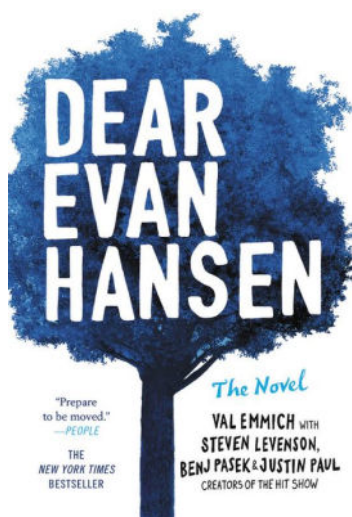
Gen Z navigates their social media anxieties by relying on visual-centric social media, such as GIFs, memes and emoji, to provide visual interpretations of shared cultural experiences and project their own emotions into their social media feeds (Walczel and Baird, forthcoming 2018). The use of visual descriptors allows them to collaboratively solve their collective and individual problems, learn new knowledge and coping skills from one another, and provide peer-to-peer support. They also serve as avenues to embrace more empowered positions of digital citizenship on topics some may find difficult to talk about or express at home or in school (Highfield and Leaver, 2016).

Spotlight: Gen Z pop culture – *Dear Evan Hansen*

When viewed through the lenses of popular youth culture, the hit Broadway musical *Dear Evan Hansen* provides educators, and marketers, with a unique perspective on the role that visual social media and visual narrative artefacts play in the lives of Gen Z youth (Walczel and Baird, forthcoming 2018). *Dear Evan Hansen* (DEH), the winner of the 2017 Tony for Best Musical, is the story of a teen named

Evan Hansen, played by Tony Award-winning actor Ben Platt, who, like many Gen Z, faces a daily struggle with social anxiety. In mid-2016, as DEH began to bubble up in the popular culture, teens around the country simultaneously engaged with communities on Tumblr and Instagram to share how DEH felt like a mirror of their unfiltered emotions and unspoken anxieties on the pressures of popularity and social media.

The musical struck a nerve and resonated with many youths, who saw in Evan Hansen the first authentic portrayal of their daily reality. DEH quickly became a cultural phenomenon and spread using the community hashtag #YouWillBeFound. In short, through Evan Hansen many youths felt as if they had found their tribe. Many teens suffer from the effects of social media bullying and anxiety in silence (Pappas, 2015), and for many of them, DEH was the first piece of popular culture that made them feel that they were not alone in experiencing these feelings. In many ways, Dear Evan Hansen became a form of self-care, with members of the community (aka 'Fansens') combining fan art, social media and hashtags. (#YouWillBeFound) to create self-care memes. They distributed them on Tumblr, YouTube and Instagram as rallying points to combat cyberbullying directly as well as other issues, including depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicide.



The key takeaway here is that youth recognize the power they have when they self-organize and remix themes into digital visual stories that suit their platform preferences and community identities.

Social media provide them with a platform to express their feelings as well as help other teens struggling with social anxiety issues. This phenomenon is both relevant and timely, as Lady Gaga's anti-bullying initiative, The Born This Way Foundation, recently launched The Kindness Project with the cast of *Dear Evan Hansen* to talk about the impact of bullying, kindness and mental health.

Note: adapted from the forthcoming (2018) *#YouWillBeFound: Leveraging 'Dear Evan Hansen' on Instagram and Tumblr to combat cyberbullying and empower teens* (Walczel and Baird, forthcoming 2018)

Gen Z speak emoji. Do you?

Emojis, the once-obscure collection of smiley faces and cartoon poop, have migrated their way into pop culture, brand communications, the tweets of pop stars, and brand advertising. You might be wondering what they all mean and how a brand should use them. The bottom line is: there is no straightforward answer. There's no translation for a wave next to a heart next to a laughing cat! In fact, that is part of what made emojis so popular with youth culture in the first place.

The truth is, Gen Z use emojis to tell a story or convey emotion, but in many cases they are merely a digital artifact that is used to make a conversation more visually appealing and tell a story. Deployed strategically, they can also be used as an emotional barometer to lighten the mood, provide an emotional context to avoid the misinterpretation of text-only communication, or reflect the seriousness or sadness of an event (Highfield and Leaver, 2016). The key here for brands is to use them sparingly and in an authentic context. As discussed previously, the worst thing a brand can do to its credibility and authenticity with Gen Z is try to be someone it is not.

Gen Z and fandoms

In today's world, brands can no longer expect to reach Gen Z by relying on traditional or one-way marketing channels (print, TV or radio advertising) alone. An effective alternative is to learn to engage with fandoms and online communities. A fandom, if you are wondering, is a group or community built around a mutual affinity for a book series (Harry Potter), TV show (Riverdale), the movie (Star Wars), artist (Camila Cabello) or other pop culture artefact (Dear Evan Hansen). These fandoms are fuelled by a combination of pop culture, social media and the use of a standardized, distributed hashtag which allows members of the fandom to self-identify as a fan, find others who share the same passion, validate their decision to join the fandom and, through the creation of social media artifacts, drive their fandom into the mainstream.

For many tweens and teens, joining a fandom means they get to collaborate with others while working to shape their own identities; find, create and participate in communities; set goals; and negotiate the ways brands, marketers and educators reach them. Fandoms are an integral part of the Gen Z identity, providing young people with a community of supporters who share their love for certain stories, characters and fictional worlds. The members of the fandom create meaning around works of fiction and make them a reality. When evaluating the idea of fandom, it is essential to redefine our concept of what constitutes a legitimate 'social system' or 'social interaction' (Baird, 2016a).

Moreover, because the fandoms are created on the internet, it opens the fandom to making connections across the globe. Anthropologist Lori Kendall (2002) spent years researching the dynamics of online social identity, fandoms and community, and concluded that members of fandoms have 'intact social systems and highly charged social relations'. Fandoms are created organically when real people connect with a character, content or story. As a brand, your job is to find authentic ways to celebrate and support a fandom that pops up around your content, without co-opting or directing the community culture. Think about what visual narratives or memes or other content assets you can create to help your community and make the fandom move forward.

Spotlight: Jenk Oz, Gen Z entrepreneur

Jenk Oz is a young actor, entrepreneur and musician with access to events, experiences and celebrities that his friends could only dream of. That's not all. As Britain's youngest CEO, Jenk is using iCoolKid - a digital media platform aimed at Gen Z - to share these experiences and create content, social media and a community that he designed with his generation in mind. The core brand message of iCoolKid is to encourage other young people to be passionate about their interests and hobbies and to make their dreams a reality.

Jenk started iCoolKid in 2014, when he was eight years old, as part of a school project to share the 'cool things' he was doing outside school. His newsletter grew from something he shared with his friends at school into an international website being embraced by kids from across the United Kingdom, United States, India and around the world. iCoolKid is now a digital publishing, media, consulting and production company providing original content for Gen Z. As CEO, Jenk manages a team of professionals who produce articles, previews, reviews and features, as well as original music. As the face of the iCoolKid brand, Oz attends all the coolest pop culture events, movie premieres and live events, and conducts interviews backstage with A-list celebrities such as Idris Elba. In 2017, Jenk was invited to speak at TEDxYouth in Harlow, Essex. In his presentation, Jenk



shared his strategies for getting your ideas out of your head and building them into a real company.

Jenk is a harbinger of a dynamic generational cohort that is ready to roll up their sleeves to create and build a future filled with media that reflect what's most important to them. For Gen Z, it seems, the sky's the limit. Jenk is representative of both the entrepreneurial spirit of Gen Z and an example of how they are building their own brands through the efficient and strategic use of social media. Brands need look no further than the type of content being created by iCoolKid to learn what type of content and social media interaction resonates with youth audiences.

Educating Gen Z

The innate digital learning styles of this generation include fluency in digital media, online communities, guided mentoring, video games or collective reflection via social media platforms (Baird and Fisher, 2010). To actively engage learners in the classroom, educators should focus on providing content that allows the pupil to understand the context of the learning objectives while utilizing various forms of social media and emerging technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR).

Understanding and incorporating these digital learning experiences into your frontline and online curriculum will increase student motivation and enhance the delivery of instruction while meeting the needs of today's digital learning styles (Baird and Fisher, 2010). The use of mobile devices in the classroom should be directly connected with their personal experiences and authentic use of technology outside school. The key is to create an experience that will allow them to access information, communicate collaboratively, and create content using mobile devices and new digital skills such as VR and AR technologies in the classroom.

Gen Z digital learning attributes

- **Interactive:** Use interactive, engaging content and material that motivates them to engage through the creative use of social media, conceptual review and community feedback. Gen Z also expects to find, use and 'mash-up' various types of web-based media, such as audio, video, multimedia, edutainment and educational gaming/ simulation.
- **Student centred:** Shifts the learning responsibility to the student and emphasizes teacher-guided instruction and modeling. Customized, interactive and social media tools, and ability to self- direct how they learn.
- **Situated:** Reconcile classroom use of social media with how technology is used outside the classroom. Use of technology should be tied to both authentic (learning) activity and intrinsic motivation.
- **Collaborative:** Learning is a social activity, and students learn best through observation, collaboration, and intrinsic motivation and from self-organizing social systems comprised of peers in either a virtual or in-person environment.
- **On demand:** Gives the ability to multitask, handle multiple streams of information and juggle both short- and long-term goals. Access content via different media platforms, including mobile, PC based, or another handheld (portable) computer device.
- **Authentic:** Deploy active and meaningful activities based on real-world learning models. Industry-driven problems and situations should be the focus and require reflective elements, multiple perspectives and collaborative processes for relevant applicable responses from today's student

SOURCE Adapted from Digital Learning Styles 2.0: Digital, social, and always-on (Baird, 2006).

Teaching Gen Z with emerging technologies

Technologies such as VR and AR provide Gen Z with opportunities to engage in a social, collaborative and active learning environment (Baird, 2018). In an evaluation report on the MissionV Schools Pilot Programme in Ireland, Dr Conor Galvin, a professor at University College School of Education, found that the use of VR technology in the classroom showed a real benefit in tackling students' social issues (Baird, 2017). For example, Galvin points out that the students struggling to be included in their classroom were able to become accepted by their peers because of their technology skills. Integrating the VR project into the curriculum allowed shy students to 'come out of their shells' and boosted confidence in students who were previously lacking in confidence in their maths skills.

While it is still a relatively new technology as far as its educational context is concerned, there are already some great AR experiences available for educational uses. For a generation that's been raised on interactive technologies, bringing AR into the classroom and curriculum can also help encourage active engagement and contribute to student retention (Baird, 2016b). For example, AR helps students who are visual learners gain a better understanding of the concepts that the teacher has explained in class lectures or that they have read about in traditional textbooks.

AR is also a valuable assessment tool, allowing students to demonstrate proficiency in a variety of subjects. AR is also a useful pedagogical strategy to enhance learning with flashcards, pop-up books or textbooks embedded with interactive media. It's clear that AR is rapidly finding its way into 21st-century classrooms. For example, Google is using its Google Cardboard VR viewer for schools, creating original content through its Google Expeditions Pioneer Program which takes students on a virtual tour of the ocean, historic sites and more (Baird, 2017).

One thing is clear: as Gen Z move from the classroom to the work-force, it will be increasingly essential to deepen our understanding of these burgeoning digital learning styles and prepare educational and training programmes (online and off) to meet them on their own territory (Baird, 2018)

Spotlight: Gen Z – virtual reality in the classroom

Students at St. Kieran's, a school in the Irish town of Broughal, recently went on a field trip to Clonmacnoise, a nearby ancient monastic site with historic ruins. Nothing unusual or exceptional about that, right? What makes this school field trip surprising, though, is what the students did when they came back to the classroom. The students, part of a VR pilot programme in Irish schools, used the MissionV VR platform to create a virtual model of the Clonmacnoise ruins in OpenSim and then viewed it using Oculus Rift headsets.

In this VR Clonmacnoise example, these 10-12-year-old students utilized technology (maths, scripting, 3D modeling, programming), creative thinking skills (archaeology, history, design) and social skills (project management, collaboration, face-to-face interaction) in a constructivist-based project environment to create a VR experience (Ó Muíneacháin, 2014). In short, for Gen Z, it is not just about technology, it is about relationships. Social interaction will continue to be at the heart of any active Gen Z offline (traditional) or online (learning) or virtual learning environment (AR or VR). Brands that want to embrace these emerging AR/VR technologies in new products, marketing, and campaigns need to be aware of the role that content creators and VR developers play regarding media literacy and creating experiences deemed factual by Gen Z audiences (Baird, 2018).



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TL;DR: chapter takeaways

- Identify ways your brand can have 'non-verbal' conversations with Gen Z. What types of digital artifacts (GIF, meme, emoji) can you use to enhance the conversation?
- Consider strategies that capitalize on the growing global generation. With a majority of Gen Z living in developing countries, do you have a mobile-only strategy to reach Gen Z consumers in India, Nigeria and other countries where mobile devices are the only way to connect?
- Review your marketing campaigns from the past three years. Do the young people in your advertising and content reflect the diverse (racial, gender, orientation) populations that comprise Gen Z?
- Conduct social listening for your brand on social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, or online forums such as Reddit. Find out what Gen Z is saying about your brand, organization or educational institution.
- Don't treat Gen Z as one monolithic target market. Every sub- segment within this diverse generational cohort has different needs, wants and frequencies, even when they share common values such as inclusiveness.
- Where Gen Z is concerned, mobile is the great leveller, providing brands with access to nearly every consumer in the world. Your ticket to entry starts by developing mobile-first marketing communications and engagement strategies with youth culture.
- Gen Z is already producing incredible changemakers such as Jenk Oz, Malala Yousafzai and Jack Andraka. Their stories give brands a preview of the leading edge of a generation with unprecedented access to digital media, knowledge and ambition. YouTube and other global digital communities will bring many more change- makers to the forefront.
- Comprising 25 per cent of the US population, Gen Z is going to be larger than Boomers, Xers and Millennials. Gen Z is set to influence nearly 600 billion dollars of family spending and will comprise 40 per cent of consumers by 2020.
- Gen Z is a global phenomenon. Marketers should look to emerging markets such as Nigeria, Southeast Asia and Mexico for opportunities to reach Gen Z.

- The democratization of media, means of production and distribution of content has shifted power to the youth audiences and creators themselves. Gen Z consumes social content often – going there as a first option over ‘traditional media’. This makes social platforms like YouTube, Snapchat, Twitch, Instagram, and other rising and emerging platforms, legitimate competitors to major digital media companies.

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“ Youth culture is always moving, changing and evolving. Gregg L. Witt and the **Engage Youth** team deliver well-researched, actionable strategies and tactics that focus on alignment and value creation with that culture. Many agencies "talk" about Gen Z, but they are definitive leaders for modern marketers and business people seeking to authentically engage an emerging generation.

Stefan Heinrich, Head of Global Marketing, **TikTok**

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