



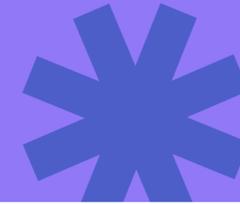
GEN Z REVISITED

MARCH 2026



GOOD FUTURES HORIZON SCAN

FOREWORD



Generation Z (also known as Zoomers) are born between 1997 and 2012, and make up a cohort of [approximately 14 million people](#) in the UK today. The oldest among them are turning 29 this year, navigating early careers and, in growing numbers, early parenthood. The youngest are turning 14, still in school, growing up in a world the older half of the cohort would barely recognise.

You may recall that we published a Horizon Scan on Gen Z in early 2023. In generational terms, that was only yesterday. But for a cohort this young, a lot can change in three years. The oldest Zoomers have moved further into careers and parenthood. The youngest have crossed key developmental thresholds. In that time, we've also seen more robust data emerge on the long-term impact of lockdowns, educational disruption, economic instability and sustained exposure to crisis. This report revisits Gen Z because the fundamentals have sharpened and diverged.

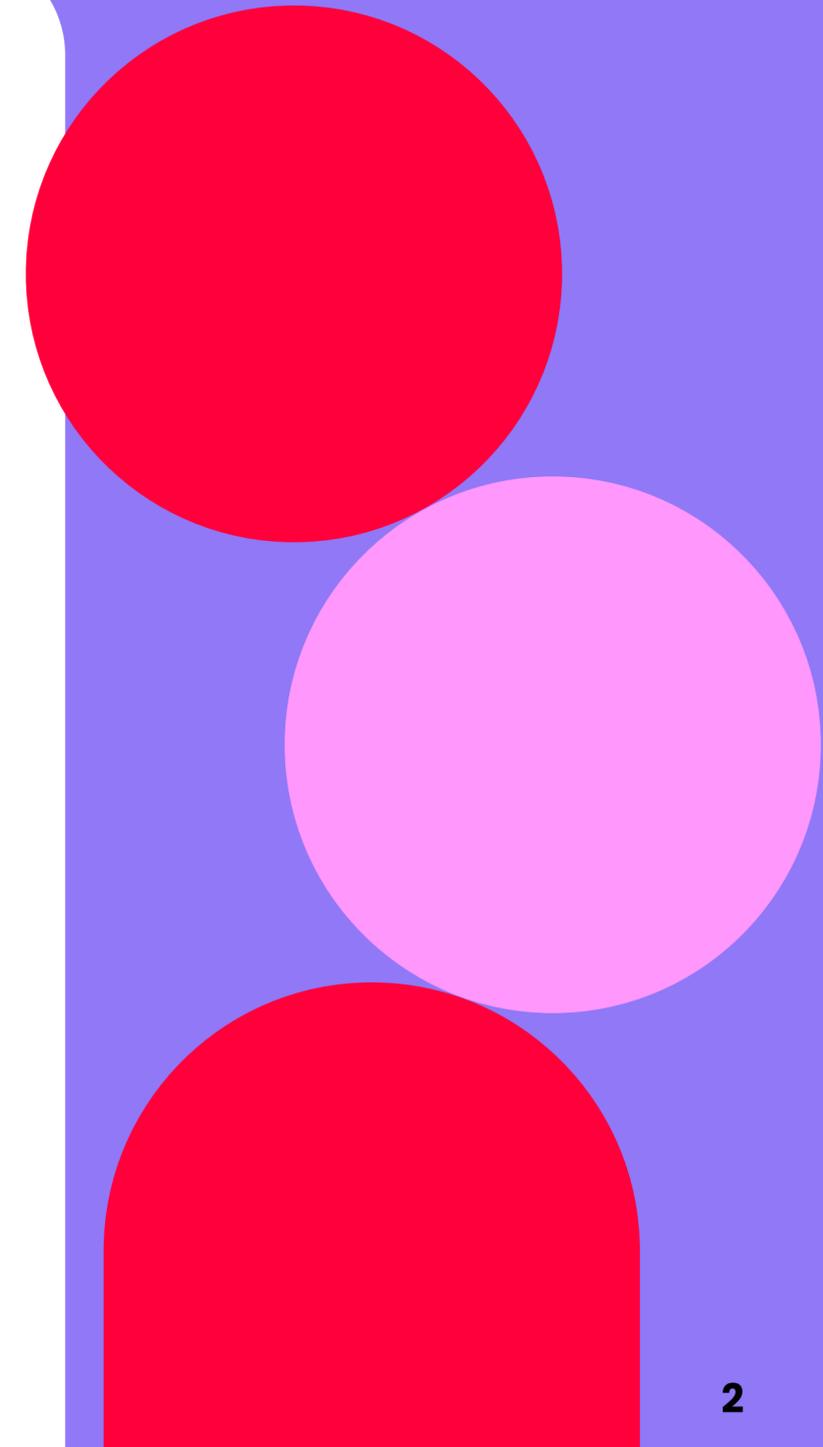
'This is a generation that is simultaneously activist and exhausted, hyper-connected but lonely and isolated.'

You're likely familiar with the headline version of Gen Z: digital natives, progressive, climate-anxious, chronically online. This gives the impression of a unified cohort with similar needs, preferences and motivations. But look closer, and that picture quickly fractures. This is a generation that is simultaneously activist and exhausted, hyper-connected but lonely and isolated. It is more diverse than any cohort before it, but increasingly polarised along gender lines.

That fragmentation is born out of polycrisis. Gen Z has grown up with a rolling series of crises, or polycrisis, as the backdrop of their formative years.

A global pandemic that disrupted their formative years, accelerating climate breakdown, geopolitical instability, and the rapid rise of artificial intelligence (AI). All of these crises have unfolded in real time, consumed 24/7 through a phone screen and an endless scroll, where the boundaries between breaking news, personal life, and entertainment don't exist. In fact, nearly [half of adults aged 18-25](#) believe that their mental health is harmed by an overall sense that everything is falling apart.

Gen Z is a divided generation navigating instability from a young age. Understanding that complexity, and the contradictions that come with it, is the first step towards meaningful engagement. The result is a cohort that is, in many ways, harder to reach through traditional models of engagement for the sector. Institutional trust has collapsed across society, and Gen Z is living at the sharp end of that decline. Attention is finite and fractured across an increasingly saturated digital landscape.



Traditional channels for engagement struggle to connect with this cohort. This doesn't mean that Gen Z is apathetic to the charity sector. Research into [why Gen Z gives less to charity](#) suggests a sense of invisibility, rather than one of indifference. This cohort may feel that the sector has not adapted to their realities, their needs and preferences. Yes, they want to participate, but only on their terms.

'Yes, they want to participate, but only on their terms.'

Why engage them in the first place? When you picture your average donor, chances are you are not imagining a teenager in sixth form or a twenty-something navigating their first unstable job. Gen Z is not currently the bread and butter of most fundraising strategies. They are not the highest-giving cohort, nor the most financially secure. But they are ageing into adulthood, and with that shift, stepping into influence.

Crucially, the forces shaping Gen Z are not unique to them. Declining institutional trust is a cross-generational phenomenon. The search for meaning amidst uncertainty, compassion fatigue, financial precarity, loneliness, and disillusionment with the way things are, are conditions shared widely across age groups. What makes Gen Z distinctive is that these pressures have defined the years in which identity, confidence, and worldview are formed. This then makes them a useful lens through which to understand both the cohort itself, as well as rethinking how we engage anyone who feels burnt out, sceptical, or left behind.

In this report, we explore the fractures within Gen Z, the trust gap reshaping engagement, their financial realities, their relationships and communities, the rise of the Gen Z parent, their digital behaviours, and their attitudes towards charity.

With all that in mind, we hope that this Horizon Scan offers actionable insight for now, rather than later.



Eef Leurs
Trend Consultant,
Good Innovation

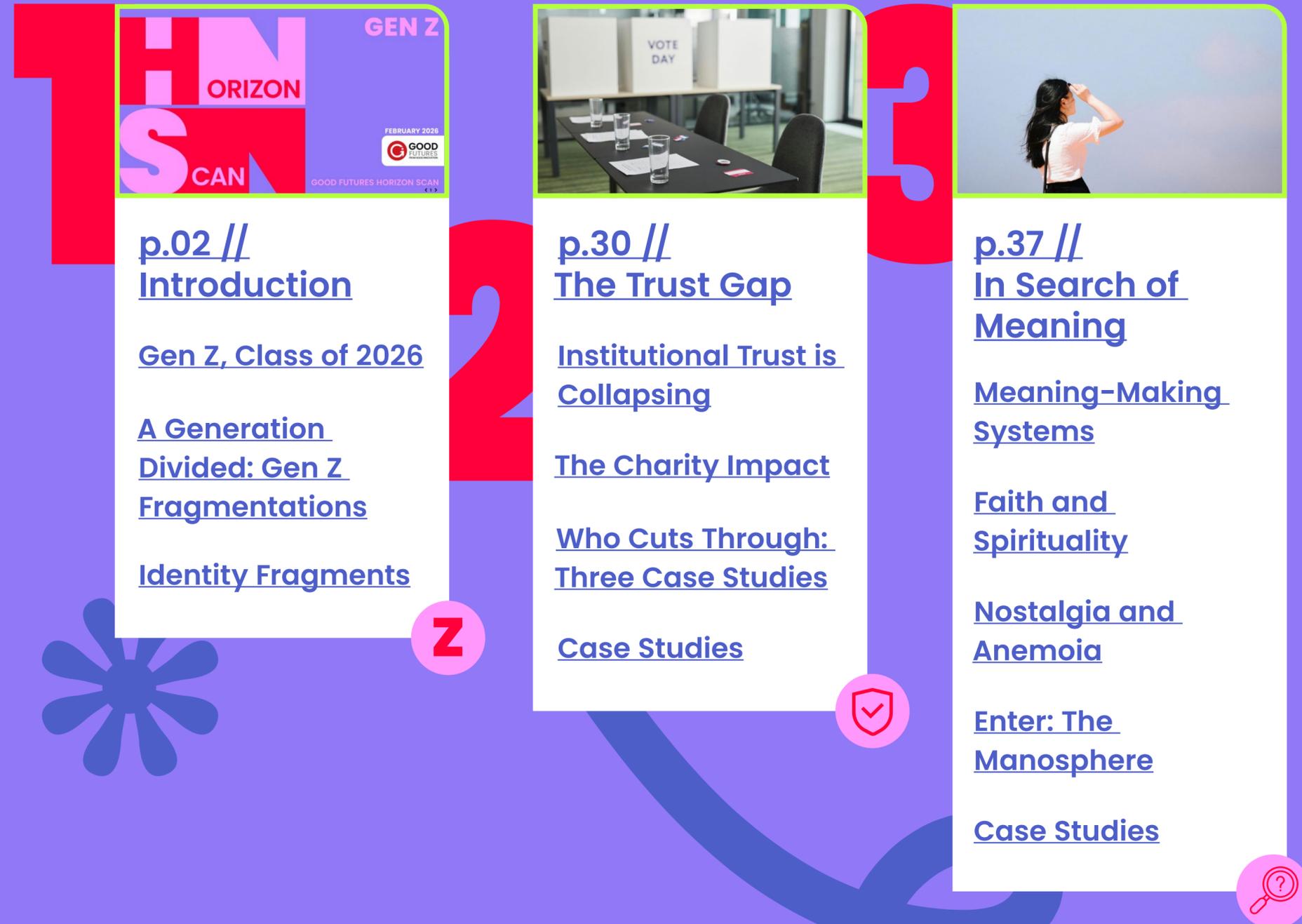
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// A Note on Our Previous Report

As mentioned in the foreword, we've previously written about Gen Z as a cohort. In revisiting them, we made the deliberate choice not to rehash ground we've already covered in depth, unless we felt there had been a meaningful shift since our last publication. As such, we felt it was worth signposting some of the most relevant themes to this generation that we don't cover in this report:

- 1 Gaming culture and virtual worlds ([Gen Z Horizon Scan](#) and [Level Up: Charity Gaming](#));
- 2 Mental health trends ([Gen Z Horizon Scan](#));
- 3 Gen Z at work ([Gen Z Horizon Scan](#));
- 4 Buy Now, Pay Later and alternative finance models ([Gen Z Horizon Scan](#));
- 5 Growing up with social media ([Gen Alpha Horizon Scan](#) – although not specific to Gen Z, contains in-depth research into the impact of growing up with social media, which this generation also experienced).

If you're looking for deeper dives into these areas, we recommend revisiting those publications alongside this one.



		
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GEN Z, CLASS OF 2026



Image source

Greta Thunberg, Activist (2003 -)

Swedish climate activist who sparked the global Fridays for Future school strike movement at age 15.



Image source

Sam Carling, Labour MP (2002 -)

Britain's youngest sitting MP, elected to represent North West Cambridgeshire in 2024 at the age of 22.



Image source

Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé, Author (1999 -)

British-Nigerian novelist whose debut *Ace of Spades* won the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work for Youth/Teens.



Image source

Millie Bobby Brown, Actor (2004 -)

British actor who rose to global fame as Eleven in *Stranger Things*.



Image source

Bella Ramsey, Actor (2003 -)

British actor who earned critical acclaim as Ellie in HBO's *The Last of Us*.



Image source

Kit Connor, Actor (2004 -)

British actor who won hearts in Netflix's *Heartstopper* and has appeared in films including *Rocketman*.



Image source

Malala Yousafzai, Activist (1997 -)

Pakistani activist and the youngest-ever Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who became a global champion for girls' right to education.



Image source

Amanda Gorman, Poet (1998 -)

America's first National Youth Poet Laureate in the US, famous for her poem "The Hill We Climb".



Image source

Hunter Schafer, Actor (1998 -)

American model, actor, and trans rights advocate best known for her role in *Euphoria*.



Image source

Owen Cooper, Actor (2009 -)

British actor whose debut performance in Netflix's *Adolescence* made him the youngest male actor ever to win a Primetime Emmy and a Golden Globe.



Image source

Marcello Hernández, Comedian (1997 -)

Comedian and Saturday Night Live cast member known for his viral skits and stand-up.

GEN Z, CLASS OF 2026



Image source

MrBeast, Content Creator (1998 -)

American YouTuber and entrepreneur who became the platform's most-subscribed individual creator through elaborate stunts and philanthropy.



Image source

Emma Chamberlain, Content Creator (2001 -)

American YouTuber and media personality whose unfiltered vlog style redefined influencer culture.



Image source

Billie Eilish, Singer (2001 -)

American singer-songwriter who became the youngest artist to win all four major Grammy categories in one night.



Image source

Lil Nas X, Rapper (1999 -)

American rapper and singer whose genre-bending hit "Old Town Road" became the longest-running number-one single in Billboard Hot 100 history.



Image source

Chapell Roan, Singer (1998 -)

American pop artist known for her campy, drag-inspired aesthetic and anthems like "Good Luck, Babe!".



Image source

Lando Norris, F1 Driver (1999 -)

British-Belgian Formula 1 driver for McLaren who won his first World Championship in 2025.



Image source

Khaby Lame, Content Creator (2000 -)

Senegalese-Italian creator who became TikTok's most-followed account with his wordless, deadpan reaction videos.



Image source

Lalisa Manoban, Singer (1997 -)

Thai rapper, singer, and dancer known as Lisa of BLACKPINK, one of the best-selling girl groups of all time.



Image source

RAYE, Singer (1997 -)

British singer-songwriter who made history at the 2024 BRIT Awards with six wins in a single night.



Image source

Jung Kook, Singer (1997 -)

South Korean singer of BTS whose single "Seven" became the fastest song in history to reach one billion Spotify streams.



Image source

Sky Brown, Skateboarder (2008 -)

British-Japanese skateboarder who became Great Britain's youngest-ever Olympic medallist when she won bronze in park skateboarding at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

GEN Z, CLASS OF 2026



Image source

Bukayo Saka, Footballer (2001 -)

British winger for Arsenal and England who has been named Arsenal's Player of the Season twice.



Image source

Emma Raducanu, Tennis Player (2002 -)

British tennis player who made sporting history by winning the 2021 US Open as a qualifier, the first player ever to do so in the Open Era.



Image source

Kylie Jenner, Media Personality and Founder (1997 -)

American media personality whose lip kit empire and social media following made her one of the world's youngest self-made billionaires.



Image source

Gitanjali Rao, Inventor and Scientist (2005 -)

American inventor who became TIME's first-ever Kid of the Year in 2020 for her work developing technology to detect lead in drinking water.



Image source

Wisdom Kaye, Content Creator and Model (2001 -)

American model and fashion content creator whose creative, high-concept outfit videos on TikTok led to a modelling career with IMG.



Image source

Kylian Mbappé, Footballer (1998 -)

Forward for the French football team who became a World Cup winner at 19.



Image source

Molly Mae Hague, Media Personality and Entrepreneur (1999 -)

British influencer who rose to fame on Love Island and went on to become creative director of PrettyLittleThing and founder of her own brand, Maebe.



Image source

Grace Beverley, Content Creator and Entrepreneur (1997 -)

British fitness influencer and Forbes 30 Under 30 honouree who founded sustainable activewear brand TALA and productivity app Shreddy.



Image source

Alexandr Wang, Entrepreneur (1997 -)

Tech entrepreneur who co-founded Scale AI at 19 and became the world's youngest self-made billionaire by building a data-labelling platform.



Image source

Kaia Gerber, Model (2001 -)

American model and actor, daughter of Cindy Crawford, who has walked for the world's top fashion houses.



Image source

Phan Huy, Fashion Designer (1999 -)

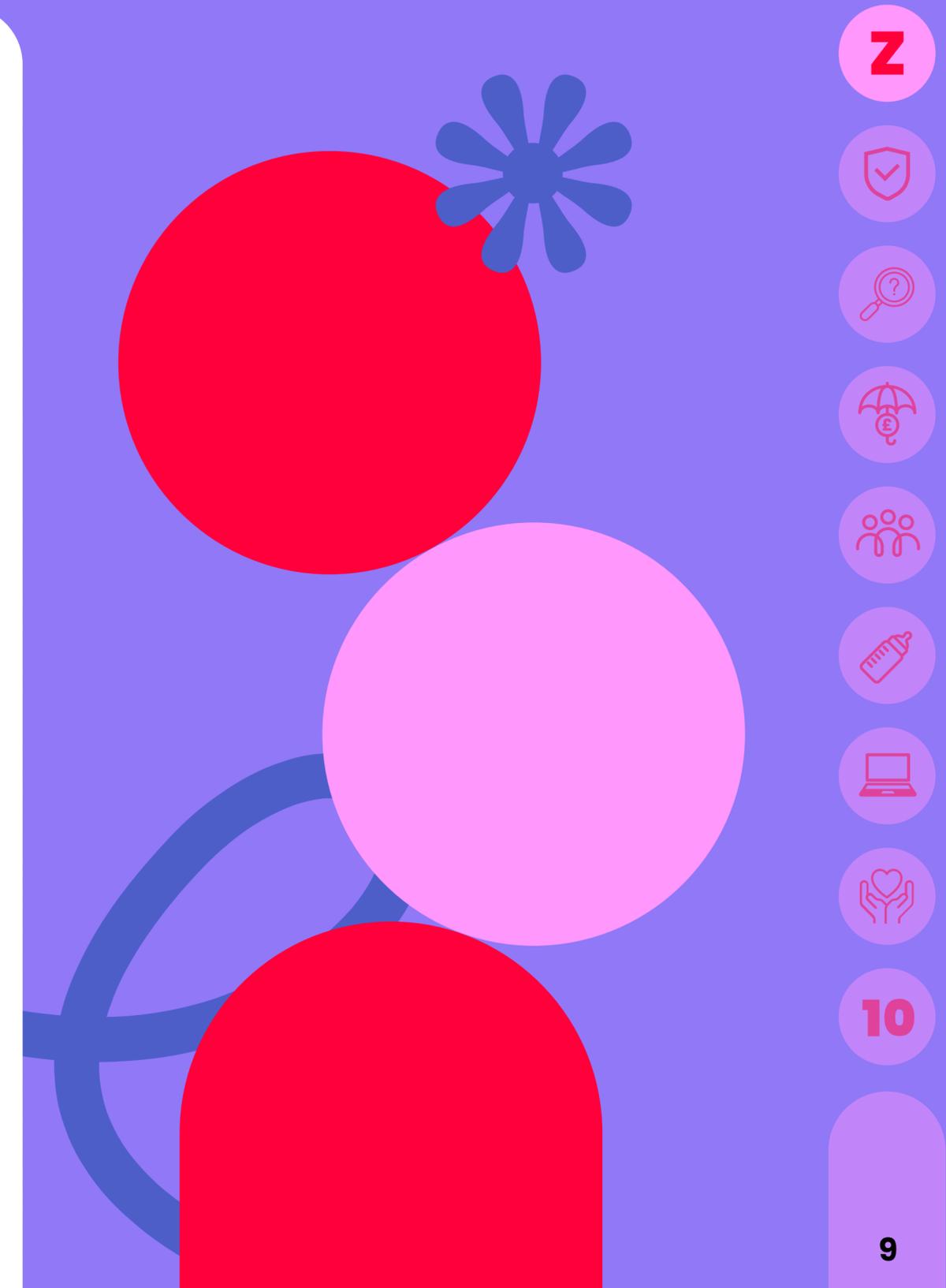
Vietnamese fashion designer who made history as the youngest ever designer to present a collection on the official Haute Couture calendar in Paris.

// Growing Up With Polycrisis

For Gen Z, the context of their formative years has been a pile-up of crises. They were children during the 2008 financial crash. They came of age during COVID-19 lockdowns. They've grown up with a climate emergency as (very loud) background noise, punctuated by geopolitical instability: the war in Ukraine, Gaza genocide, and rising authoritarianism across the globe. And they've consumed all of it, in real time, through their phone screens. [60% of 13-17-year-olds](#) and 75% of 18-24-year-olds have an overall sense of doom about the world and the future.

This is the backdrop to Gen Z's coming of age. A sustained, overlapping sequence of shocks. This polycrisis may also be partially responsible for the fragmentation of this cohort. We talk about Gen Z as though it describes a unified generation with a universally shared worldview. You have likely come across the stereotypical depiction of this generation: digital natives, progressive, anxious, climate-conscious. But the closer we examine any of these descriptors, the more the categories fracture.

This fragmentation isn't unique to Gen Z (far from it). Every generation contains multitudes, and the concept of generational cohorts can sometimes lead to unhelpful generalisations and stereotypes. Before we dive into what makes Gen Z 'Gen Z', we have to recognise the fractures and growing divides.



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// The Long Shadow of COVID

For Gen Z, the pandemic struck during formative years, when identity, social confidence, and independence are typically built. Unlike older generations, for many of whom the pandemic was an interruption to an established life, many Gen Zers experienced it as a formative condition. This difference is reflected in research: **59% of Gen Zers** say the pandemic permanently changed how they view themselves, compared to 36% of Boomers. **Two-thirds (65%)** say they had to relearn social skills after restrictions were lifted. We're essentially looking at a cohort that has had to, and might still be, recalibrating to typical social norms.



'This is a generation that learned to socialise through screens'

And while some Gen Zers report having emerged more resilient (**17% say** the pandemic had a net positive effect on their lives, compared to just 4% of Boomers), the broader legacy is **one of disruption**: to education, to early careers, to the milestones – school graduations, first dates, freshers' week – that previous generations took for granted. The loss of these 'ordinary' late-teen/early-20s milestones and reduced in-person socialising have had a **knock-on effect** of delayed or compressed social skill development for some, laddering up to difficulties with confidence and in-person interactions. This is a generation that learned to socialise through screens and had its early communal experience disrupted. 'Bouncing back' into traditional models of group engagement may not happen for this cohort.

The Fragmentation: The COVID Divide

Gen Z spans roughly 1997 to 2012, a 15-year window that contains people who are now 29 and people who are 13. Generational cohorts have always been wide-ranging, but COVID-19 has had a particularly divisive impact on Gen Z. We can separate this cohort into **'Gen Z 1.0'** and **'Gen Z 2.0'**, those who graduated secondary school and were young adults pre-Covid (Gen Z 1.0, typically aged 23-29), and those who grew up during Covid (Gen Z 2.0, aged 13-22).

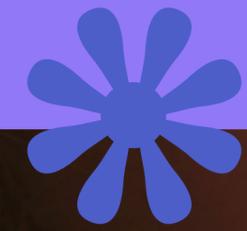
So, how does this divide show up in the data? Younger Gen Z is more likely to have suffered from **developmental impacts throughout the pandemic**. They're also more likely to have suffered from learning loss, with post-Covid mathematics test scores, for instance, having **declined an average of 14%** – roughly equal to seven months of learning for a student. The younger cohort is also the first to have grown up with **generative AI as a normal feature of education**.

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A GENERATION DIVIDED: GEN Z FRAGMENTATIONS



The students who are taking their A-Levels this year have never known secondary school without ChatGPT. Meanwhile, older Gen Z came of age on Instagram and Twitter and their peer networks; younger Gen Z is native to TikTok, where algorithmic content feeds shape the information diet.

Gen Z 1.0 are described as frustrated with the status quo but want to partner with institutions to create change. Gen Z 2.0, by contrast, are more distrustful from the outset. They were shaped by [watching institutions fail during the pandemic](#) and by a social media environment that rewards scepticism and cynicism. The oldest Gen Z members are now stepping into mid-career roles and growing more optimistic; the youngest are entering adulthood with less social confidence, less institutional trust, and a fundamentally different political orientation.

Essentially, a 28-year-old Gen Zer who marched for climate action at university and a 16-year-old who spent lockdown on TikTok are not the same audience. Addressing them with the same tone, platform, or framing is a missed opportunity.



// The Climate Crisis

Over the past decades, the climate crisis has become increasingly visible. Every year, we inch closer to the [climate tipping points](#), we hit new [temperature records](#), and the negative impacts of global warming become increasingly visible. Hurricanes, wildfires, and excess heat deaths hit the headlines with seemingly increasing frequency. [2025 was the UK's warmest and sunniest year on record](#). It inherits this record from 2023, which in turn broke 2022's record. 2024, meanwhile, set a record for the warmest year globally. These may be the hottest years we've ever experienced, but they [might be the coldest years of the rest of our lives](#).

Gen Z has been typecast as the climate generation. The cohort most passionate about environmental action. The generation that will stand up for sustainability and take decisive action against those failing to do their part. There's evidence for this characterisation: [70% of Gen Z in the UK](#) agree that climate change is the biggest threat to civilisation, compared to 63% of Millennials. They're also [more likely than older generations](#) to cite climate change as a priority issue.

But dig beneath the surface, and a more complex picture emerges. [More than half of Gen Z](#) believe that humanity is doomed, and [45% of this cohort](#) report climate anxiety affecting them daily. But despite this deep anxiety (or perhaps because of it) Gen Z's engagement with sustainable living is [actually declining](#). In reality, older generations are much more likely to take climate change to task. Baby Boomers, for instance, are [more likely to have boycotted a product or company](#) for socially conscious reasons and [more likely to recycle](#).



The Fragmentation: Individual Action, Meaningless or Not?

On one side of this divide are eco-activists. The perhaps more stereotypical figure that we associate with this generation, of the climate activists driving Fridays for Future protests, joining environmental organisations, making significant lifestyle changes, and channelling their climate anxiety into action. This group sees individual and collective action as both morally necessary and practically effective.

On the other side is a growing cohort of Climate Fatalists who, despite caring deeply about the environment, have essentially given up on the possibility of meaningful change. Almost [40% of Gen Z agree](#) that it's too late to stop climate change at this point. Where [42% of Gen Z](#) believe that there's no point in altering their own behaviour to address climate change, only 19% of Boomers think the same. We call this '[Nouveau Nihilism](#),' the feeling, particularly acute amongst the young, that in an uncertain world, it's better to live for today.

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A GENERATION DIVIDED: GEN Z FRAGMENTATIONS

This fatalism shows up in the data. The proportion of young people committed to reducing their environmental footprint has slipped from [76% in 2020 to 68% in 2024](#). More concerningly, the proportion who believe individual actions don't make a difference has grown from [33% to 42%](#).

A growing chunk of UK teenagers believe climate change is being [purposefully over-exaggerated](#). This climate denial has shifted in nature: 'Old Denial' posits that climate change isn't happening, whereas 'New Denial' argues that the solutions don't work, the science can't be trusted, and the impacts are overstated. The 'New Denial' now makes up [70% of all climate denial content on YouTube](#), up from 35% in 2018.

The picture that emerges is of a generation caught between genuine eco-anxiety and a sense of growing fatalism: the problem is too big, the solutions don't work, and individual action is pointless. The same messaging that energises the activists can reinforce the doom of the Fatalists. Recognise which segment you're approaching and design with the differences in mind.



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// Compassion Fatigue

This is a generation that can't easily escape the news cycle, because the news cycle lives in the same spaces that they operate in for everything else: their mobile phones and social media. In response, we're seeing an [increase in escapism behaviours](#) over the past year (think binge-watching, gaming, or doomscrolling) to escape from stress and reality. Here's the paradox: the escapism itself doesn't help. It creates a cycle where the distressing content that drives you to escape is served by the same platforms you escape into, creating a feedback loop of anxiety and numbing.

The concept of compassion fatigue was originally coined in the 1990s to describe the emotional exhaustion of medical workers over-exposed to trauma. Today, it describes something many of us experience as a baseline condition. Saturated with stories of injustice, disaster, conflict, and suffering, competing for attention in the same feed as memes, ads, and endless influencer content. Our capacity to emotionally respond is wearing thin.

'Every crisis is urgent and all-encompassing, so no crisis is urgent and all-encompassing'

The reality is that for this cohort, the emotional bandwidth available for each individual cause has shrunk. Every crisis is urgent and all-encompassing, so no crisis is urgent and all-encompassing. Emotional reserves are dry. This is the environment in which charities are now competing for attention with this cohort.

To be clear: this generation is not entirely unreachable. Research describes them as "[overwhelmed but undeterred](#)," but the mode of engagement has to change. Take the climate data, for example. Gen Z cares, but has largely stopped believing that their individual actions matter. Show them the mechanism by which their contribution can translate into measurable change.

The Fragmentation: Activism and Burnout Go Hand-In-Hand

Gen Z is, simultaneously, the generation most associated with activism and the generation most likely to say they're too exhausted to engage. These two things aren't contradictory, they're two responses to the same overwhelming stimulus. We've already discussed the polycrisis backdrop against which this cohort is coming of age, and the accompanying sense that effecting change is becoming increasingly difficult.



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A GENERATION DIVIDED: GEN Z FRAGMENTATIONS

That's not to say that Gen Z doesn't have its moments of political activism, or individuals driving change. In 2025 alone, we saw intense, concentrated bursts of activism driven by younger generations across multiple countries. In New York City, progressive mayor [Zohran Mamdani](#) swept to victory, disproportionately powered by young voters. In Nepal, [Gen Z-led protests](#) led to the overthrowing of an oppressive government. Gen Z isn't either fatigued or activist. It's both, often in the same person, depending on the issue, the moment, and the perceived stakes.

The challenge, then, is designing for both states by creating low-friction ways in during moments of exhaustion, and high-impact ways to channel energy when it strikes, alongside the flexibility to easily shift between engagement modes as needed.

'Gen Z isn't either fatigued or activist. It's both, often in the same person, depending on the issue, the moment, and the perceived stakes.'



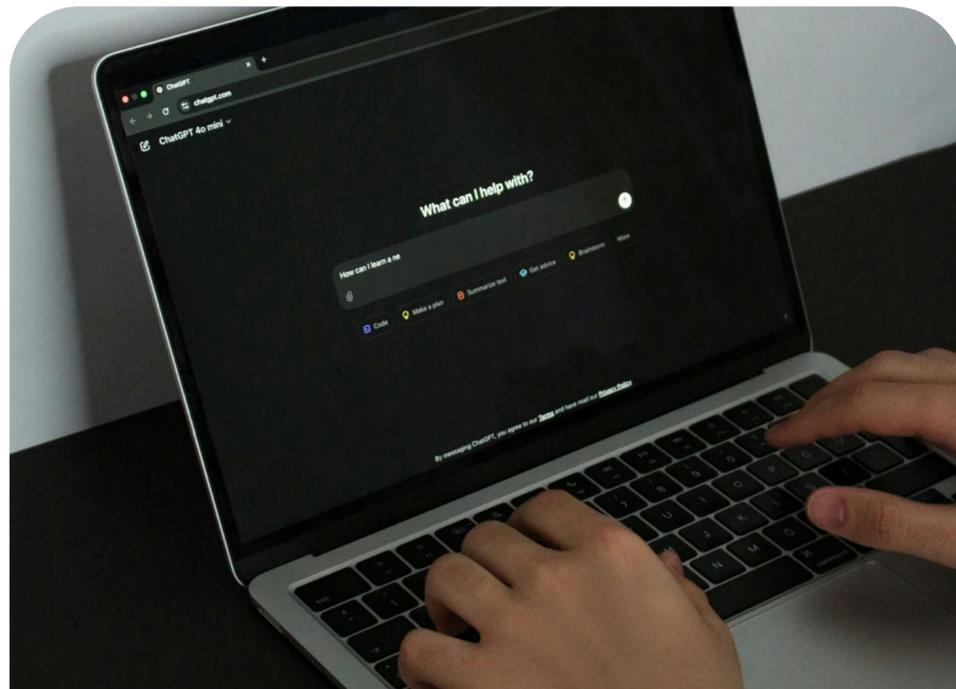
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// The AI Generation

No technology has reshaped Gen Z's landscape as rapidly or as comprehensively as artificial intelligence. Generative AI arrived in late 2022 with the public launch of ChatGPT and, within two years, became embedded in how this generation learns, works, relates to others, and thinks about their future. So, who uses it and how much? The short answer: almost everyone, almost constantly. **79% of Gen Z have used AI tools**, with almost half (47%) using generative AI at least weekly. Among the youngest cohort, uptake is even higher: **53% of high schoolers** report weekly or daily use, compared to 45% of Gen Z adults.



Education is where AI's impact on Gen Z is most visible and most contested. For students, AI has become a study companion, essay drafter, revision tool, and tutor rolled into one. But this has thrown education into crisis. **Educators report** that AI-assisted homework completion has become so widespread that assigning writing outside the classroom now feels equivalent to inviting cheating. These concerns aren't unfounded, as **89% of students** admit to using AI tools like ChatGPT for homework. Schools are scrambling to respond: some universities have **returned to pen-and-paper in-class tests**, others to browsers that prevent students from leaving the quiz screen.

The long-term concerns are primarily cognitive. **Almost half of Gen Z worry** that AI will harm their ability to think carefully about information. This cohort worries it is making people lazier and less intelligent by creating too many shortcuts for learning by doing, critical thinking, and social learning. And while Gen Z's ability to understand and use AI is reasonable, **their ability to critique it is less developed**. They struggle, for instance, to recognise when AI systems fabricate facts.

Their concerns aren't unreasonable: we're seeing increased cognitive offloading due to the prevalence of AI tools across all demographics who use them. Chatbots do the thinking, while users stop checking, critique less, and remember less of what they 'produced', turning the entire content economy into a mirage.

'79% of Gen Z have used AI tools, with almost half (47%) using generative AI at least weekly.'

For the Gen Zers who are already in their working lives, AI has a similarly large impact. Here, we see both opportunities and threats. **57% of Gen Z professionals** already use generative AI at work (higher than any other generation surveyed), leveraging it for data analysis, creative work, content creation, and project management. Of course, there's the same threat of cognitive offloading here.

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A GENERATION DIVIDED: GEN Z FRAGMENTATIONS

The other threat is to the job market – specifically, entry to it – and we’re already seeing this occur. Entry-level tech hiring decreased **25% year-on-year in 2024**, and we’ve seen a **13% relative employment decline** for early-career employees in the most AI-exposed jobs since companies began widely integrating the technology. The World Economic Forum projects that **41% of organisations** expect to reduce their workforce by 2030 due to automation, even as 70% plan to hire people with new skills. The result is what we call the ‘Anxiety Pivot’: Gen Z switching towards hands-on careers or other roles they perceive as harder to automate, drawn by stability and career longevity.

‘41% of organisations expect to reduce their workforce by 2030 due to automation’

AI is also showing up in Gen Z’s personal lives, including their emotional and relational spheres. **75% of Gen Z** report feeling a personal connection to AI, embracing it as something more than just a tool, think of it more like a companion

in their daily lives. A whopping **third of Gen Z singles** have engaged with AI as a romantic companion. **One in four young adults** believes AI has the potential to replace real-life romantic relationships, with young men more likely to hold this view than young women. Globally, **more than 100 million people** now interact with personified AI chatbots, ranging from text companions to apps specifically designed for friendship and romance. AI companions are available around the clock, non-judgmental, endlessly patient, and can be customised to the user’s preferences. AI’s well-documented tendency towards sycophancy is often seen as a flaw. The AI companion market effectively transforms it into its most appealing feature.

But researchers are raising alarms. While AI romance can foster personal growth and emotional support, heavy involvement may be linked to **higher depression and anxiety**. The fundamental concern is that frictionless, on-demand intimacy may erode the capacity for the messier, more demanding – but ultimately more rewarding – work of human relationships.

The Fragmentation: Accelerationist or Doomer?

What makes AI’s relationship with Gen Z so distinctive is not enthusiasm or fear alone, but both at once. **41% of Gen Z** say AI makes them anxious, while 36% say it makes them excited, and these are often the same individuals. They use AI to study while worrying it is eroding their ability to think. They welcome it at work while fearing it will eliminate the jobs they’re training for. They turn to it for companionship while yearning for face-to-face community and friendships. Gen Z uses AI even in situations where they are **explicitly told not to**, while simultaneously worrying about what it is doing to them. These views sketch the image of a generation that feels AI is a force it can’t opt out of, whether it would like to or not.

‘41% of Gen Z say AI makes them anxious, while 36% say it makes them excited’

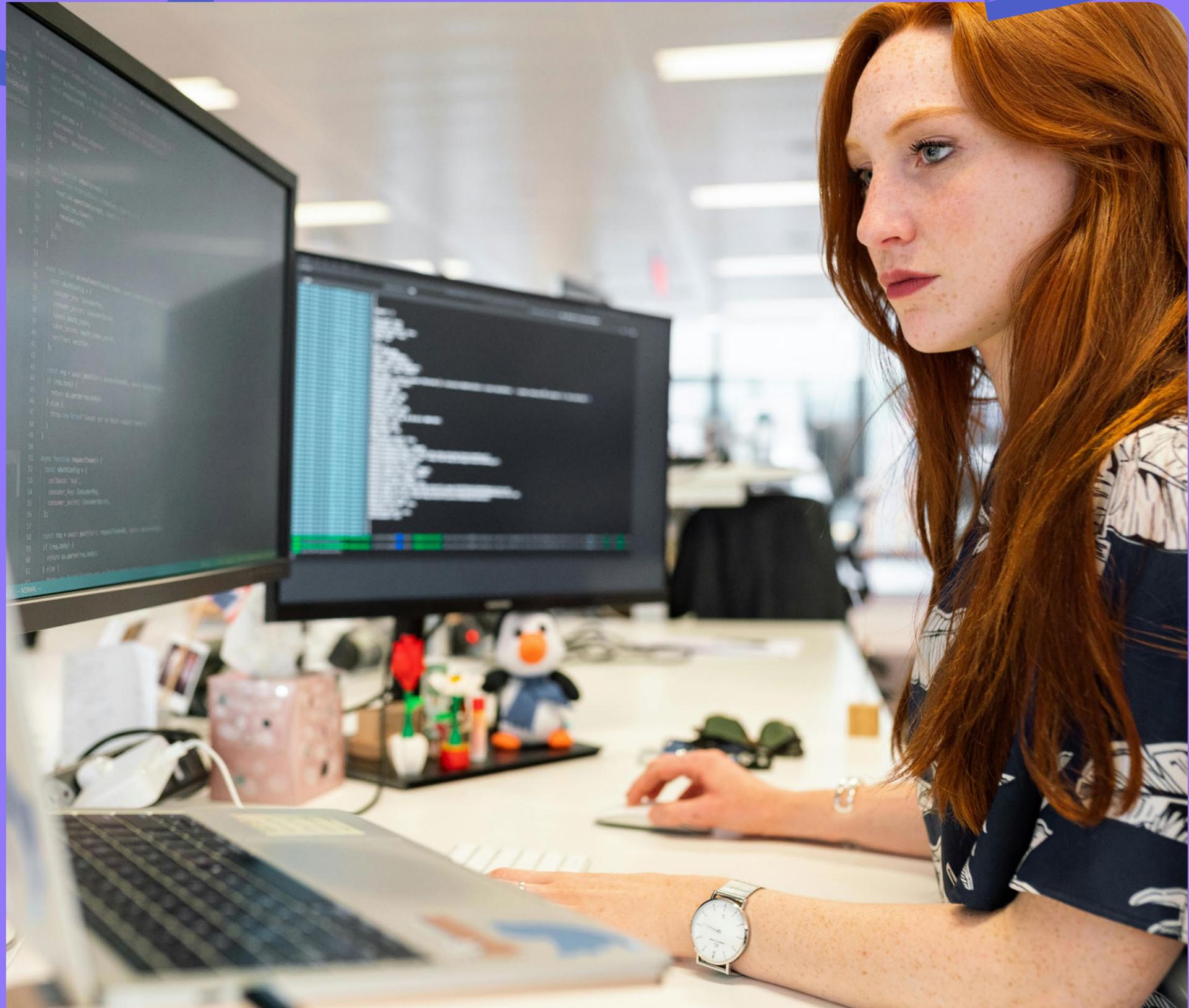
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A GENERATION DIVIDED: GEN Z FRAGMENTATIONS

This ambivalence is crucial to understanding Gen Z's approach to AI. This is a generation for whom this new technology is a structural condition of growing up. It's shaping their education, their employability, their relationships, and their mental health, all at once. Honest, considered, and realistic approaches to both opportunities and threats are key to engaging Gen Z in this space.



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// Inclusive and Diverse

Gen Z is the most diverse generation in history, both demographically and in terms of values. In the UK, **75% of Gen Z are White, 12% Asian, 6% Black, 5% mixed ethnicity, and 3% other ethnic groups**, making them the most ethnically diverse generation in England and Wales. They're also more likely than any previous generation to identify as LGBTQ+. UK data shows that **only 76% of Gen Z** identify as heterosexual, with just 54% saying they are exclusively attracted to the opposite sex.

This cohort's lived diversity that shapes their worldview from the ground up. Gen Z are **more globally minded, more inclusive** in their language, and more likely to see social justice issues as interconnected rather than separate causes. They're generally seen as more accepting of different family structures, gender identities, neurodiversity, and ways of living.

'This cohort's lived diversity that shapes their worldview from the ground up'

They're also more likely to see charity through an intersectional lens, understanding that issues like poverty, climate change, racial justice, and mental health are connected rather than separate problems requiring separate solutions. This has implications for how they donate. They're more attracted to organisations that take holistic approaches to social change rather than those that work in traditional silos.



The Fragmentation: Gendered Polarisation

Whilst Gen Z is progressive – perhaps **more so than Millennials** before them – there is one crucial exception. Perhaps the starkest fracture within Gen Z is political, and it runs along gender lines.

'Globally, we're seeing an ideological divide open up between young men and women'

Globally, we're seeing an ideological divide open up between young men and women. For example, only **43% of Gen Z men** consider themselves feminists, compared to 61% of Gen Z women; among Millennials, those figures were 52% and 54% respectively. In the 2024 UK general election, **young women were roughly twice as likely** to vote Green as young men, while young men were twice as likely to vote Reform.

Z



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A GENERATION DIVIDED: GEN Z FRAGMENTATIONS

In the US, women aged 18–30 in the US are approximately **30 percentage points more liberal** than their male counterparts. In Germany's 2025 election, **60% of women aged 18–24** voted for left-wing parties, while roughly half of men in the same age bracket voted right-wing, with the far-right AfD coming first among young men at 27%. These gaps are noticeably larger than anything seen amongst previous generations, where age (rather than gender) has historically been a better indicator of political beliefs.

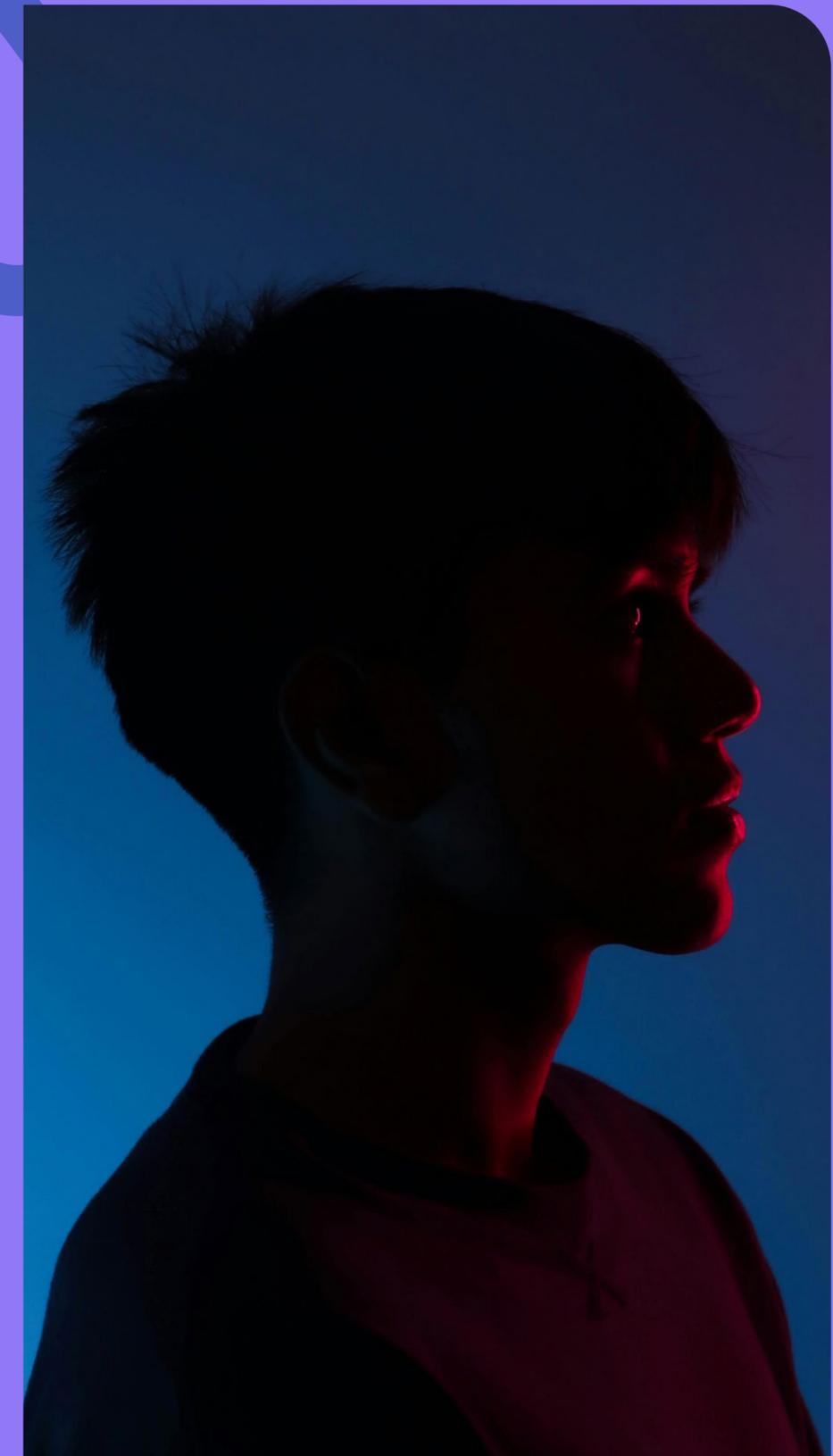
'44% of UK Gen Z men agree that 'when it comes to giving women equal rights, things have gone far enough.'

This trend is not just showing up in voting behaviour either. **44% of UK Gen Z men** agree that 'when it comes to giving women equal rights, things have gone far enough.' Meanwhile, only 26% of these Gen Z men agree that 'feminism has done more good than harm'. In response, **62% of Gen Z women** are deciding to take a break from dating, and the Gen Z women who are dating are **increasingly choosing older men**.

"Gen Z is two generations, not one. In countries on every continent, an ideological gap has opened up between young men and women. Tens of millions of people who occupy the same cities, workplaces, classrooms and even homes no longer see eye-to-eye."

– John Burn-Murdoch, The Financial Times

What's driving this? We can examine several overlapping forces. The #MeToo movement politicised gender in ways that pushed many young women leftward, while a growing online 'manosphere' (more on this in the chapter 'In Search of Meaning') has pulled young men rightward, framing feminism and progressivism as a threat to masculinity. Meanwhile, social media algorithms mean that young men and women now increasingly occupy separate digital spaces and consume separate cultures, **reinforcing the divergence**. Whilst Gen Z's commitment to inclusion and diversity holds water, it does not apply to every segment. Again, these preferences often run along the gender and political lines fragmenting this cohort. Engaging this cohort largely means you have to be comfortable holding and acknowledging these contradictions.



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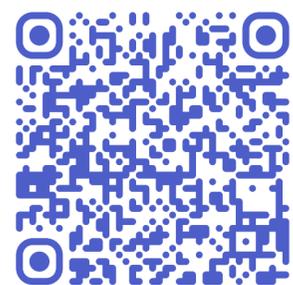


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IDENTITY FRAGMENTS

As the fragmentations in this cohort demonstrate, Gen Z is not a fixed profile. A Zoomer can be climate-anxious and apathetic in the same week. Digitally fluent and digitally burnt out. Deeply community-oriented and struggling to find connection. To help you explore these tensions and contradictions within Gen Z, we've designed a deck of 'Identity Fragment' cards, based on the research for this report.

Each card captures one recognisable facet of the cohort, written as a mini character sketch. Watch out: these fragments are not meant to be representative of the entire generation, but to evoke characteristics we see across different segments. They're designed to be mixed, matched, and clashed.



Scan the QR Code or [click here to access the downloadable Gen Z Generational Identity Fragments Cards.](#)

How to use the cards:

- 1. Set the challenge:** Choose a focus question (e.g. 'How might we engage Gen Z in volunteering?').
- 2. Draw fragments:** Pull 2-3 cards per group or participant.
- 3. Build the person:** Treat the cards as facets of one individual. How do they interact? How do they clash? What tension can you identify? What opportunities arise from these tensions?
- 4. Ideation:** Create 3-5 ideas per combination: messaging, channels, experiences, partnership approaches, products, or service tweaks.
- 5. Stress-test:** Swap one card and repeat. Notice which ideas hold up across multiple combinations, and which falter.

Don't shy away from unlikely combinations. What happens when **FINANCIALLY PRECARIOUS** meets **ETHICAL CHECKOUT**? When **LOGGED OFF** collides with **NEWS ON THE FYP**? The value of the deck is in designing for this cohort's fractures and complexities, not to smooth it away.



GENERATIONAL IDENTITY FRAGMENTS

GEN Z



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POST-COVID ANXIETY



Lockdowns hit at a crucial formative period for this Zoomer. They spent their teenage years locked in their bedrooms, when they should have been building crucial connections. Years later, they **still experience social anxiety and isolation** as they try to close the social skills gap. That doesn't mean they're not trying: they're **intentionally rebuilding** by saying yes more, putting themselves out there, and joining hobby-led communities.

DIFTP: THE NEW YOLO



'Do It For The Plot' is Gen Z's version of 'You Only Live Once'. They feel like **the world is doomed** and there's no point in taking action. And if the future is broken anyways, you may as well live in the now. **Spontaneity, subversive experiences, and dopamine hits** are top of the agenda.



THE MANOSPHERE PIPELINE



They feel like nothing they can do is right anymore. They're **angry, frustrated, and feel left behind by society**. While looking for some validation, they stumbled into the manosphere. Finally, **a community that understands** what it's like for them. Whenever they try to open up about this, they're rebuffed and feel more ostracised. Ultimately, it just pushes them further into the rabbit hole.

ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT ICONS



Gen Z's first political memories date back to the pandemic. They remember hearing about #PartyGate on TikTok and feeling disillusioned by the hypocrisy of the government. Their **trust in politics** (and the media, for that matter) **has never really bounced back**. Now, they prefer anti-establishment politicians who 'tell it like it is' and **speak directly to their issues**.

THE SYSTEMS REDESIGNER



This Zoomer doesn't expect (or trust) broken systems to fix themselves, so they're out there **building alternative structures for a more positive future**. They show up to create mutual aid groups, social media guides on how to drive change, or protest movements that drive progress in the rooms they can't get into. They may not trust the system, but they **haven't given up on change**.

Z

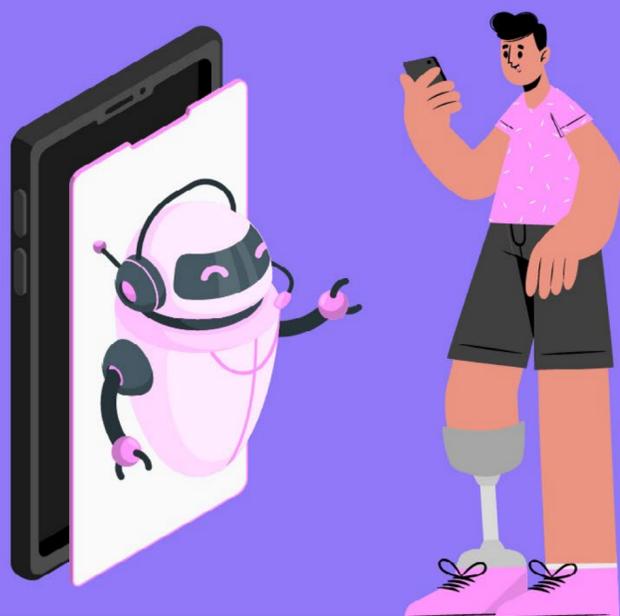


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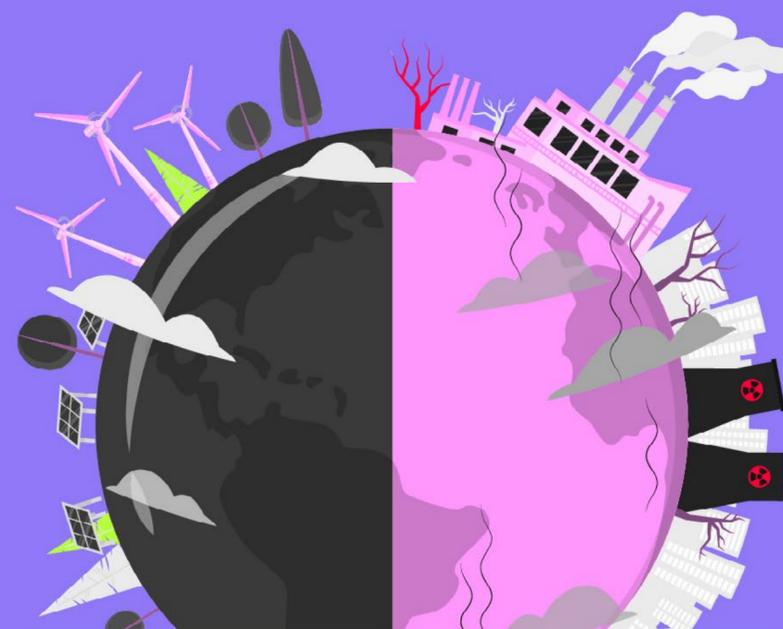


EDUCATED BY AI



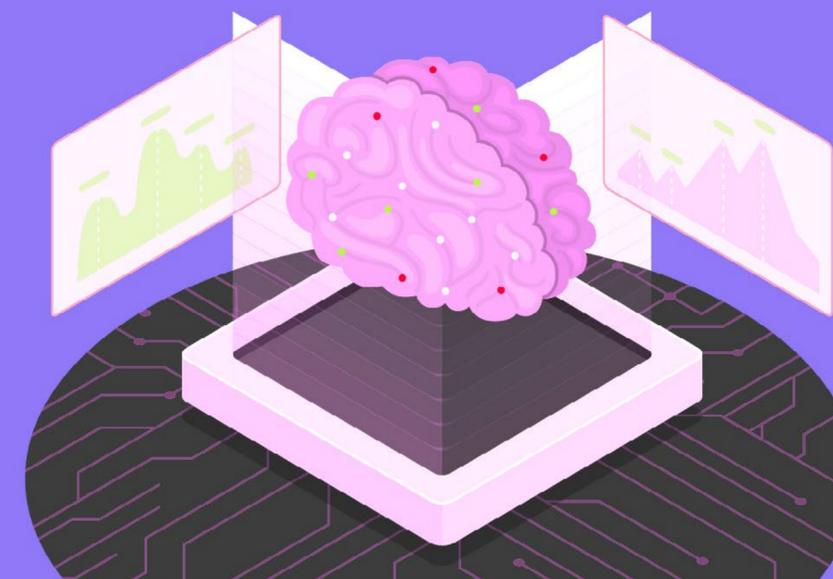
This younger cohort has **never really known education without AI**. Since they entered secondary school, they've been doing all their homework with the help of ChatGPT. If AI can do it for them, it probably wasn't worth learning in the first place. Sometimes, they even **use AI to navigate some tricky social situations**. It's just so much better at knowing what to say.

CLIMATE GENERATION



Every day, there's a new headline about another way in which **humanity has failed the planet**. This Gen Zer is exhausted. They're doing everything right: they go to the protests, they're vegan, they don't shop fast fashion. But **their individual actions aren't enough** and no one in charge is listening. They just want a way to **make their voice heard**.

AIXIETY

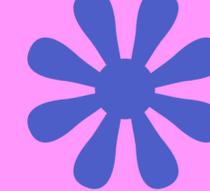


If it were up to them, they'd **go back to a time before ChatGPT** was ever released. They're anxious it's eroding their ability to think and eliminating the jobs they're training for. But **they know they can't ignore it**, and they're investing in building AI literacy. They use it to work faster, think differently, and prototype new ideas. Using AI is what finally **unlocked the extra time** to invest in their hobby and side-hustle.

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STRAIGHT TO THE SOURCE



This Gen Zer wants to do something about **the causes they care about**. Their parents suggested donating, but they're not sure they trust these opaque institutions to direct the money where they want it to go. Instead, they'll find a mutual aid network that **guarantees the donation is as direct as possible**.

THE SPIRITUALIST



This Zoomer is searching for a framework to **create structure in their chaotic life**. When their algorithm started feeding them spirituality content, they finally felt like they found something with meaning. Writing down their daily manifestations makes them feel **slightly more in control** every morning.

NOSTALGIC YEARNING



2016 is the last time the world felt stable for this cohort. Now, they **look backwards for comfort**, curating lifestyles cobbled together from decades they barely remember. They **romanticise slower, simpler eras** they never lived through. The present feels chaotic, so the past is a refuge – even if their version of it is imagined.



IDENTITY FRAGMENTS

FINANCIALLY PRECARIOUS



They have a job and **they work hard**. But they still feel like they're always **one unexpected cost away from overdraft**. Sometimes, they turn to their parents for a helping hand. Homeownership, retirement, long-term planning? That's all out of reach. In the meantime, they're focusing on budgeting spreadsheets, side hustles, and building an emergency fund. Big milestones may be delayed, but they're **building security in smaller, more flexible ways**.

FINFLUENCED



Money and budgeting were never on the curriculum. They **don't trust official guidance**, so they've **turned to TikTok**. This is where they find their budget breakdowns, guidance on launching their side-hustle, and passive income hacks. The knowledge may be primarily peer-validated instead of regulated, but it is proactive. They're **trying to get fluent** in the system the best way they can.

LOGGED OFF

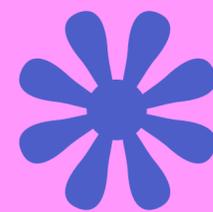


This Zoomer finally **hit a wall with the endless scroll**. The endless digital churn stopped feeling social and they realised how draining being 'always-on' actually is. Whilst they'll never fully log off, they realised they have to step into real life to **find real connection**. You'll find them at a Tuesday night run club or a volunteering shift on Saturday mornings. They want to show up and **relearn how to belong in the real world**.

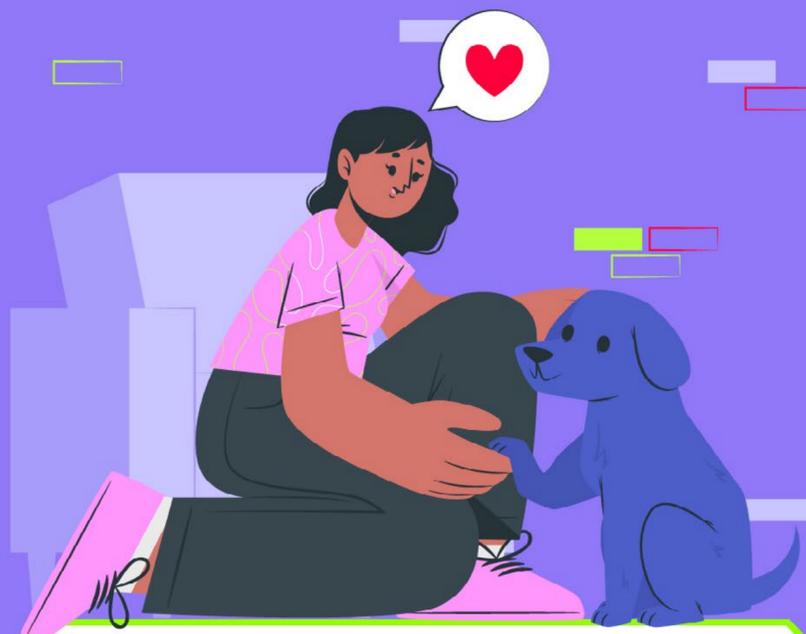
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CHILDLESS BY CHOICE



This Zoomer is **questioning the timelines and assumptions** they inherited. Marriage, mortgage, baby – why in that order? Why at all? More and more of their friends are consciously choosing not to have kids, for a variety of reasons, and they feel much more **confident in their agency to choose for themselves**.

PREPARING FOR THE REAL-WORLD



This Gen Z parent wants to **prepare their kids** for instability and polycrisis from a young age. Practical skills and resilience are top of the agenda. They **don't shy away from difficult conversations**. They're not afraid to admit that they don't always have the answers and they feel unsure too.

GOOD ENOUGH IS ENOUGH



Social media has projected an ideal of parenthood that's unachievable for this busy parent. They feel a **constant pressure to optimise** every snack, schedule, and screen time routine. It's exhausting. Instead, they're **leaning into 'good enough'**. Being loving, present, and imperfect is enough.



IDENTITY FRAGMENTS

PERSON FIRST, PARENT SECOND



This parent refuses to **disappear into the identity of parenthood**. They still want nights out, careers, hobbies, and travel. They'll go to festivals and events, and you'll find them in a beer garden with their friends and stroller. They **continue to show up**. Now, they just have a +1 they bring along.

COMMUNITY, NOT BROADCAST



After a lifetime of performing on their public feed, they're done. They've logged off of Instagram, because it's **full of brands** broadcasting to them. Instead, their online lives take place in **closed servers and hobby-based platforms** where they can get involved and avoid being observed. If they can't shape, remix, or build content themselves, they're not interested.

NEWS ON THE FYP



They no longer open the BBC website to read the headlines. The **headlines find them**. Get Ready With Me video. Update on Ukraine. Vlogging the best places to eat in Japan. Everything you need to know about the Epstein files, filmed by someone in their bedroom. The algorithm decides what content they consume and the news they hear. They **rarely stop scrolling to fact-check**.

Z



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IDENTITY FRAGMENTS

THE MICRO-VOLUNTEER



They'll give a **Saturday or an hour after work**, if their schedule allows it. It's a quick burst of energy for something that genuinely matters to them. Yet the idea of signing up every Tuesday for the next six months feels far too restrictive. They want **flexibility and ease**, not strict scheduling.

ETHICAL CHECKOUTS



This Zoomer desperately needs to buy new detergent. Luckily, their local Tesco has both own-brand and premium sustainable detergent on offer. Since they're already there, they're happy to **spend the extra £1 on a cause they care about**. If it hadn't been readily available, they probably would have ordered whatever was cheapest on Amazon.



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THE TRUST GAP



// TL;DR

Trust Is Down: Trust is down across society, but Gen Z is entering adulthood with historically low baseline confidence in institutions.

Localisation: Instead, they trust group chats, peers, and immediate networks. Authority is relational for this cohort.

Charities: Trust in the third sector is higher than in government, but younger audiences are suspicious nonetheless, especially around transparency and overheads.

Cynicism: Cynicism is a high bar, but not a closed door. Transparency, real-time proof, authenticity, and peer-led engagement can cut through.

Z



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// Institutional Trust is Collapsing

The fatigue and burnout that Gen Z are experiencing both feed and are fed by a deeper structural problem: Gen Z is coming of age during a time of deep institutional mistrust.

First, let's examine some general statistics that cut across generations. The 2026 Edelman Trust Barometer paints a stark global picture. Across nearly 34,000 respondents in 28 countries, [seven in ten](#) report being unwilling or hesitant to trust someone with different values, backgrounds, or information sources, a phenomenon referred to as 'insularity'. Over the past five years, trust in national government leaders has experienced a net loss of 16 points; major news organisations have lost 11 points. Only [32% of people globally believe the next generation will be better off](#).

The five events most responsible for [eroding trust](#)? Inflation (54%), misinformation (50%), the COVID-19 pandemic (43%), trade wars (37%), and generative AI (37%). Every single one of these is something Gen Z has lived through during its formative years.

While these issues are present across all demographics, they are exacerbated within this cohort. Confidence in institutions is [systematically lower among 18-25-year-olds than older cohorts](#), particularly in the armed forces, universities, police, parliament, and the media. Shockingly, only [5% of Gen Z](#) say they trust the press in the UK, compared to the Pre-War Generation at 25% or Gen X at 15% (admittedly, not particularly high either). It's worth noting that even in categories where older generations have similarly low levels of trust as Gen Z, older cohorts reached lower levels after their confidence declined from a much higher starting point, whereas [Gen Z are entering the data with very little confidence](#).

What that means for trust is that it has localised. People are retreating into smaller, familiar circles. Trust in neighbours, family, friends, and immediate coworkers [has risen](#), while trust in distant institutional leaders has cratered. This is a shift from 'we' to 'me,' from collective trust in shared systems to insular trust in personal networks. For Gen Z, who were already one of the most digitally networked and peer-

oriented generations, this trend is amplified. They trust their group chat more than they trust your annual report. Quite literally in some cases: asked to rank their trust in the BBC, [43% said they trusted it](#), but that figure was far outweighed by trust in friends' social media posts (58%).

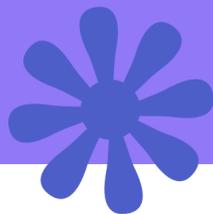
'Only 5% of Gen Z say they trust the press in the UK.'

Gen Z's exhaustion with institutions is translating into some interesting political opinions. [More than half of Gen Z](#) agreed that Britain would be a better place if a strong leader was in charge who did not have to bother with parliament and elections, and one in three said they would prefer the army to run the country. Whilst this isn't a generation that would self-identify as authoritarian, this shows the logic of a cohort that feels democratic institutions have systematically failed to address the things that matter most to them.

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// The Charity Impact

The erosion of institutional trust does not stop at the doors of the voluntary sector. While [overall trust in charities remains comparatively high](#), just 12% of people are comfortable with donations contributing to a chief executive's salary. The gap between public perception and operational reality is wide, and it is widest among younger donors, who are both more suspicious and less forgiving.

We see this reflected in donation patterns. Globally, [57% of Gen Z](#) believe that giving directly through platforms like GoFundMe and mutual aid networks has more impact than donating to a traditional charity. Who this generation trusts as a channel for doing good has changed. This is a fundamental challenge: charities that continue to operate within traditional frameworks – expecting Gen Z to come to them or to trust institutional authority – risk being bypassed in favour of non-traditional models. Gen Z has already demonstrated their willingness to route around institutions they perceive as inefficient or unaccountable. Instead, they're engaging with alternative systems of mutual aid, direct giving, and

peer-to-peer support that feel more transparent, immediate, and aligned with their values. Failing to rethink your approach to engagement, transparency, and accountability risks ceding the field to alternative models that Gen Z finds more trustworthy and effective.

We want to be explicit in saying that Gen Z's cynicism is not necessarily a closed door. It's more a high bar, set by a cohort that has been burnt before. So, what works? Of course, we go into much more depth across various different lenses throughout the course of this report, but in a nutshell: they want transparency, real-time evidence, and authenticity. They respond to peer-led models, community, and being part of the conversation. It's worth recognising that Gen Z are not the only generation feeling disillusioned and mistrustful of traditional institutions. As pointed out, we're seeing trust collapse globally, across all demographics. Whilst Gen Z's trust may be disproportionately affected, rethinking traditional models of engagement will allow us to rethink how we reach other demographics feeling similarly left behind in the system.





// Who Cuts Through: Three Case Studies

In the landscape of crumbling institutional trust, individual figures can break through, but only if they speak directly to Gen Z lived experience.



Image source

The template is Zohran Mamdani, the 34-year-old Democratic Socialist who won New York City's mayoral election in 2025 after [starting his campaign polling at just 1%](#). Research found that [75% of young voters](#) backed Mamdani, and youth turnout in the election was 28%, atypically high for a municipal race. Young people responded because they felt genuinely heard and respected, at a time when most political engagement leaves them feeling neither. Mamdani's campaign bet on a peer-to-peer outreach and a social media strategy that prioritised authenticity, ultimately reaping the rewards.



Image source

In the UK, similar dynamics are playing out in different ways. [George Finch](#), the 19-year-old Reform UK council leader of Warwickshire County Council, represents another kind of breakthrough figure. Controversial and polarising, sure, but cutting through traditional channels of authority. Finch speaks to disaffected young people who feel abandoned by mainstream institutions, albeit in a different way to Mamdani. His path from Conservative Party member to Reform UK leader tracks the same institutional scepticism driving broader political realignments among young people. Finch represents a particular strand of anti-establishment politics that resonates with a segment of Gen Z who feel their concerns are being ignored.



// Who Cuts Through: Three Case Studies



On a less divisive note, Zack Polanski, the Green Party leader, has overseen the party's surge to **32% among 18-25 year olds**. That's a full seven points ahead of Labour. Polanski's brand of politics reframes the climate away from abstract targets and moral lectures, towards rent, bills, transport, food prices and quality of life. His message reflects the same dynamic: young people gravitating towards figures who articulate their frustrations and offer concrete alternatives, rather than incremental change through existing systems.

The common thread across these figures is authenticity, directness, and a willingness to challenge the status quo in substantive ways. These figures purposefully speak to the material conditions that define Gen Z's daily reality. And, crucially, they're not asking young people to wait their turn or moderate their expectations.

Z



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The Big Democracy Lesson

In January 2026, UK charity Young Citizens launched The Big Democracy Lesson, a free programme designed to strengthen young people's understanding of democracy. The programme focuses on building critical thinking, media literacy and civic confidence at a time when democratic participation in the UK is shifting. With the voting age lowering to 16, there is renewed emphasis on preparing young people to engage meaningfully in public life. The Big Democracy Lesson responds directly to concerns about misinformation, polarisation and declining trust in institutions, equipping students with the tools to interrogate information and understand how power operates.

So What: Trust in institutions is no longer a given, it has to be earned. We can't assume future supporters will instinctively value expert voices or established organisations. There is a growing role for the sector in rebuilding civic literacy and institutional confidence from the ground up. Partnerships that combine credibility, education and practical skill-building will become increasingly important.



Zohran Mamdani

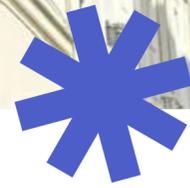
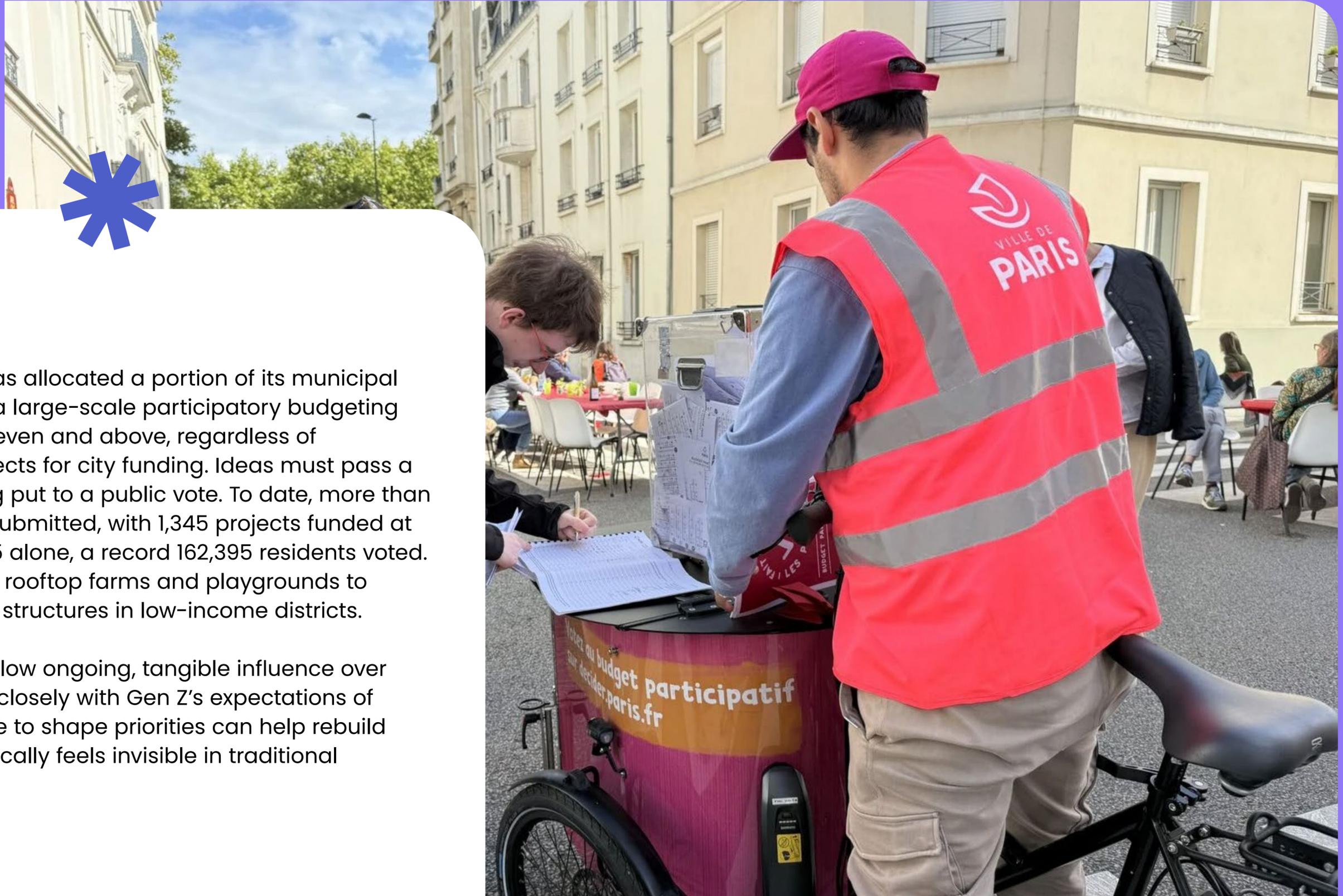
It's worth looking at Mamdani's social media strategy in more detail. His team leaned into highly shareable, platform-native content: vertically shot videos, rapid-response explainers, bold, stripped-back typography optimised for social media. Policy proposals were broken into digestible visual frames, often using plain language and high-contrast design that felt closer to youth media brands than traditional political leaflets. Much of the content was filmed in neighbourhood streets, on the subway or outside community hubs. Volunteers were encouraged to create and remix their own content, turning supporters into micro-broadcasters.

So What: The campaign treated attention as something earned horizontally, peer-to-peer, rather than delivered top-down through press endorsements or party machinery. Credibility for this cohort depends on cultural fluency as much as political substance. It's not just about what you say, but how you say it, how it looks, where it's broadcast, and who amplifies it.

Z



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The City of Paris

Since 2014, the City of Paris has allocated a portion of its municipal budget to residents through a large-scale participatory budgeting scheme. Any Parisian aged seven and above, regardless of nationality, can propose projects for city funding. Ideas must pass a feasibility review before being put to a public vote. To date, more than 21,000 proposals have been submitted, with 1,345 projects funded at a cost of €768 million. In 2025 alone, a record 162,395 residents voted. Funded initiatives range from rooftop farms and playgrounds to community cafés and shade structures in low-income districts.

So What: Mechanisms that allow ongoing, tangible influence over decision-making align more closely with Gen Z's expectations of agency. Inviting young people to shape priorities can help rebuild trust with this cohort that typically feels invisible in traditional institutional spheres.



IN SEARCH OF MEANING



Z



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// TL;DR

Polycrisis Impact: Gen Z is actively searching for belief systems that provide stability, agency, and belonging in an increasingly chaotic world. There's an opportunity to create meaning through purpose.

Faith: Organised religion and alternative spirituality are seeing an increase in popularity amongst this cohort. Both offer community and a sense of control.

Nostalgia: Nostalgia, meanwhile, functions as psychological safety. Romanticised versions of the past are filling the vacuum of an unstable present. The risk is that this longing for 'simpler times' is increasingly exploited by ideological movements.

Manosphere: The manosphere thrives in this meaning vacuum by offering identity, belonging, and rigid guides to life to young men navigating isolation and frustration.



// Meaning-Making Systems

If there's one thread that connects the many contradictions of Gen Z, it's this: they're a generation searching for something to believe in. Having come of age through a pandemic, a cost-of-living crisis, and the slow erosion of trust in institutions, Gen Z is turning to a dizzying range of meaning-making systems. Some ancient, some improvised, some more concerning than others. This section maps that search: from the pews of churches and the glow of tarot cards, to the warm haze of nostalgia and the darker corners of the internet.

'If there's one thread that connects the many contradictions of Gen Z, it's this: they're a generation searching for something to believe in'



// Faith and Spirituality

One of the more widely circulated stories about Gen Z is the 'return' of young people to organised religion. Headlines point to an [apparent uptick](#) in church attendance among Gen Z, positioned as a counter-trend to long-term decline. However, some of the data underpinning these claims has [since been questioned](#), with methodological flaws and sampling issues casting doubt on the scale of any meaningful resurgence.

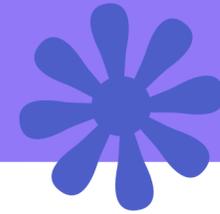
What we are, however, seeing is a strategic shift. Religious institutions are [actively rethinking how they engage younger audiences](#). From modernised services and digital outreach to community-first programming and open conversations around mental health and identity, churches are adapting to the realities of Gen Z's world. The story is less about a sweeping generational return to faith, and more about institutions evolving their approach in response to a cohort searching for belonging and meaning. Whether this translates into sustained growth remains to be seen. But these institutions are recognising that engaging Gen Z requires

cultural fluency, community-building, and a willingness to help them create meaning.

But organised religion is only one part of the story. Alongside the return to churches runs a parallel (and arguably even more mainstream) turn towards alternative spirituality. Roughly [a third of atheists](#) in the UK more specifically identify as agnostic about the existence of a God but open to spirituality. Meanwhile, [62% of adult Gen Z](#) consider themselves "very" or "fairly" spiritual compared to 52% of millennials; 36% gen X; 35% boomers. This cohort is increasingly turning to tarot cards, astrology, energy work, and manifestation in their search of meaning. On TikTok, the #WitchTok hashtag has amassed approximately [5.2 billion views](#). A quick scroll shows everything from tarot readings to spell tutorials, astrological compatibility breakdowns, and full moon rituals.

What connects church and crystal? Both offer something Gen Z craves: a sense of agency and meaning in a world that feels chaotic.





// Nostalgia and Anemoia

If spirituality represents Gen Z reaching upward for meaning, nostalgia represents them reaching backward. The most viral trend of early 2026 tells the story neatly. “2026 is the new 2016” has dominated TikTok and Instagram for weeks, with the hashtag [#2026is2016](#) generating hundreds of millions of posts. Spotify reported that user-generated “2016” playlists [surged over 790%](#) since January 1st, with tracks like Zara Larsson’s “Lush Life” and Justin Bieber’s “Sorry” soaring in the charts. For many Zoomers, 2016 is a time capsule from before everything seemingly went wrong.

‘User-generated “2016” playlists surged over 790%’

Of course, this is just the latest iteration of a much deeper pattern. Gen Z’s nostalgia has revisited the 80s aesthetics that dominated fashion in 2025, and the Y2K revival before that. Outside of fashion, nostalgic technology (think walkmen, flip phones, and vinyls) are ever-increasing in popularity. One poll found [42% of Gen Z](#) already expressing nostalgia for the past decade.

Regardless of the specific shape nostalgia takes, it roughly serves the same purpose. For this generation, nostalgia functions as a [defence mechanism against psychological threats](#). When the present feels heavy, the past becomes a mental safe place and a comforting lens through which to make sense of the current world – even if that past is imagined.

Here’s where it potentially gets dangerous. Much of Gen Z’s nostalgic yearning is actually [anemoia](#), nostalgia for pasts they’ve never experienced, filtered through curated aesthetics and highly selective storytelling. In fact, [68% of Gen Z adults](#) report feeling nostalgic for eras before their lifetime, primarily to media, styles, hobbies, and traditions from those eras. But romanticised reminiscing about the 1950s rarely acknowledges the entrenched inequalities present during that time period. That gap between longing and lived experience is ripe to be exploited and manipulated.

‘Much of Gen Z’s nostalgic yearning is actually anemoia’

‘When the present feels heavy, the past becomes a mental safe place’

Anemoia can serve as entry points into broader ideological frameworks that exploit Gen Z’s hunger for stability and meaning. When young people scroll through endless content celebrating “traditional family values” or “simpler times,” they’re often consuming propaganda even as they think they’re watching lifestyle inspo, produced by creators with explicit political agendas leveraging aesthetics.



Z



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IN SEARCH OF MEANING

Tradwives are the clearest cut example: white supremacist ideals are [rebranded to follow platform norms and spread ideologies](#) that would otherwise be rejected. The blending of aesthetics, lifestyle advice, and subversive messaging makes it difficult for audiences to trace where their romanticised visions of the past are actually coming from. You may think we're being dramatic, but the [algorithm on TikTok](#) genuinely creates a pipeline from baking bread in a farmhouse kitchen to content about gender roles, immigration, or the supposed decline of Western civilisation.

This pipeline preys on Gen Z's genuine exhaustion with contemporary political engagement. Disconnecting and retreating into seemingly 'non-political' spaces creates a vacuum that this nostalgic content fills. Meanwhile, young people experiencing rose-tinted nostalgia for past places and times become susceptible to politicians who promise a return to the "good old days". Even if those days are little more than a figment of the imagination. In their search for meaning, this cohort is retreating into imagined simplicities and daydreams that are being subversively defined for them.



Z



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// Enter: The Manosphere

One of the most concerning cultural dynamics in this space is the radicalisation of young men through online ecosystems that weaponise their legitimate anxieties into misogyny, grievance, and political extremism.

First, let's set the scene. The roles and expectations placed on men in the 2020s have been undergoing a significant transformation. Traditional ideals of men as primary 'providers' and 'protectors' no longer hold water. Whilst this is liberating for some, it has also created a segment of men grappling with their identity and societal roles. And, rather than visions of positive masculinity or alternative guides to life filling the space, men, and young men especially, are experiencing a sort of vacuum of positive role models and guidance.

Enter: [the manosphere](#). This is a loose network of online communities that claim to address men's struggles, from dating, to fitness, and fatherhood, but frequently promote harmful attitudes and the false narrative that feminism and gender equality have come at the cost of men's rights. This community is united by

what's known as the 'Red Pill' ideology – if you've seen the Matrix, you'll understand the reference – which frames men as victims of a system rigged against them, with women and feminists as the culprits. And it's stunningly common: [two-thirds of young men](#) regularly engage with masculinity influencers online. In fact, only [26% of 16-to-17-year-old boys](#) outright rejected the ideas of manosphere content creators, while 45% viewed them positively.

The brand of masculinity that these role models try to sell is prescriptive, rooted in stereotypical norms of what 'being a man' means. That said, there is no singular version of masculinity sold in the manosphere. There's many niche subcultures, each with their own variations of masculinity. For example, if you look at Andrew Tate, his version of masculinity is all about dominance and status. Wealth is proof of worth, women are validation of that, and aggression is strength. On the other hand, [Clavicular and the looksmaxxing community](#) are less about conquering others and more about engineering yourself. They promote hyper-control over your body as a proxy for control of life.



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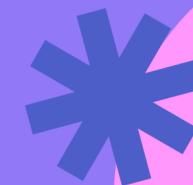
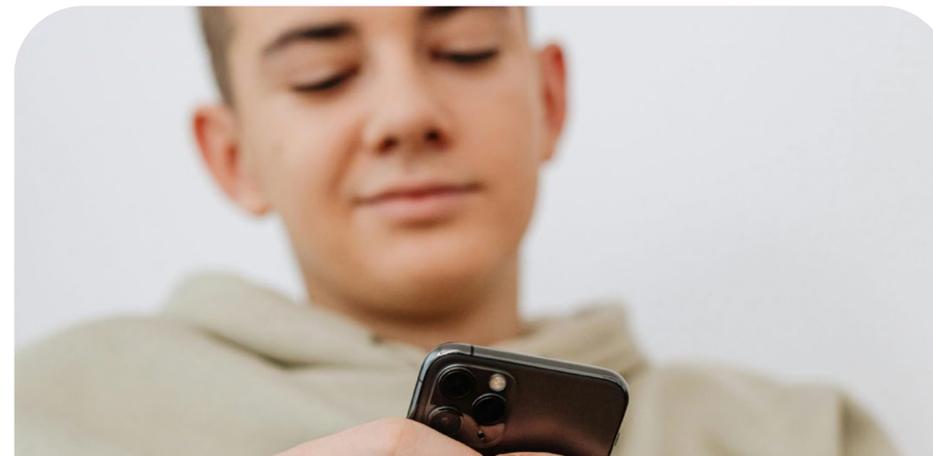
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IN SEARCH OF MEANING

So, what's the appeal for young men? First of all, conforming to these models of masculinity comes with [rigid advice, norms, and guidance](#) than 'just be good' does. Secondly, many of these influencers are essentially grifters outright selling the idea that by following their lead, young men too can achieve their socially, economically, and sexually successful lifestyles. Lastly, and particularly prescient for Gen Z men, is the fact that liberal discourse increasingly tries to centre marginalised voices (rightly so), under the ethos that white, straight, cisgender men have 'had their time'. But imagine you're a 15-year-old Gen Z boy. You're still in school, you don't know what you want to do with your life, and you've hardly had time to make a mark – you don't feel like you've had your time at all. You're looking for role models that provide a space where you feel your identity is relevant and listened to, and the manosphere provides. It offers a sense of belonging and meaning that young men may feel they can't find elsewhere. This pull towards the manosphere is a large driving force behind the polarisation of young men and women we've previously describe.

Of course, it's easy to condemn the manosphere. It's much harder to find a positive alternative. The void exists because no one else is filling it. We need to offer something better. Positive role models, healthy masculinity, and spaces where men can discuss their struggles without being funnelled towards hatred. Trying to argue young men out of the manosphere typically [causes them to retrench deeper](#). What we need to do instead is address the underlying feeling. The agitation, isolation, and, yes, the search for meaning.

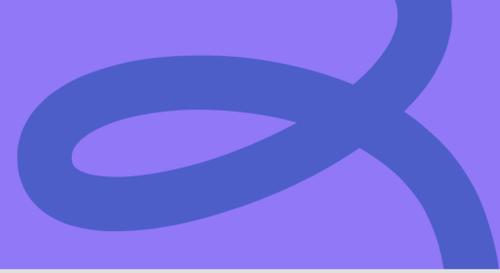
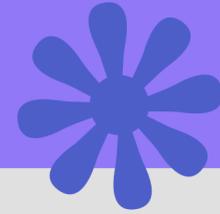
'[The manosphere] offers a sense of belonging and meaning that young men may feel they can't find elsewhere'



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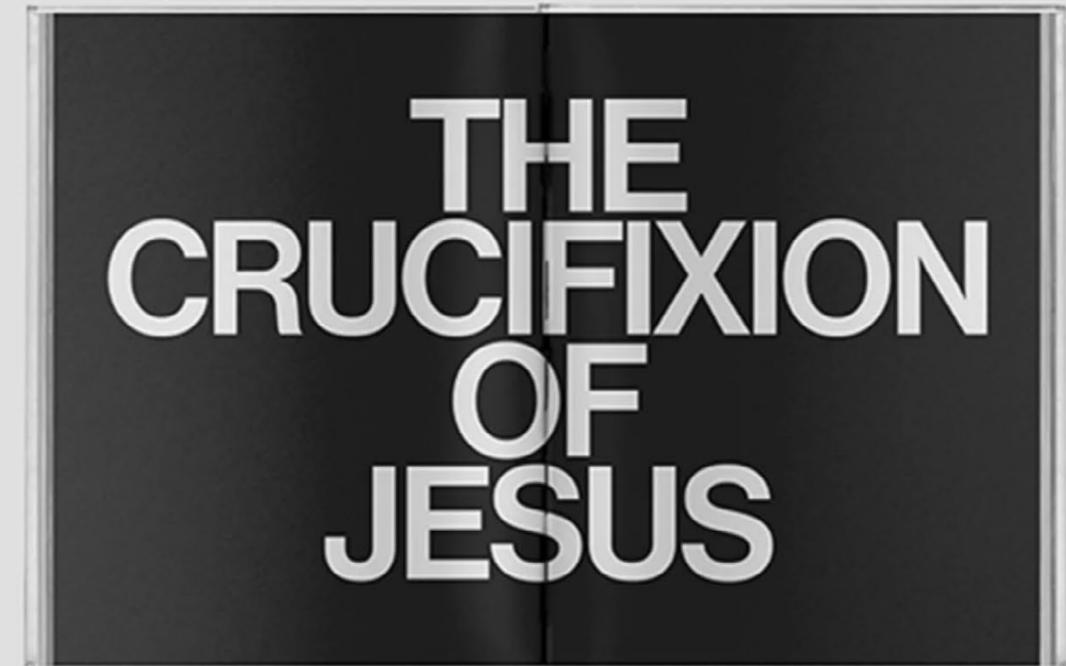


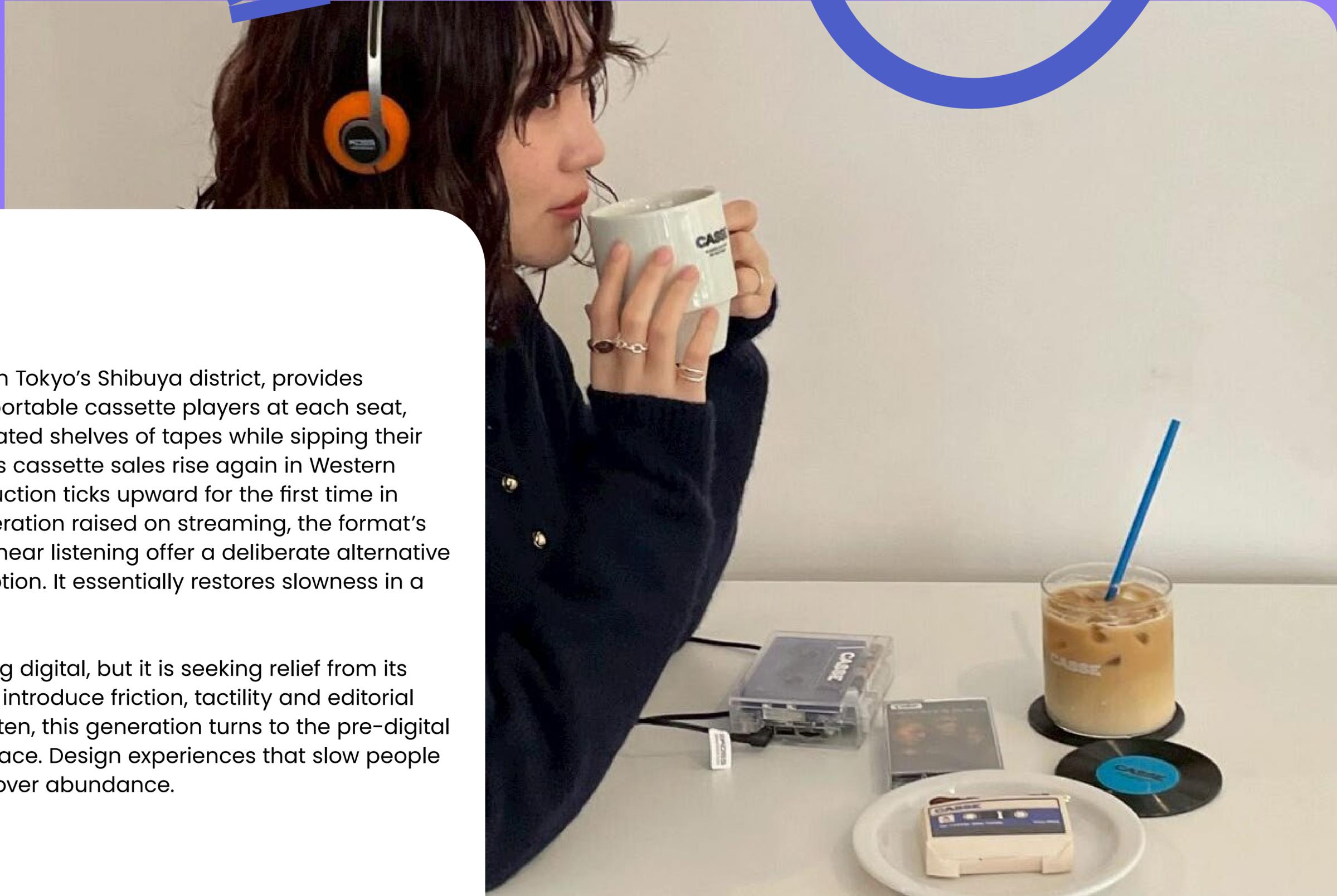
MATTHEW

Byble

Byble, which stands for “begin your bible learning experience,” is a redesigned edition of the Christian Bible. With a slick, typographically driven layout and contemporary visual identity, it reframes scripture through clean design and editorial clarity. The creator says the project is designed to translate the experience of reading the Bible for a generation shaped by visual culture. *Byble* aims to meet young people where they are visually, culturally and spiritually. Its premise is simple: if Gen Z consumes meaning through considered design, then sacred texts must compete on the same terms as beautifully produced magazines, apps and brand worlds.

So What: If meaning is now created through beautiful design, intuitive layouts, and culturally fluent storytelling, then engagement strategies should evolve accordingly. Modernising means translating your substance and messaging for this new cohort, their needs and preferences. Whether or not you cut through will increasingly depend on whether a new generation can see itself reflected in the form as well as the content.



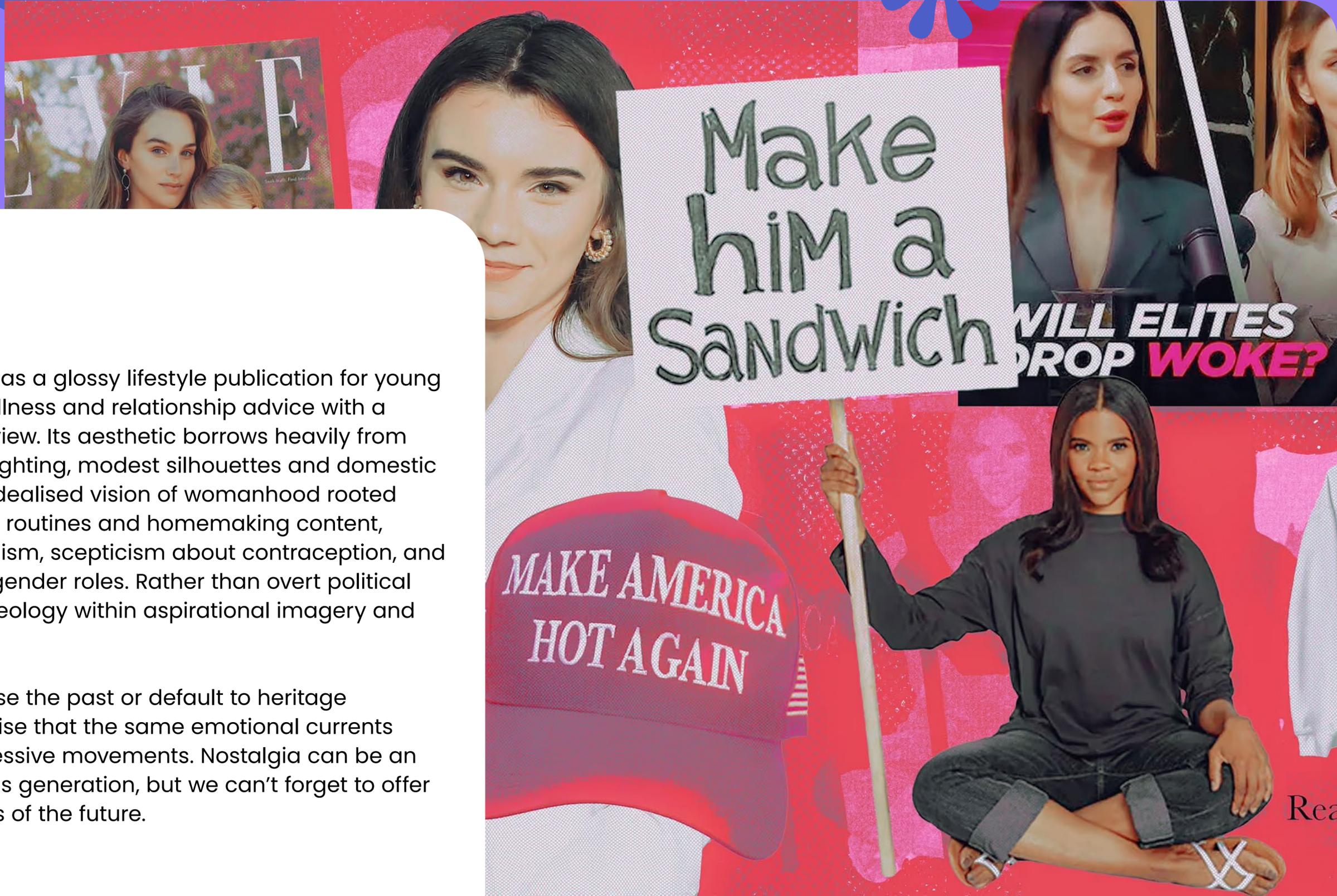


CASSE Cassette Café

CASSE, a cassette tape café in Tokyo's Shibuya district, provides individual headphones and portable cassette players at each seat, inviting visitors to browse curated shelves of tapes while sipping their coffee. The concept arrives as cassette sales rise again in Western markets and Japanese production ticks upward for the first time in over two decades. For a generation raised on streaming, the format's constraints, physicality and linear listening offer a deliberate alternative to algorithm-driven consumption. It essentially restores slowness in a culture optimised for speed.

So What: Gen Z is not rejecting digital, but it is seeking relief from its constant churn. Formats that introduce friction, tactility and editorial control can feel like luxury. Often, this generation turns to the pre-digital world for inspiration in this space. Design experiences that slow people down and prioritise curation over abundance.





Evie Magazine

Evie Magazine positions itself as a glossy lifestyle publication for young women, blending fashion, wellness and relationship advice with a distinctly conservative worldview. Its aesthetic borrows heavily from mid-century femininity, soft lighting, modest silhouettes and domestic romanticism, presenting an idealised vision of womanhood rooted in tradition. Alongside beauty routines and homemaking content, however, sit critiques of feminism, scepticism about contraception, and arguments in favour of rigid gender roles. Rather than overt political messaging, Evie packages ideology within aspirational imagery and nostalgic storytelling.

So What: When we romanticise the past or default to heritage aesthetics, we should recognise that the same emotional currents are being harnessed by regressive movements. Nostalgia can be an effective tool for engaging this generation, but we can't forget to offer alternative compelling visions of the future.



CASE STUDIES



Adolescence

Netflix's 2025 drama *Adolescence* centres on teenage boys navigating masculinity in a hyper-digital world. The series explores loneliness, online radicalisation, porn literacy, male friendship and the subtle pathways that draw young men towards manosphere communities. Rather than caricaturing its characters, it portrays them as confused, searching and emotionally under-equipped, shaped as much by algorithmic feeds as by absent role models.

So What: The manosphere is a mainstream influence on how many boys interpret power, sex and success. We can't afford to treat it as taboo or assume it will burn out on its own. There is an urgent need for spaces where boys can explore identity, status and belonging without sliding into grievance-driven ideologies. Interventions that combine media literacy with emotional literacy will be more effective than moral panic. If the sector does not engage young men directly, someone else will.



Ochre Spirits

Ochre Spirits' #PourOutTheToxic campaign tackled everyday misogyny by focusing on silent bystanders. The film follows Aarav, a young man who witnesses crude jokes and casual aggression yet says nothing. His inaction becomes the central tension, reflecting how complicity often thrives in ordinary social settings rather than overtly radical spaces. The campaign invited audiences to confront their own moments of hesitation and share reflections using #PourOutTheToxic.

So What: Countering the manosphere can't rely only on deplatforming or condemnation. Many young men encounter harmful narratives in subtle, social ways before they reach the overtly extremist spaces of the Manosphere. Campaigns like #PourOutTheToxic recognise that silence is part of the ecosystem. It's about equipping young men with scripts, confidence and social permission to intervene.

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FINANCIAL HEALTH CHECK



// TL;DR

Stereotypes: The reckless spender stereotype doesn't hold. Many Gen Z adults are financially stretched, primarily due to work failing to guarantee stability and traditional milestones feeling increasingly out of reach.

Work: The early-career ladder is weakening as AI continues to automate entry-level roles across sectors. For younger Gen Zers who haven't yet started their careers, this means the on-ramp is much harder to find.

Education: Financial education gaps are being filled by social media. Gen Z is proactively trying to upskill, but often through unregulated, peer-led sources.

Clarity: Organisations that offer trustworthy guidance or tangible value can build long-term relationships with this cohort.

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// The Statistics

The stereotype of Gen Z is that they're reckless spenders: frittering away money on iced lattes and subscription boxes while complaining they can't afford a house. This narrative should sound familiar to any Millennials who were previously faulted for spending too much money on avocado toast to step onto the housing ladder. So, what does the data actually say?

The numbers paint a sobering picture. In the UK, nearly [half \(47%\) of young people](#) are unable or just about managing to make ends meet, with that figure climbing to 57% for 22–24-year-olds. Work is failing to protect young people's economic security, with [56% of employed young people](#) experiencing financial precarity. In fact, [one-third of Gen Zers and Millennials](#) are still relying on parents for help with housing costs and bills.

'56% of employed young people [are] experiencing financial precarity'

All this to say: the cost of living crisis has bitten hard, with far-reaching consequences for a younger cohort attempting to begin financial planning for life. Savings are hard to come by, with [over half of Gen Z](#) saying they don't have sufficient savings to cover three months of expenses. Relatedly: [32% name building an emergency fund](#) as their main short-term financial goal, ahead of retirement saving, education, or home purchase.

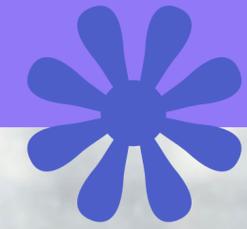
'Over half of Gen Z [say] they don't have sufficient savings to cover three months of expenses'

It doesn't come as a surprise, then, that traditional financial markers of success still feel out of reach for this generation. The share of [under-25s who own their home](#) has fallen from 24% to 10% over the past two decades. House prices relative to earnings are now at their most unaffordable in more than a century, and only [one in five Brits aged 18–34](#) live independently.

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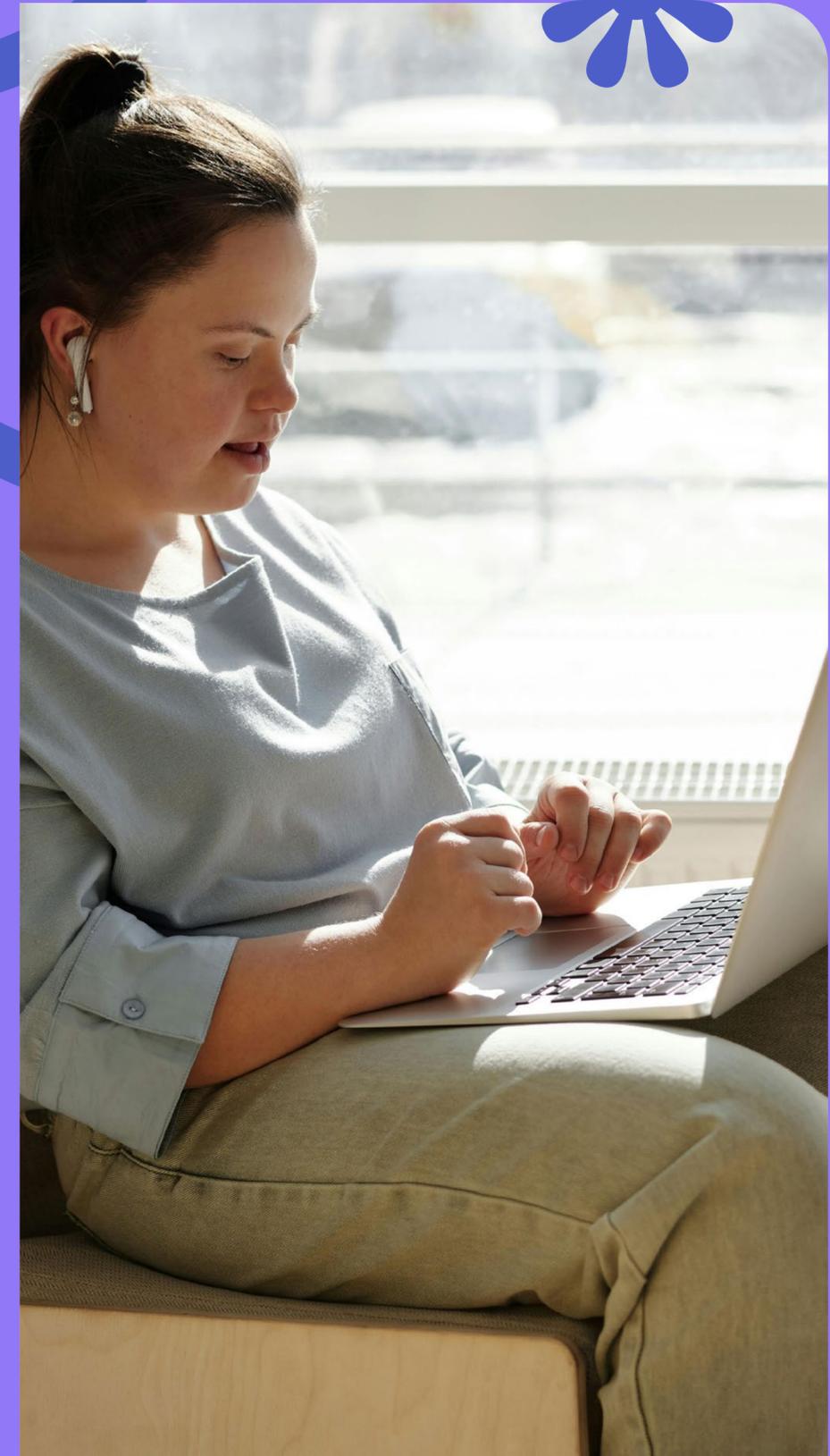
// Where Is Gen Z at Work?

Gen Z is now firmly entering the workforce. Whilst the younger half of the generation is more likely to still be in some form of education, Gen Z already makes up the **third-largest generation in the UK labour market**, behind Millennials and Gen X.

But the career ladder they expected to climb is missing a few rungs. Global job postings for roles requiring 0–2 years of experience have declined by **29 percentage points since January 2024**. Gen Z's **average job tenure** in the first five years of their career is just 1.1 years, significantly shorter than Millennials (1.8), Gen X (2.8), and Baby Boomers (2.9). The Covid pandemic is partially to blame. It hit right when many Gen Zers would be looking to start their careers, or were in the early years. At the time, young workers already in employment were **concentrated in sectors hit hardest by lockdowns** (hospitality, retail, leisure, arts), so the youth labour market contracted sharply. While youth unemployment has fallen since, there is still a **striking one million of 16–24 year olds** classified as NEET (not in education, employment, or training).

And then there's AI. Entry-level workers aged 22–25 in AI-exposed occupations (e.g. software development, customer service, accounting) experienced a **13% relative decline in employment since late 2022**. In software development specifically, employment for the youngest workers declined **nearly 20% from its peak**. Meanwhile, employment for workers over 30 in the same roles remained **stable or grew by 6–12%**. AI is automating the codifiable, entry-level tasks that historically served as on-ramps to professional careers, while complementing the experience-based knowledge of older workers. The bottom rungs of the career ladder are, in places, disappearing entirely.

This has profound implications for Gen Z's financial trajectory. A generation that can't reliably access the first step of a career is a generation who will struggle with long-term financial planning and creating a stable income. Expect less disposable income and less time to engage from those hit by this trend.



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// Finfluencing and Misinformation

The sources Gen Z turn to for financial guidance are radically different from those trusted by previous generations. **Only 6% of Gen Z** say they learned about money at school. Instead, **43% of 16–24-year-olds** turn to online platforms and social media for financial education, with YouTube and TikTok the most popular sources. On these platforms, approximately **58% of 18–24-year-olds** follow TikTok influencers who talk about budgeting, money, or personal finance, and **40% say** TikTok influencers give better advice than traditional media. Declining institutional trust has led to a cohort of people at the start of their financial planning journeys who do not trust ‘traditional’ sources of advice, and therefore turn to peer validated, but often unregulated, social media advice.

‘Approximately 58% of 18–24-year-olds follow TikTok influencers who talk about budgeting, money, or personal finance’

The overall picture is one of real engagement with financial upskilling and literacy, but from unreliable sources. Unfortunately, **only 9% of 18–24-year-olds** pass basic financial literacy tests, down from 14% in 2024 and 17% in 2023. And this creates a self-reinforcing loop: **only 47% of children in the UK** are receiving meaningful financial education, and when they turn to their parents instead, they inherit whatever financial knowledge (or lack of it) the previous generation had.

This presents both a risk and an opportunity. The risk is that a generation with proportionally lower financial literacy may be less equipped to engage with legacy giving, estate planning, or long-term philanthropic commitments. The opportunity is that this same generation is hungry for credible, values-aligned financial guidance. Organisations that can position themselves as trustworthy voices in a saturated landscape have the opportunity to build a long-term relationship with this cohort.



// Death by a Thousand Direct Debits

Gen Z spends an average of **£305 per month on subscription services**. That's three times what Gen X spends (£91) and nearly triple Baby Boomers (£108). A remarkable **93% have at least one subscription**, and among those who do, Gen Z pays the most across virtually every category: £86 on meal kits (vs £51 for Gen X, £33 for Boomers), £70 on wellbeing services like meditation apps (vs £16 for Gen X), £68 on beauty subscriptions (vs £32 for Gen X, £34 for Boomers), and even £57 on plant subscriptions (vs £16 for Gen X).

In the media, this gets framed as Gen Z being the '**subscription kings**', spending lavishly on plants, skincare, and oat milk. Whilst that framing isn't entirely wrong (based purely on the numbers), it misses some structural context. For a generation priced out of big-ticket purchases, subscriptions represent a model of access over ownership, prioritising flexibility. Subscription culture, in this sense, bears similarities to Buy Now, Pay Later models that are similarly popular with this demographic (more on this in our previous [Gen Z report](#)).

There's a dark side to this habit as well. **Three-quarters (75%) of Gen Z** have had a negative experience with subscription payments: unexpected charges, difficulty cancelling, or poor visibility into what they're paying for. A third (35%) have paid for a subscription they no longer wanted. One in four (25%) missed a cancellation window.

'Gen Z spends an average of £305 per month on subscription services'

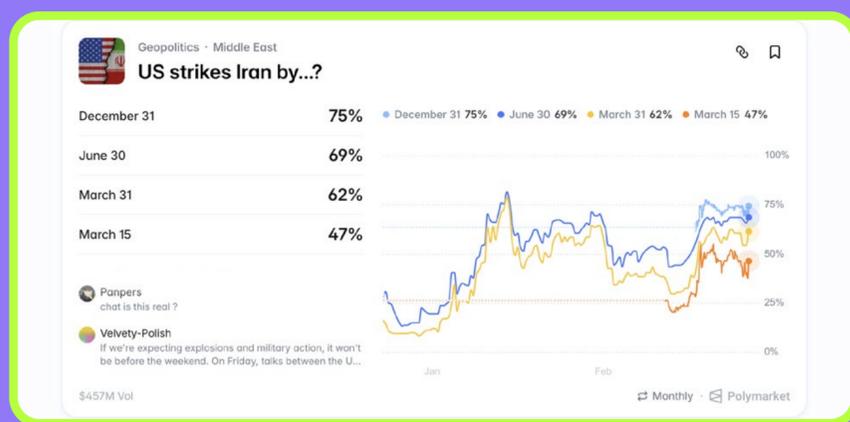
Yes, there is an opportunity to engage this cohort around subscription models. But don't assume that they will automatically engage with anything in this space. Subscriptions are alluring and convenient for a generation that may feel priced out of outright ownership, which is a core driving factor. Engaging them successfully in this space requires offering subscription models that feel genuinely compelling and valuable to receive on a monthly basis.



Highest grossing movie in 2026?

Spider-Man: Brand New Day	38%	Yes	No
The Super Mario Galaxy Movie	31%	Yes	No

\$1M Vol.



What will Karoline Leavitt say during the next White House press briefing?

Historic	83%	Buy Yes 83¢	Buy No 18¢
AI / Artificial Intelligence	37%	Buy Yes 57¢	Buy No 84¢
China	-	Buy Yes 71¢	Buy No 81¢
Supreme Court	60%	Buy Yes 74¢	Buy No 44¢

\$28,565 Vol. Feb 26, 2026 Polymarket

Real-time bets, Source: Polymarket, 2026

// The Rise of Cultural Betting

One of the more surprising financial behaviours emerging among Gen Z is the rise of prediction markets. Platforms like Polymarket and Kalshi, which let users wager on the outcomes of real-world events (elections, policy decisions, award shows, even when your favourite celebrity will get engaged), have exploded. Together, these two platforms generated over \$44 billion in trading volume in 2025, with **monthly volumes topping \$10 billion in November**. Gen Z and Millennials have four times the awareness of platforms like Polymarket compared to Gen X and older generations (**17% vs 4%**).

These platforms (purposely) don't call themselves betting sites. They call themselves 'markets', with 'traders' buying 'shares'. It's the language of finance, not gambling, and it taps into the same instincts that drew Gen Z towards crypto, meme stocks, and day trading. It's part hustle, part entertainment, part information consumption. And it's being normalised fast. Case in point: this year's Golden Globes incorporated **Polymarket odds into its broadcast**.

But the prediction market space is largely unregulated as a gambling activity (due to different classification) which means it often operates **without functional checks on insider trading or market manipulation**. And aside from the financial risks, the cultural implications aren't ideal either. When you can place a bet on whether a ceasefire will hold in Gaza, or how many migrants will be deported in a given month, or **whether a nuclear weapon will be detonated this year**, human suffering becomes a speculative asset. As **Kalshi's own CEO put it in December 2025**: the long-term vision is to 'financialise everything and create a tradeable asset out of any difference in opinion'.

The result is a landscape where gambling on other people's outcomes (e.g. wars, famines, political crises) is normalised. Prediction markets risk deepening the most corrosive tendency of the attention economy: the reduction of everything into content to be consumed, gamified, and profited from.



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Find Your Grind

**FIND
YOUR
GRIND.**

Find Your Grind

Find Your Grind is rethinking career guidance by starting with lifestyle rather than job titles. Instead of steering students towards conventional professions, it helps them identify the kind of life they want to lead, then maps potential roles to match. Options range from creator and entertainer to humanitarian, reflecting a labour market shaped by digital culture and portfolio careers. Through a Lifestyle Assessment, students receive tailored post-graduation plans, supported by video content from mentors such as Tony Hawk and will.i.am, alongside an AI-powered Reflective Coach offering personalised feedback.

So What: For Gen Z, work is identity architecture. Salary alone is no longer the primary driver; alignment with values, flexibility and self-expression matter just as much. Traditional employability messaging that focuses narrowly on stable professions risks feeling outdated. Future planning now blends aspiration, lifestyle design and digital opportunity. Supporting this generation means engaging with how they define success.

Mine

Mine

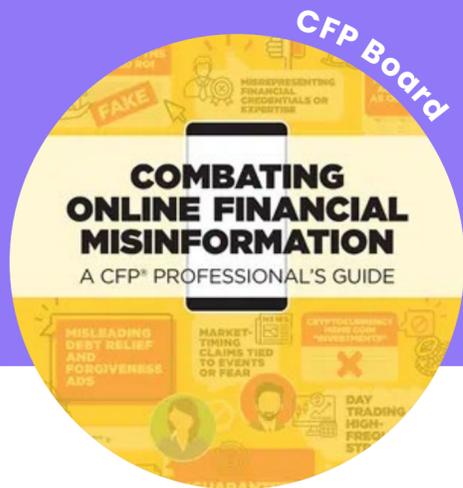
US personal finance company Mine launched an AI-powered platform aimed at helping young adults manage their money with greater confidence. At its centre is MoneyGPT, a personal finance agent that delivers tailored guidance on saving, spending and credit-building. It uses proprietary data models to learn individual habits and goals, offering adaptive advice that reflects realities such as gig income and fluctuating cash flow. MoneyGPT sits within a broader ecosystem that includes the Mine Card, a credit-building card that signals safe-to-spend amounts in real time, and a consolidated dashboard tracking bank accounts, student loans and retirement funds.

So What: Gen Z increasingly expects financial guidance to be on-demand, personalised and conversational. And whilst AI can scale support and reduce shame around money, it also depends on potential privacy concerns and the possibility of hallucinations around financial advice. The organisations that win trust in this space will be those that combine intelligent tools with transparency and human accountability.

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CFP Board

In 2025, the US Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards (CFP Board) launched a dedicated toolkit to help financial professionals tackle online financial misinformation. Designed for use on social media, the resource equips certified planners with guidance on identifying misleading claims, responding ethically in public forums and creating credible, accessible content that can compete with viral but unqualified “finfluencer” advice. The toolkit outlines common misinformation trends, from exaggerated investment returns to debt elimination myths, and provides practical messaging frameworks to correct false claims without amplifying them. Crucially, it encourages professionals to engage directly in the digital spaces where younger audiences are already consuming financial content.

So What: The CFP Board’s approach recognises that credibility must be proactive and platform-native to maximise engagement. If trusted institutions do not show up visibly and fluently in social spaces, misinformation will fill the gap. Combating financial harm requires participation in the same ecosystems where it spreads.



Kalshi

Kalshi is a US-based prediction market platform that allows users to trade on the outcome of real-world events, from inflation rates and interest rate decisions to election results and cultural moments. Unlike traditional gambling platforms, Kalshi is regulated as a financial exchange, positioning itself closer to investing than betting. Its rise coincides with a broader cultural shift in how younger generations relate to money. For many Gen Z consumers, financial markets, meme stocks, crypto, sports betting and political wagering sit on the same spectrum: participatory speculation. In an era defined by economic volatility, high-risk, high-reward platforms can feel more like rational engagement with an unstable system.

So What: If everything is a market, values can start to look like assets and outcomes like bets. A generation raised on volatility may become desensitised to long-term consequences and collective responsibility. We have to actively counter the idea that the future is something to wager on rather than something to safeguard.

COMMUNITY



// TL;DR

Loneliness: Loneliness is widespread among young people as the social infrastructure around them has weakened.

Digital Natives: Digital connection has not translated into deep belonging. Platforms optimise for engagement over connection, amplifying isolation. Online communities still matter, but don't fully replace face-to-face connection.

Offline: In response, Gen Z is intentionally returning offline. Run clubs, hobby groups, cultural events and volunteering are becoming new access points to community.

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// The Loneliness Epidemic

Around [one third of 16-29-year-olds](#) say they feel lonely often, always, or sometimes, marking them as the generation most likely to self-identify as lonely. There are currently [1.9 million chronically lonely young people](#) in the UK, and one in five Brits aged 18-24 report having [one or no close friends](#). A caveat is warranted here. The gaps between generations can be marginal depending on the dataset, and self-reporting loneliness is shaped by who feels comfortable naming it. Whilst we're not here to argue that Gen Z is the 'loneliest generation,' it is worth recognising the struggle this generation is facing in finding social connection.

The paradox, of course, is that Gen Z is one of the most digitally connected generations alive. Yet the platforms that were created to bring people together have, instead, amplified feelings of inadequacy and isolation. Highlight reels and glossy influencer lifestyles have left people feeling like they're falling short, whilst algorithmic feeds are optimised for engagement over community-building. Social media platforms are business models that depend on keeping people scrolling alone, not gathering together.

Add to this changing in our physical socialising environment. The spaces where previous generations formed low-stakes social bonds (e.g. youth clubs, community centres, pubs, public parks) are declining. Since 2010, [more than 1,243 council-run youth centres](#) have closed in England and Wales. [Spending on youth facilities fell by 73%](#) between 2010/11 and 2022/23. Nearly half of young people now [spend the majority of their spare time in their bedroom](#). Young people themselves recognise this gap, with many young people saying they [want a 'third space' where they could spend time with friends for free](#), but struggle to identify these spaces.

Then there's the economic dimension. The cost-of-living crisis has made socialising a luxury many Gen Zers can't afford. When a round of drinks costs £25, a gym membership costs £40 a month, and a cinema ticket costs £15, staying home becomes the financially responsible choice. For a generation split between students (both school and university) and young professionals with less disposable income, socialising may feel out of reach.

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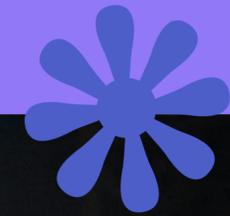
All of this is happening to a generation whose social development was disrupted by lockdowns. For those who were 13 to 18 during lockdowns, the usual rites of passage (your first house parties, school trips, leavers' events and more) were simply cancelled. Adolescence is a **critical period for social and emotional development**, and young people's primary difficulty during lockdown was **not spending time with friends**. This cohort is still recovering from the skills gap that lockdowns forced them into.

'This cohort is still recovering from the skills gap that lockdowns forced them into.'

This is not to say that Gen Z has simply failed at connection. Online spaces are still a valuable source of belonging for this cohort. Community for Gen Z often means Discord servers, group chats, gaming lobbies, and fandom spaces. For many, these are the primary spaces of belonging, identity, and mutual support, but don't fully replace the need for face-to-face connection.

There is, however, an opportunity to become the third spaces that have disappeared from young people's lives, by offering a space to belong. Treat community-building as a core function when engaging this cohort, and make showing up as accessible as possible.

'Treat community-building as a core function when engaging this cohort'





// IRL Connection

In response to this loneliness, Gen Z is increasingly, deliberately, reaching for the offline. The most visible example is the explosion in running clubs: over the past years, we've seen a **59% global increase** in running club participation, driven overwhelmingly by young people seeking in-person social connection. Why run clubs? A whopping **72% of Gen Z** join run clubs to meet new people. In the UK, female running participation in particular has surged. Strava recorded an **89% increase in women joining the app** in 2024, with all-female run groups creating safe spaces that combine fitness, socialising, and a sense of belonging.

'A whopping 72% of Gen Z join run clubs to meet new people'

But the search for community goes well beyond running. Eventbrite reported a **248% increase in Dungeons & Dragons-related events**. Tate Modern announced it would stay open until 9pm on Fridays and Saturdays from autumn 2025,

driven by **record numbers of young attendees** at its Tate Late events. In South London, **Sauna Social Club** combines saunas with electronic music. And volunteering is emerging as a potential community pathway: 38% of Gen Z said they'd be **more likely to volunteer than go to a pub or club**, with two-thirds of those not already volunteering saying they would consider it.

'38% of Gen Z said they'd be more likely to volunteer than go to a pub or club'

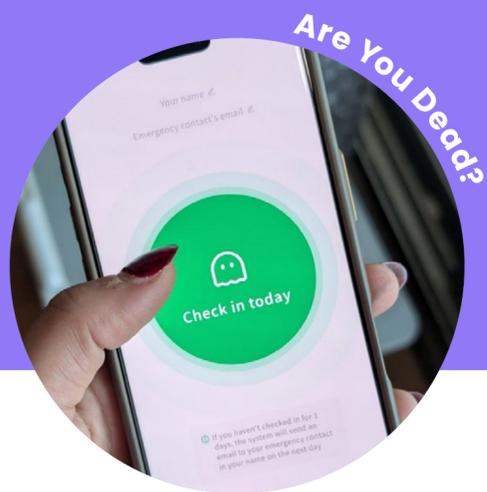
Tap into this trend to engage Gen Z: create spaces, both physical and relational, where young people can show up, be seen, and belong. And engaging this cohort IRL doesn't just have to mean creating another run club for people to join, it could be creatively thinking about where your organisation can show up and supplement existing experiences.

Z



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CASE STUDIES



Are You Dead?

Are You Dead? is a Chinese safety app designed for the country's fast-growing solo-living population. Users must tap a button every two days to confirm they are safe. If they fail to check in, the app alerts a pre-selected emergency contact. It quickly became China's most downloaded paid app, reflecting demand among young urban professionals living alone, a group projected to reach 200 million households by 2030. Despite its deliberately blunt, darkly humorous name, the app responds to a serious anxiety: the fear of suffering a medical emergency or crisis unnoticed amidst the loneliness epidemic.

So What: The loneliness epidemic is being productised. When millions are willing to pay for a digital "proof of life" system, it signals how many people feel insecure in their personal relationships. Safeguarding, check-ins and light-touch monitoring may become core components of community care.



Bard Books

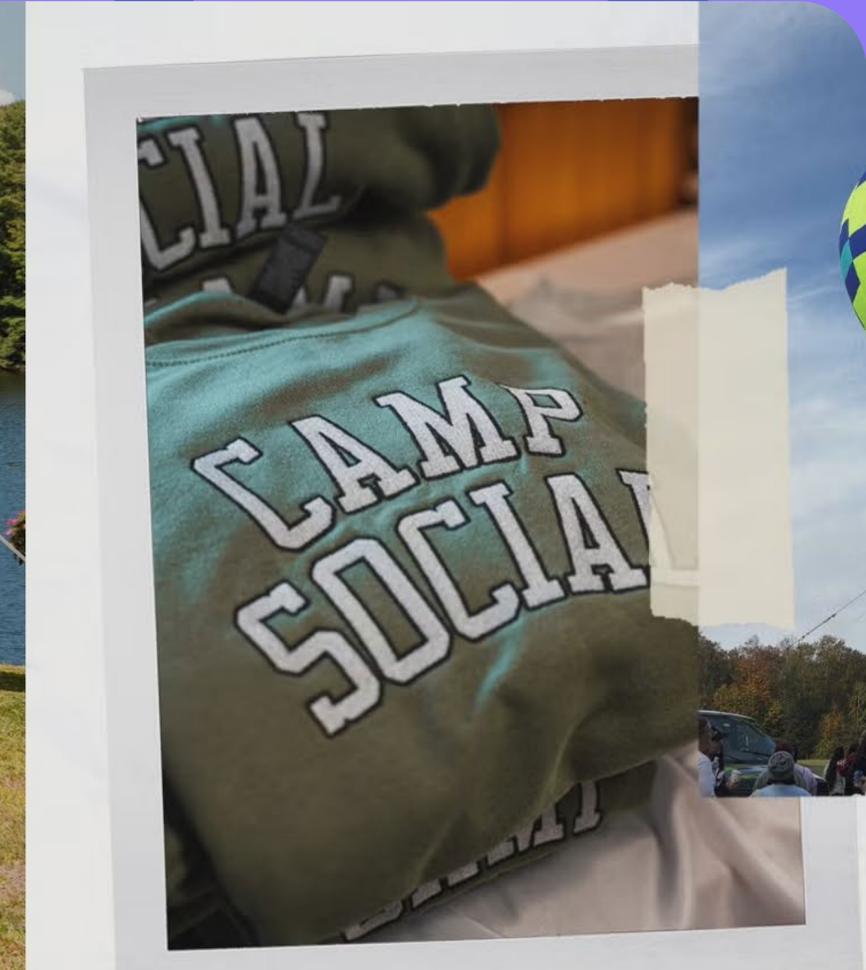
On Tuesday evenings in East London, independent bookshop Bard Books hosts a book club specifically for singles. Strangers gather to discuss the same novel, with conversation and chemistry unfolding in real time. A generation raised on swiping and curated profiles is experimenting with slower, analogue ways of meeting. The book is the scaffolding that singles can hang their self-consciousness on, reducing the pressure of small talk and the transactional feel of app-based dating.

So What: Shared purpose, whether a book, a cause or a task, lowers barriers to connection and makes vulnerability easier. In an era of romantic and social fatigue, designing environments where relationships can emerge organically is crucial.

Z



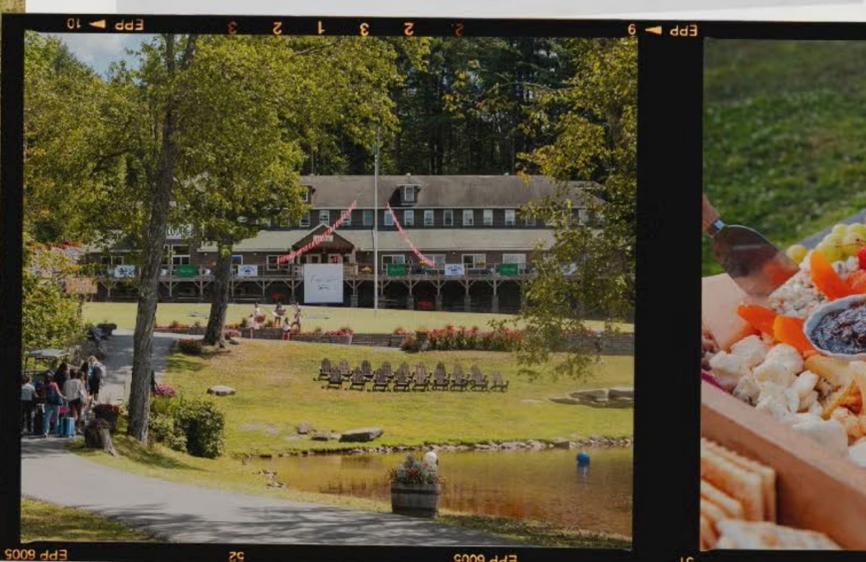
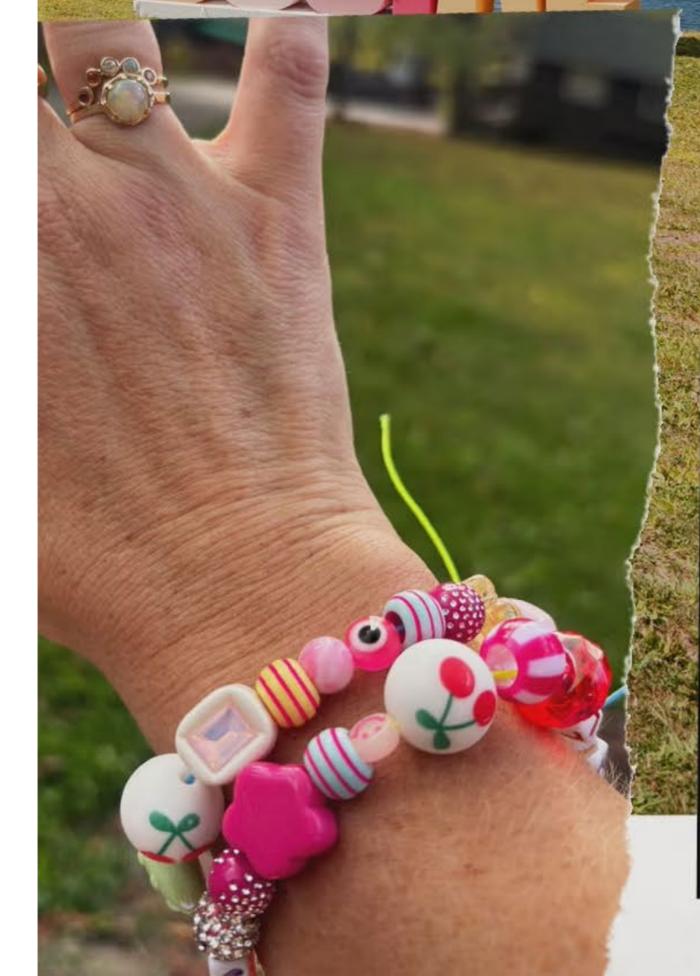
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Camp Social

Camp Social is a sleepaway camp designed specifically for adult women seeking real friendships in a world where making friends as an adult has become unusually difficult. The camp blends classic summer-camp activities (e.g. lakeside games, crafts, hikes and communal meals) with an intentional environment for connection. By 2025, the camp sold out quickly, with a waiting list in the tens of thousands, and participants report forming lasting friendships that extend well beyond the weekend.

So What: These sleepaway camps show that purposeful, embodied social design (shared activities, rituals, unstructured time) can create deep bonds that algorithm-driven feeds and superficial networks can't. This means shifting from transactional engagement toward spaces that engineer connection.



MEET THE PARENTS



// TL;DR

Parenthood: Gen Z is entering parenthood on their terms. Fewer are married or homeowners, and many are delaying or reconsidering having children altogether.

Childfree: A growing minority are choosing to remain childfree, driven by cost, climate anxiety, identity, and shifting cultural norms. Parenthood is not assumed.

Attitudes: Those who do become parents are pragmatic and non-traditional. They prioritise resilience and real-world readiness over one-size-fits-all philosophies.

Structures: Family structures are more diverse. Blended, co-parenting and solo-parent households are common, and expectations around gender and identity are being redefined.

Z



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// Introducing: The Gen Z Parent

Many of us may still think of Gen Z as perpetually young. They're students, in university at most, or early-career workers still finding their feet. In reality, the oldest members of this generation are turning 29 this year, and a growing number of them are parents. Projections suggest that **most Gen Z mothers** will have their first child between 2020 and 2045, meaning we're in the early stages of a wave of Gen Z parenthood.

'Most Gen Z mothers will have their first child between 2020 and 2045'

But this is a generation entering parenthood on markedly different terms from those who came before them. Gen Z is **less likely than previous generations to own a home, be married, or have children at the same age as their parents**. Roughly **39% of Gen Z** say they have delayed having a child because of the current economic climate, slightly more than the 36% of Millennials who said the same.

So, meet the Gen Z parents: shaped by economic precarity, digital saturation, and a deep awareness of the world their kids will inherit.

'Roughly 39% of Gen Z say they have delayed having a child because of the current economic climate'



// Childless By Choice

It's worth pausing on the significant proportion of Gen Z who don't have children and may never plan to. [28% of young Britons aged 18-40](#) don't want children at all, while 27% remain undecided. This is a growing minority, similar to the trend we've seen amongst Millennials, deciding that children are not for them. Case in point: England and Wales recorded their [lowest fertility rates since records began](#) in recent years, and the trajectory continues downward.

'28% of young Britons aged 18-40 don't want children at all, while 27% remain undecided'

The reasons are varied, and often deeply considered. Let's take a look at some of the most commonly cited drivers.

1. Cost: [28% of young adults](#) who don't want children named expense as the primary reason, with housing costs, childcare availability, and job insecurity compounding the picture. Not for no reason: in the UK specifically, the average cost of raising a child to age 18 now sits [between £260,000 and £290,000](#). Contextualise this amidst Gen Z's financial picture, and it quickly looks out of reach. This is a segment of adults who may want children but know that it is financially out of reach.

3. Independence and Identity: [11% of childless adults](#) say they don't want to sacrifice their independence and existing lifestyle. Gen Z has grown up in a culture that increasingly sees childfreedom as legitimate and positive identity. The growing visibility of life outside of traditional pathways is making it easier for younger adults to articulate and assert their choice. For women in particular, the decision not to have children can be an assertion of agency over a life path that was, until recently, assumed rather than chosen.

2. The State of the World: Anxiety about the world comes in a close second. [16% of those who don't want children](#) cited worry about the state of the world as their primary reason. This is rooted in climate anxiety, political instability, and a sense that the future is precarious. It's also worth noting that people who are more committed to a sustainable lifestyle are [substantially less likely to go on to have children](#), in part due to the environmental impact of increasing the population. This is a segment grappling with whether or not it feels fair or ethical to bring children into a world that feels chaotic and unstable at best, and dangerous at worst.

4. No Reason Needed: It's also worth noting that some people simply don't want children, and there doesn't need to be a structural or philosophical explanation for that. The shift we're seeing is partially in the cultural permission to say so without justification.

MEET THE PARENTS

Of course, 27% of Britons are genuinely undecided: a middle ground that is neither firmly childfree nor committed to parenthood. But it would be a mistake to dismiss this shift out of hand. The proportion of adults choosing not to have children has been rising steadily across most ongoing surveys, and the structural pressures reinforcing that choice (economic insecurity, climate anxiety, polycrisis) are not easing.

‘For this generation, ‘starting a family’ is not the assumed next chapter’

For this generation, ‘starting a family’ is not the assumed next chapter. Many will be grappling with making this personal decision for themselves over the coming years, and many will choose not to have children. Instead, we’ll likely see an increase in the DINK (Double Income No Kids) segment, who may have more disposable time, energy, and income to invest not only in themselves but in their communities, extended families, careers, friendships, and potentially charity.



Z



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// Attitudes to Parenting

For those Gen Zers who are becoming parents, they're doing it their way. How does that compare to previous generations? Where Millennials, who were shaped by a growing cultural focus on mental health, tend to prioritise their [children's emotional and mental wellbeing](#), Gen Z parents are more focused on [preparing their kids for the real world](#). Having come of age during a pandemic, a cost-of-living crisis, and a shaky post-COVID job market, they're channelling those experiences into raising children who are practical, resilient, and future-ready.

Gen Z parents are also non-traditionalists: having kids doesn't necessarily come before marriage or buying a house, and they're open to their children exploring apprenticeships, entrepreneurship, and trades rather than defaulting to university. Cohabiting couple families have been [the fastest-growing family type](#) over the last decade, while lone-parent families account for 16% of all families in the UK. Gen Z parents are more likely to be parenting in blended families, co-parenting arrangements, or as solo parents. Designing services around outdated assumptions of household structure risk missing this cohort.

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, [85% of parents](#) in this cohort agreed there's no 'one size fits all' approach, and today's parents blend an average of three different parenting styles. [Seven in ten](#) said they choose their approach based on what their individual child needs, rather than trying to make a single philosophy work regardless.

The 'non-traditional' of parenting may be due to Gen Z's diversity as a generation as well. Data shows that [17% of Gen Zers](#) globally identify as part of the LGBT+ community, compared to 11% of Millennials and 6% of Gen X. In Britain, [just 76% of Gen Z](#) identify as heterosexual, and only around half say they are exclusively attracted to the opposite sex. This diversity is reflected in how they parent: Gen Z parents are [more likely to challenge gendered expectations for their children](#), to seek out representation in the media and products their children consume, and to raise kids with an awareness of different family structures, identities, and cultures. Any charity engaging Gen Z parents needs to reflect this diversity in its imagery, its language, and its assumptions about who a 'parent' is.

'Gen Z parents are more likely to challenge gendered expectations for their children'

Alongside this shift, we're seeing a changing approach to gendered parenting roles. Gen Z fathers see caregiving [as shared responsibility](#), similar to Millennials before them, but going slightly further in their rejection of the breadwinner-as-default model. When asked how much paternity leave they had taken, Gen Z dads reported taking [seven weeks on average](#), compared with four weeks for Millennials and just two weeks for Gen X and Boomers. This appetite for increased involvement clashes with the way the system is built. At just two weeks long, the UK's statutory paternity leave is the [worst in Europe](#), paid less than minimum wage. In 2023, 605,000 babies were born in the UK, yet only 195,000 dads received statutory paternity pay: less than [one father for every three children born](#).

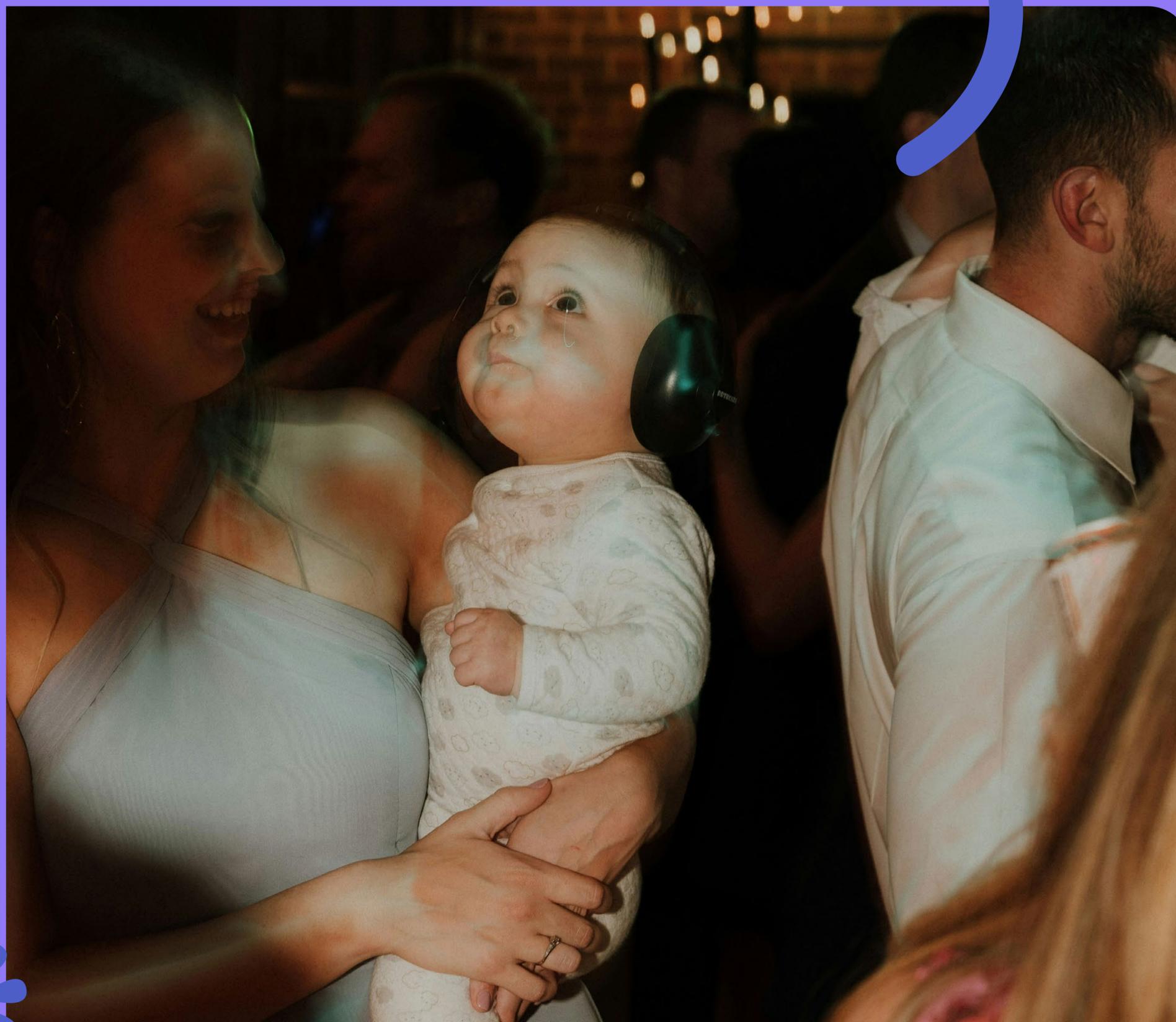


MEET THE PARENTS

We're also seeing a counter-trend emerging against the hyper-optimised, research-backed parenting culture that Millennials embraced. Gen Z parents, exhausted, under-resourced, and information-overloaded, are increasingly drawn to the idea of the 'Good Enough' parent. Messaging that adds to the pressure of perfect parenting is likely to alienate their audience. They're tired but doing their best, and recognising that this is good enough is more likely to land than polished portrayals of parenthood.

'[Gen Z] see parenthood as a supplementary addition to their existing identities'

Similarly, this is not a generation planning to put everything on hold for parenthood. They see parenthood as a supplementary addition to their existing identities, and don't want it to usurp the lives they've already built. We can see this in their engagement with events. Nearly **8 in 10 Gen Z** expect to attend more events in the year ahead, led primarily by young parents, who are 1.4x more likely to do so.



// Raising Kids in the World of AI & Technology

If the broader context for today's children is daunting, the digital layer adds an entirely new dimension of complexity. And the newest frontier, AI, is raising questions that parents, educators, and policymakers are scrambling to answer.

The numbers are sobering. [53% of high schoolers](#) report weekly or daily use, and [83% of parents](#) said schools hadn't addressed it. Children as young as 3–5 are already using the internet, and [nearly 80% of kids aged 3–12](#) have their own tablet. Meanwhile, [72% of teens have used AI companions](#), and, perhaps most alarmingly, nearly a third found those AI conversations as satisfying as, or more satisfying than, talking to a real friend. We've discussed some of the implications of this AI use by Gen Z itself in our previous section on Community and Relationships, but it's worth acknowledging that the elder Gen Z are grappling with the implications of raising kids in this landscape.

'Children as young as 3–5 are already using the internet'

Gen Z parents are, paradoxically, the most concerned and the least prepared. [80% of Gen Z parents](#) worry about their kids falling victim to online threats from AI, yet 37% give their children full autonomy or only lightly monitor device use. As digital natives themselves, they understand the risks of the landscape, but they're not always equipped to handle them.

Then there's the digital footprint problem. Today's children have an online presence before they can consent to it. Often before they're even born, courtesy of ultrasound posts. The tension between a parent's right to share and a child's interest in privacy is one of the defining challenges of modern parenting. The practice of 'sharenting,' or parents sharing news, images, and stories about their children on social media, creates a **'digital dossier.'** A trail of data that can be used to build academic, economic, and personality profiles, sold to potential employers, advertisers, and even university admissions offices. In the age of facial recognition, deepfakes, and AI-driven data scraping, the implications are expanding fast.

'37% give their children full autonomy or only lightly monitor device use'

Gen Z parents, to their credit, seem aware of this, perhaps due to their own experiences of growing up as digital natives. [One in five Gen Zers](#) say they'll never post their children online, while four in ten say they would rarely do so. They want their kids to wait until [nearly 15 to join social media](#), almost two years later than when they themselves got started. But awareness and action don't always align, and the structural pressures of a share-everything culture are hard to resist when your community, your parenting advice, and your social life all live online.



CASE STUDIES



Pause Before You Post

Ireland's Data Protection Commission launched Pause Before You Post, a public awareness campaign highlighting the risks of "sharenting": parents sharing images and information about their children online. Framed around children's rights and long-term data protection, the campaign urges parents to consider the digital footprint they are creating on their child's behalf. The initiative positions sharenting as a privacy issue with future consequences. The Commission is drawing attention to consent, identity theft, facial recognition and the permanence of online content.

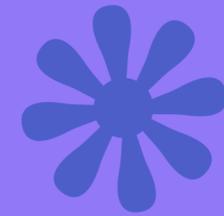
So What: Gen Z parents are raising children in a world where identity is documented from birth. The tension between visibility and protection is only intensifying. Digital safeguarding can no longer focus solely on young people's own behaviour; parental behaviour is part of the equation.



Little Break

Little Break is a nonprofit co-working space with adjacent childcare designed for parents who cannot afford, access or justify traditional daycare. Parents remain on site while paid staff supervise children in a neighbouring room, keeping costs significantly lower than licensed full-time care. Membership ranges from \$65 per day to \$799 per month, compared with typical US childcare costs that can exceed \$1,400 for part-time provision.

So What: Models like Little Break signal a shift from institutional childcare as a separate, siloed service towards integrated ecosystems that support the whole adult. Spaces that combine peer support, economic participation and practical relief may resonate more deeply than traditional service models. The future of family support focuses on shared infrastructure built around community.



Z



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Big Feelers

ALL AGES

A groundbreaking course for highly sensitive and strong-willed kids. Generic advice fails "Big Feelers." Get the specialized tools you need for the explosive behavior courses don't cover.

Big Little Feelings

Big Little Feelings is a US-based parenting platform founded by a child therapist and a parenting coach, offering online courses focused on toddler behaviour, emotional regulation and boundary-setting. Delivered through Instagram content and paid digital programmes, the brand translates offers step-by-step techniques for overwhelmed parents. Its tone is informal, meme-literate and emotionally validating, positioning tantrums and meltdowns as developmentally normal rather than signs of failure. The platform has built a multimillion-dollar business by meeting millennial and Gen Z parents where they already are: on social media, scrolling for reassurance at 9pm.

So What: Gen Z parents are outsourcing expertise differently. Instead of turning first to family elders or formal services, many are seeking therapist-endorsed guidance via Instagram and digital courses. Advice for this segment must feel culturally fluent and immediately actionable. Relatability and practical tools are key.



8 Course Topics

1 Understand What's

Decode your child's intense emotions and how their wiring affects behavior

2 Stay Cool When You

3 Transform Behavior

4 Prevent the Next Ex



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Online Safety Act 2023



UK Online Safety Act 2023

The Online Safety Act

The UK's Online Safety Act places new legal duties on tech platforms to protect users, particularly children, from harmful content. Companies must now assess and mitigate risks related to issues such as self-harm, suicide content, pornography and exploitation. Age assurance measures are being strengthened, and platforms face significant fines if they fail to comply. The legislation marks one of the most assertive attempts globally to regulate the digital environments young people inhabit.

The benefits are clear. The Act shifts responsibility from parents and children to platforms, forcing companies to design with safety in mind. But tighter controls create unintended consequences. Age verification and content filtering can restrict access not only to harmful material but also to peer support, sexual health information and mental health resources.

For some young people, especially those without trusted adults offline, the internet has been a primary source of identity exploration and crisis advice. Overcorrection risks pushing vulnerable users into darker, less regulated corners of the web.

So What: Safeguarding and access now sit in tension. On one hand, there may be safer mainstream spaces. On the other, young people could find it harder to access informal advice networks and community-led support. Organisations working with children and young people should review how discoverable and age-accessible their digital resources are under the policy. If regulation limits certain routes to help, the sector must ensure alternative pathways are visible, credible and easy to reach.

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DIGITAL NATIVES



// TL;DR

Blurred Lines: For Gen Z, there's no offline versus online. Socialising, shopping, news and entertainment all live in the same scroll, on the same device.

Content: Short-form creator-led content dominated. They feel more connected to influencers than traditional media, and social platforms shape how they learn, search, and buy.

Authenticity: After growing up immersed in branded, overly-polished content, they prioritise honesty, consistency, and peer validation.

Closed Doors: Public feeds are declining in importance. Meaningful engagement is shifting to private group chats, closed communities, and niche platforms built around shared values and hobbies.

Z



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// Digital Natives: The Overview

To understand Gen Z's online lives, we have to abandon some frameworks that worked for previous generations. There is no watching TV versus going online. There's no clear line between content, socialising, entertainment, and news. For Gen Z, it's all the same screen, the same scroll. The platforms where you're likely to find this cohort are the ones that make the blur feel most natural.

Time Spent Online: 6 hours and 40 minutes online each day. They spend 54% more time, which translates to about 50 minutes extra per day, on social platforms and user-generated content than the average consumer.

Device: Nearly 99% either own a smartphone or have access to one. 89% are second-screen users, consuming multiple media simultaneously.

Shopping: 77% of Gen Z made a purchase influenced by social media in the last six months. 63% say ads or product reviews on social media are most influential to their purchasing decisions, more than double the influence of streaming video ads.

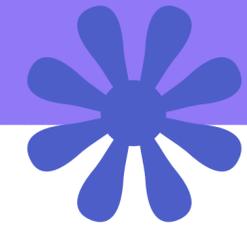
Platforms: 89% of Gen Z social media users are on Instagram, 84% on YouTube, and 82% on TikTok.

Up and Coming Platforms: NoPlace (text-based social media app with a friends-only feed); Substack (newsletter publishing platform that has launched a group chat option for subscribers); PI.FYI (social platform that emphasises sharing what you love); Fable (for creator-led bookclubs); and more.

Watching: 56% say social media content is more relevant to them than traditional TV shows and movies. 52% feel a stronger personal connection to social media creators than to TV personalities or actors.

Content Style: Short-form video is the dominant format. Around 80% of Gen Z watch short-form videos on platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts on at least a weekly basis. Short-form videos receive 2.5 times more engagement than long-form videos, and 57% of Gen Z say they prefer short videos when learning about products and services.

Search: 51% prefer TikTok over Google for finding local information. 74% of Gen Z use TikTok's search function.

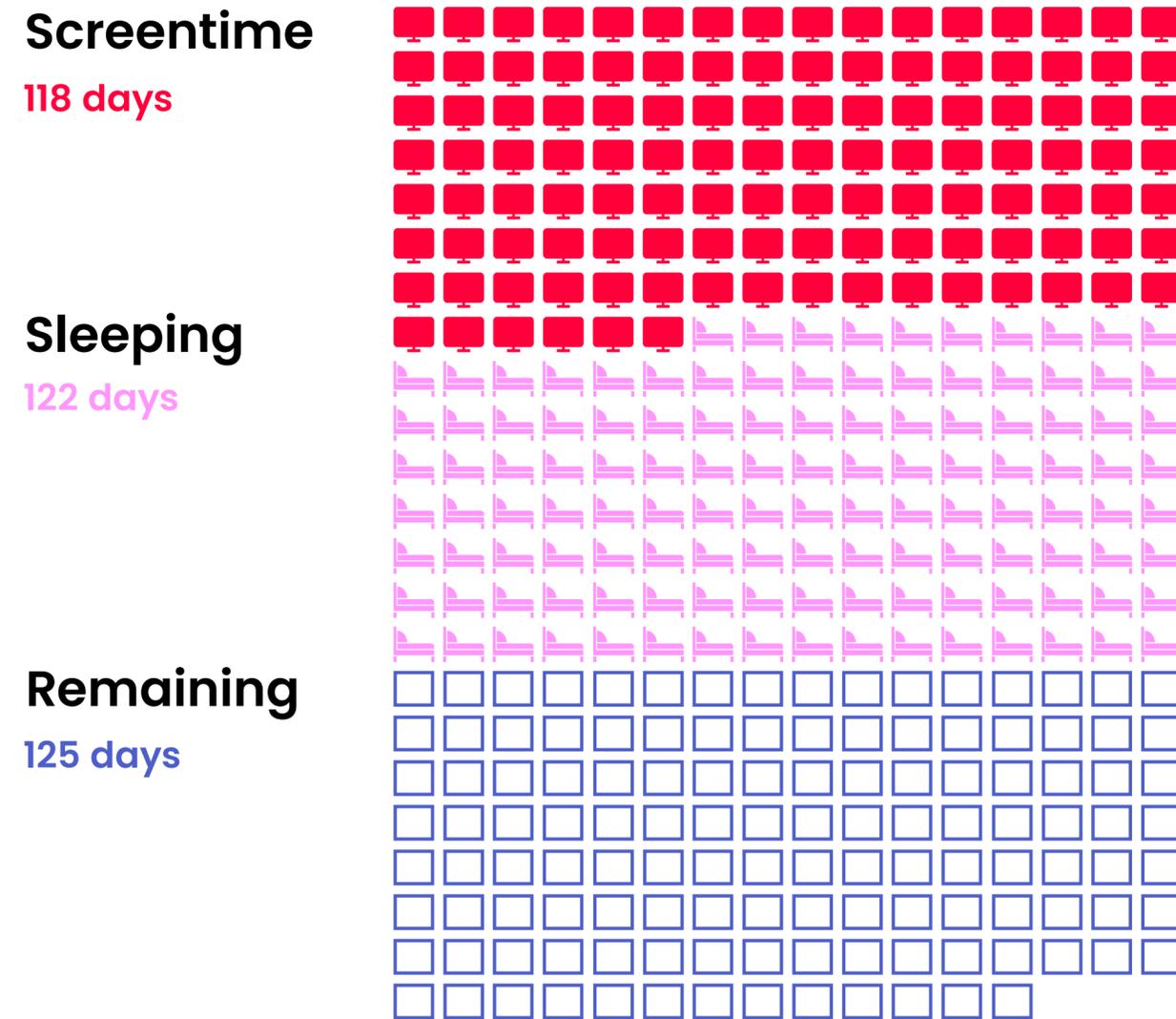


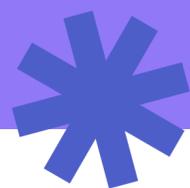
// Digital Natives: The Overview

Gen Z's Most Used Apps By Screenshot, 2025

Rank	Application	Rank in 2024	
#1	TikTok	#1	+0
#2	Instagram	#2	+0
#3	Messages	#3	+0
#4	YouTube	#4	+0
#5	Safari	#5	+0
#6	Snapchat	#8	+2
#7	Twitter / X	#7	+0
#8	WhatsApp	#6	-2
#9	Photos	#10	+1
#10	Google	#35	+25

Gen Z's 2025 Screen Time





// Capturing Gen Z Attention

Gen Z has grown up swimming in branded content. It's near impossible to frequent the platforms they have been since childhood without encountering ads left, right and centre. Whether that's obvious marketing, or sneakily hidden in the background of an influencer's content video. As a result, this generation places a high emphasis on authenticity, as a counter to the fake, forced, performative media they've gotten used to. When asked how important various brand behaviours are, **62% say that honesty is 'very important'**, followed by trustworthiness at 61%, and consistency between what brands say and do at 56%.

What earns this cohort's attention is not what you say, but whether you mean it. **Research found** that acting genuinely (53%), understanding everyday challenges (53%), and showing authenticity (49%) are the traits Gen Z values most highly in brands. Being clever or funny barely registers at 22% – a significant shift from when we last conducted research on Gen Z, when humour was king. Interestingly, **only 31% say** it's very important that a brand 'stands for something'.

The way that Gen Z evaluates authenticity is fundamentally peer-driven. For this cohort, UGC plays a significant role in purchasing decisions, with **70% of Gen Z** finding it helpful when deciding what to buy. Meanwhile, **61% of Gen Z** prefer brands that collaborate with relatable creators over celebrities. Hence, the voices Gen Z trusts are primarily peers with whom they can find common ground or a personal connection, rather than removed and branded.

That desire for human-made, peer-validated content sits against a growing backdrop of increasing AI use in marketing and communications. What even is authenticity when you can **easily use AI** to generate an aesthetic that would feel peer-evaluated to this generation? **55% of this group** are uncomfortable with brands using AI-generated models. Amidst synthetic, AI-generated content, the human-made and handcrafted alternatives are markers of trust. The bottom line is that engaging this cohort requires a human voice, peer-to-peer communications, and letting your community speak alongside you.





// Community Over Broadcasting

A significant shift in Gen Z's behaviour is the move to private online lives. Rather than the public feed, they're prioritising the group chats, Close Friends stories, and closed servers.

We can see this both on existing legacy platforms, as well as the new platforms Gen Z is gravitating towards. On the legacy side, for instance, public grid posting among [Instagram users aged 16–24](#) dropped by 28% over two years, while engagement with Close Friends Stories rose by 42%. Meanwhile, beyond the existing platforms, Gen Z is gravitating towards spaces explicitly designed around small-group belonging and closed spaces. Think Discord, where Gen Z makes up [43.1% of users](#); Reddit, where usage among [Gen Z rose 14%](#) in 2024–25 and where [78% of Gen Z users](#) say their primary motivation is finding people who share their specific interests; or hobby-based platforms like Strava, Fable, and Letterboxd.

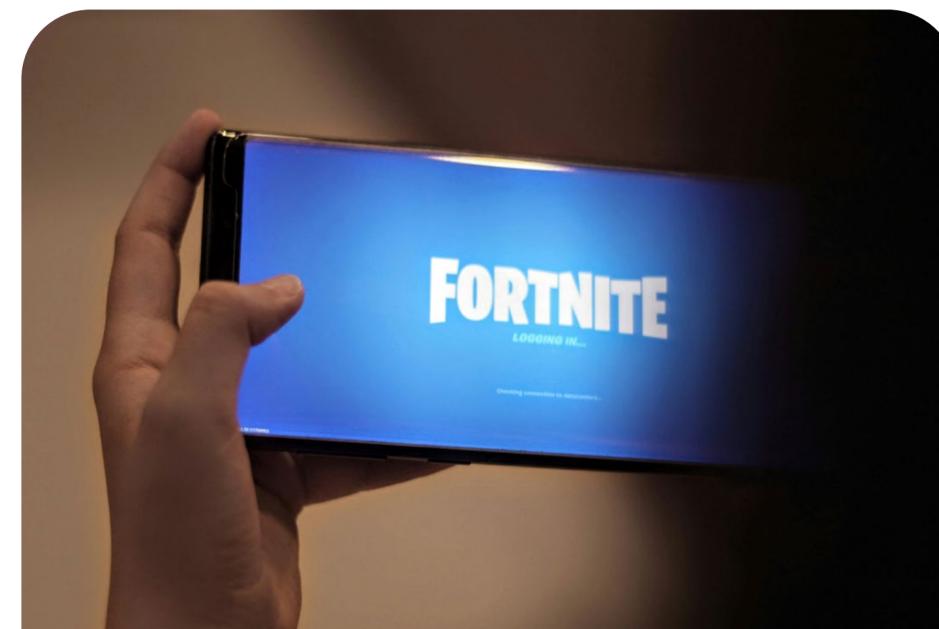
'A significant shift in Gen Z's behaviour is the move to private online lives'

The trend extends beyond social media. Substack newsletters, WhatsApp communities, and even in-game social spaces (Roblox, Fortnite) all serve this same function: giving Gen Z a space designed for interest-driven, closed connection, free from the performative pressure of the public feed.

'Gen Z is gravitating towards spaces explicitly designed around small-group belonging and closed spaces'

If the most meaningful engagement is happening in DMs, private servers, and group chats, traditional social media metrics (e.g. follower counts or likes) are measuring the wrong thing. Similarly, the challenge is cutting through and reaching audiences on social media if they're withdrawing to closed spaces with the express purpose of avoiding brand broadcasting.

There is, however, an opportunity as well: depth. Gen Z is making these changes as they're searching for communities to belong to. The organisations that can create genuine micro-communities around their cause, whether through Discord servers, WhatsApp groups, or mission-aligned platforms, have the chance to build deeper relationships with this audience. This ultimately means moving beyond the goal of getting audiences to engage with your content, and towards getting them to join the conversation. Create spaces where young people can participate, contribute, and connect with each other, their purpose, and your mission.





// News Consumption and The Overwhelm Cycle

It would be a mistake to assume that Gen Z is only online for entertainment or social purposes. This cohort consumes **news more than any other type of content**. Of course, it's positive that Gen Z stays informed and aware of the news cycle, but the way in which they do so leads to emotional overwhelm.

Over 50% view news on social media daily, encountering it mid-scroll between memes, creator content, and shopping ads. **66% of young news consumers** receive most of their news through push notifications. They engage with news through memes, quick summaries, and video-based storytelling. These are all formats designed for emotional impact rather than contextual depth. The platforms make no distinction between serious journalism and trending content; the algorithm simply serves what generates engagement.

'This cohort consumes news more than any other type of content'

The result is doomscrolling fatigue, the compulsive consumption of distressing content driven by algorithmic design. And they recognise this issue themselves: **84% of 18-24-year-olds** say they use their smartphone 'too much'. The emerging shift is towards digital detoxing. Young people are taking steps to actively limit their screen-time, join smaller, less algorithmic communities, and seek experiences that move between screens to physical space. At least, they are in theory. In 2025, Gen Z's daily average screen time still **rose by over 21 minutes**. Whilst the intention is there, this cohort still struggles to close the action gap.

'84% of 18-24-year-olds say they use their smartphone 'too much''

Essentially, this shift is playing out as a cohort hoping to reclaim agency over social media platforms to cut through the overwhelm. They want to engage with content that earns its place in their feeds with clarity and intentionality.



// Information and Understanding The Truth

Before we can talk about how well Gen Z evaluates information, we need to understand where they're getting it. Gen Z doesn't start with a newspaper, a broadcast bulletin, or even, increasingly, a Google search. According to Google's own internal data, nearly [40% of young people](#) prefer TikTok or Instagram over Google Search or Google Maps for finding information. [74% of Gen Z](#) use TikTok's search function, and over 50% choose it over Google as their go-to search engine. In fact, [a whopping 63% use TikTok](#) as a search engine specifically for news.



This matters because the information environment on social platforms is structurally different from traditional search. On Google, you type a question and receive a ranked list of sources you can evaluate. On TikTok, an algorithm decides what you see, served in a continuous feed alongside entertainment, shopping, and creator content, with no editorial hierarchy and no distinction between a BBC journalist and a teenager with a ring light. Add Reddit (which Gen Z increasingly uses to find peer-validated answers), YouTube, and ChatGPT, and you have a generation whose entire information diet is assembled by algorithms and consumed in formats optimised for engagement rather than accuracy.

The consequences of this are measurable. [Cambridge University's Misinformation Susceptibility Test \(MIST\)](#), based on over 66,000 responses, found that Gen Z scored worst of any generation at identifying fake news headlines. To their credit, they were also the least confident in their ability to spot misinformation. Gen X scored best, followed closely by Boomers.

[Researchers attribute this](#) to knowledge and judgement that accumulates over a lifetime, which younger people simply haven't had time to develop.

What makes this more nuanced than a simple 'kids can't tell real from fake' narrative is the fact that Gen Z's information processing is [fundamentally social](#). When scrolling online, they don't tend to tap into their critical literacy skills. When they're going into an argument or debate, or have to make a big decision, they will do the fact-finding. But for the vast majority of content they assume, they're simply scrolling mindlessly. [Veracity isn't top of mind](#), nor is it seen as important to this generation in this mode.

For organisations trying to reach Gen Z with evidence-based messaging, this means that facts alone won't land. No matter how reliable they are. Facts delivered through trusted, relatable voices, in formats that feel socially relevant, can cut through in ways that traditional channels can't.

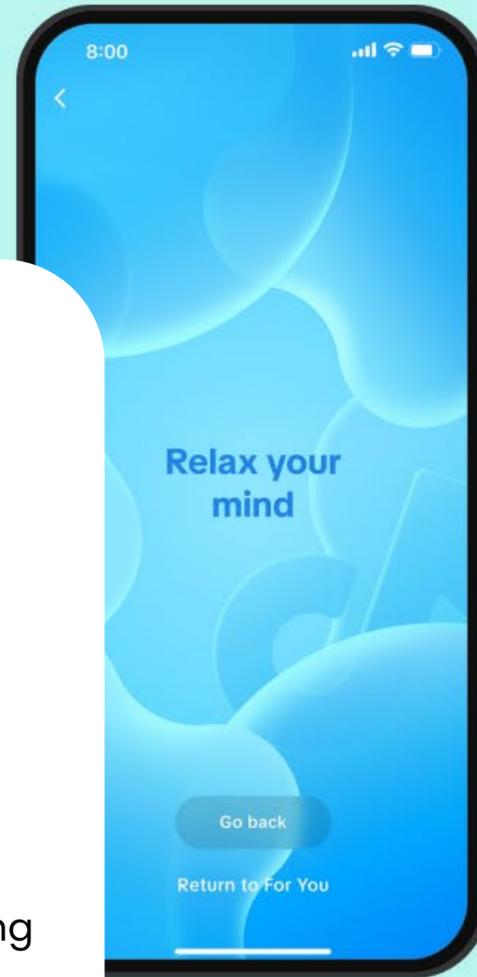
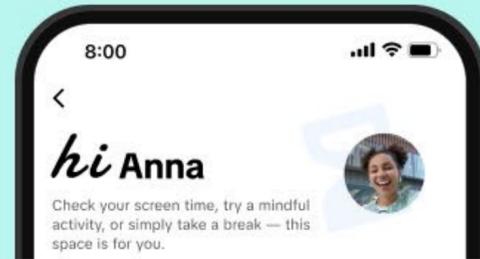




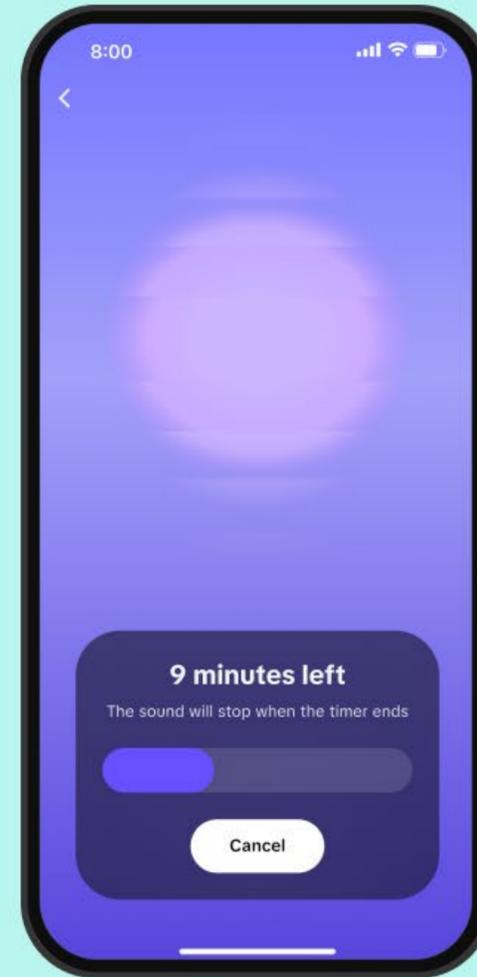
TikTok

TikTok has launched a new Time and Well-Being space within its settings, designed to help users build healthier habits on the app. The hub includes an affirmational journal with over 120 prompts, a soothing sound generator and guided breathing exercises. It also features creator-led videos explaining how to use tools such as screen time limits and Family Pairing more effectively. To encourage behavioural change, TikTok introduced gamified Well-being Missions. Users can earn badges for completing tasks such as logging off during designated sleep hours or sticking to daily screen time goals.

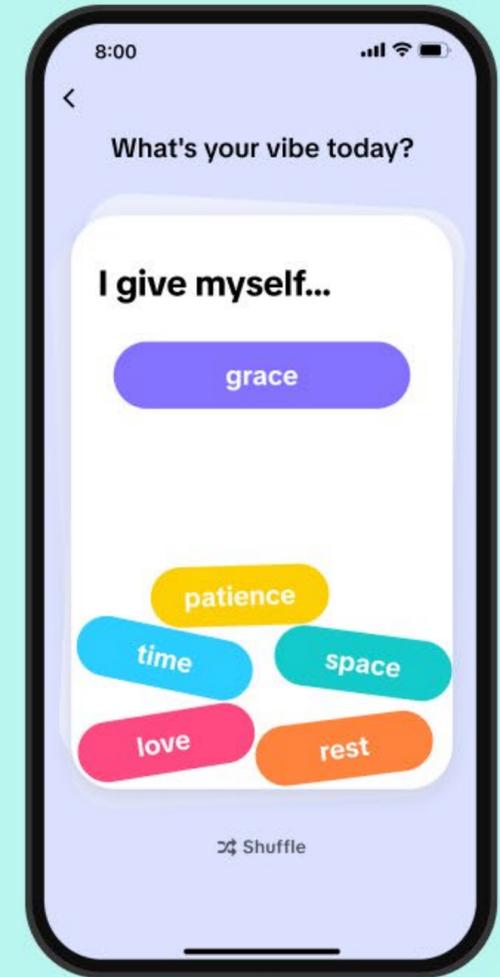
So What: Platforms are increasingly acknowledging their role in shaping attention and mental health, but they are also embedding wellbeing within the same gamified systems that drive overuse. Digital spaces remain essential for reach, but reliance on them reinforces the habits that many are trying to moderate. Where do you go to create balanced online engagement?



Breathing exercises



Soothing sounds



Affirmation journal



CASE STUDIES



The Washington Post

The Washington Post has launched *Your Personal Podcast*, an AI-powered feature within its mobile app that allows users to generate customised audio news briefings. The tool lets listeners select preferred topics, choose between different AI host personas and set the length of the programme. Alternatively, users can opt for an automatically curated version based on their reading and listening history.

So What: Gen Z expects information to adapt to them, not the other way around. Personalisation is shifting from recommendation to generation, where content is assembled in real time around individual preferences and behaviours. Whilst tailored storytelling can deepen relevance and loyalty, hyper-personalisation can also fragment shared narratives and reduce exposure to perspectives beyond a user's interests. As AI reshapes how information is delivered, organisations must decide whether to prioritise custom fit or collective conversation.



Google

In response to a web increasingly dominated by SEO-driven content and AI-generated copy, Google introduced *Perspectives*, a search feature designed to surface content from individual users rather than institutions or brands. Perspectives curates forum posts, Reddit threads, YouTube videos, blog entries and community discussions that reflect first-hand experience. The feature acknowledges a behavioural workaround already common among younger users: adding "Reddit" to a Google search to find real human opinions and experiences.

So What: Trust flows horizontally, peer-to-peer, rather than vertically from institutions. Expertise still matters, but it should be complemented by visible human voice, lived experience and community dialogue.

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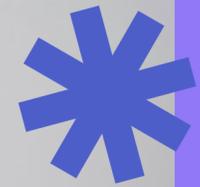
Crocs

In January 2026, Crocs unveiled *Wonderfully Unordinary*, its first new global brand platform in nearly a decade. Replacing the long-running “Come As You Are” slogan, the multi-year campaign is designed to resonate with Gen Z by celebrating individuality and lived experience over digital sameness. The wider rollout includes influencer collaborations, retail activations and social content aimed at positioning Crocs as a badge of expressive, offline identity.

So What: Crocs’ campaign references a growing cultural fatigue with algorithmic conformity and aesthetic uniformity. The lesson is not to abandon digital, but to anchor it in tangible experience. Invite participation beyond the screen and celebrate individuality.



GEN Z AND CHARITY



// TL;DR

Invisibility: Gen Z is giving less through traditional channels, but this decline mirrors a broader drop in national giving.

Volunteering: Volunteering is rising among young people, with a preference for flexible, skills-based, and community-oriented opportunities. Satisfaction depends on feedback, development, and mission clarity.

Alternative: Alternative models resonate more strongly than traditional appeals. Membership, ethical retail, cause-linked purchases, advocacy and experience-led engagement are strong ways in.

Cause Over Brand: Gen Z is issue-driven, especially around climate, and more likely to support multiple or grassroots causes than to show brand loyalty to larger institutions.

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// The Headlines

On the surface, some headline figures tell a worrying story for the sector. Only **36% of 16–24-year-olds** reported making a charitable donation in 2024, down from 52% in 2019, representing a fall of around a third in seven years. Similar to other generations, Gen Z cites trust and financial constraints as barriers to giving. Unlike other generations, they're also more likely to feel disconnected from engagement methods or be unsure about where to start or how to get involved.

So let's zoom out and take stock.

'Only 36% of 16–24-year-olds reported making a charitable donation in 2024, down from 52% in 2019'



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// The Engagement Gap

The drop in traditional donations among Gen Z is real, but it sits against a backdrop of broader decline. Overall giving has [fallen to its lowest recorded level](#), with charities now relying on donations from just 50% of UK adults, equivalent to approximately 4 million fewer donors than in 2019. Gen Z's perceived disengagement is part of a systemic structural problem, not necessarily a generational one.

'Overall giving has fallen to its lowest recorded level'

What is distinctive about Gen Z is how this disengagement manifests. Whilst younger donors are [similarly impacted by lack of trust or financial constraint](#) as older generations, they're also more likely to say they simply don't know [how to engage, or feel that organisations aren't speaking directly to them](#). This is particularly prevalent amongst BPOC Gen Z. Generally, there's a sense that Gen Z feels less visible in conversations about charity, or that current engagement methods aren't cutting through

with this cohort. This is the engagement gap: feeling disconnected from the landscape. This generation has grown up with infinite content competing for attention; is overwhelmed and overloaded; and is disengaging from difficult topics. They're unlikely to seek out giving opportunities independently. Instead, they need to be presented to them frictionlessly, in the flow of daily life.

There are early signs that this is shifting. Research from 2024 found that [younger adults are increasingly likely to report](#) feeling more inclined to give to charities than the year before. There's a potential rise in generosity from this cohort that the sector can capitalise on – if they close the engagement gap.

'Younger non-donors are more likely to say they don't know how to engage, or feel that organisations aren't speaking directly to them'



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// Volunteering

Aside from money, we have to look at time and presence. **32% of 16–24-year-olds** said they had volunteered in the past three months in 2024, up from just 21% in 2012, while volunteering among the over-65s fell from 28% to 17% over the same period. The pipeline of ‘typical volunteer’ is shifting.

The caveat is that Gen Z volunteers engage differently. They favour micro-volunteering, a.k.a. flexible, ad hoc contributions of an hour or two, with no ongoing commitment, over traditional regular shifts. Crucially, they are motivated not only by altruism but by personal development: **48% of Gen Z volunteers** say career enhancement is a motivating factor, and 28% are driven by the desire to belong to a community. Perhaps unsurprising for a generation searching for meaning, belonging, and connection. Framing volunteering as a two-way exchange of value, rather than just a sacrifice, is a way through to this cohort.

‘Only 82% of 18–24-year-olds report satisfaction with their volunteering’

However, there is a satisfaction gap in volunteering that’s worth acknowledging. While Gen Z are willing volunteers, only **82% of 18–24-year-olds** report satisfaction with their volunteering experience, compared to 96% of those aged 55 and over. What makes volunteering more satisfying?

Frequent Touchpoints: Frequent feedback on performance and impact – this cohort wants to see the tangible results of their efforts and know they’re making a difference.

Community: Social connection and community building, with opportunities to meet like-minded people and work as part of a team.

Flexibility: Flexible scheduling and micro-volunteering options, accommodating busy lives with short-term, project-based opportunities.

Development: Skill development and career enhancement through roles that build experience and enhance employability.

Mission: Clear mission alignment, transparency about organisational impact and how their contribution matters.

There is an opportunity to increase loyalty and deepen relationships by closing this gap and tailoring volunteering opportunities (especially those that over-index younger) to younger audiences’ preferences, needs, and values.

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// Alternative Models of Engagement



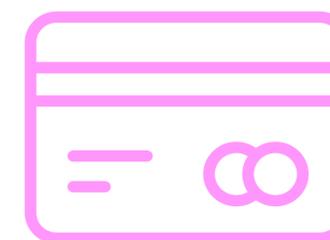
Membership

This generation responds more readily to models that frame support as community, rather than giving. This is where membership comes in: it implies belonging, access, and a mutual exchange of value. You join something, rather than give to it. When engagement is reframed as access to community, places, and shared identity, Gen Z is more likely to engage.



Retail

Charity retail has become an unexpected bridge between values and lifestyle for Gen Z, functioning less as shopping and more as values signalling and community participation. This is also about retail spaces functioning as **third spaces** where charitable purpose becomes embedded in everyday consumption. The model works because it offers immediate, tangible value exchange while satisfying sustainability values.

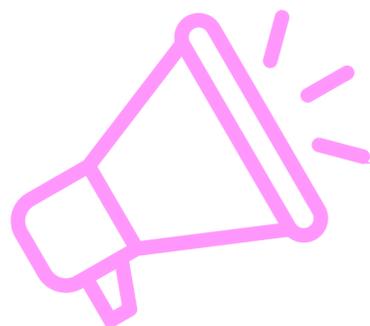


Commercial Income

Gen Z's purchasing power is increasingly channelled through ethical consumption. In fact, **75% of Gen Z** are more likely to purchase products when a portion of the sale goes to charity. Organisations can embed themselves in purchase decisions through cause marketing partnerships, social enterprises, and values-driven product offerings.



// Alternative Models of Engagement



Advocacy

Next-gen donors are **three times more likely** than older donors to engage in advocacy for an organisation or cause. This generation's ability to amplify causes through social media represents attention as currency in the digital economy.



Experience-First

Embed cause connection within experiences they already want. Festivals with sustainability missions, fitness challenges for mental health, creative workshops for community causes, etc. The cause functions as the enabler of the experience. This is a generation drawn to events and largely planning to spend **more time attending events this year**, as they shift to IRL. This ties into charity experiences as well: **73% of Gen Z and Millennials** are more likely to attend an event tied to a cause they care about. Interestingly, younger Gen Z (18-22) are especially likely to want events that **challenge them or push them beyond their comfort zone**.



Image source: Boutique by Shelter

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// Where Will Gen Z Direct Their Giving?

Younger donors are issue-driven, rather than brand-loyal. The top causes that Gen Z support are centred around the environment, animals, health and disaster relief. Perhaps unsurprisingly, climate change is their standout priority: 64% of Gen Z prioritise environmental issues in their giving, compared to around 44% of Baby Boomers. Beware: for Gen Z, climate change is the context that every other cause is operating under. They don't just value conversations about the environment from organisations whose mission ties into this space, they want it from every organisation they engage with.

When it comes to breadth, Gen Z are the widest donors, with nearly half donating to three or more causes. They are also more likely to support smaller, grassroots organisations rather than larger, established charities, drawn to the flexibility and transparency these typically offer. This further ties into issues of institutional trust declining.

'Younger donors are issue-driven, rather than brand-loyal'

Gen Z donors are motivated by trust and impact: nearly 70% say impact reporting would motivate them to give more, and (perhaps counterintuitively) nearly 60% say a postal thank-you letter would also increase their motivation to give. Convenience is king in terms of channel: two thirds (66%) of under-25s in the UK said they would be more likely to donate if they could do so within an app they already use, while a quarter typically give via a social media link. Checkout giving, event-based donations, and peer-to-peer fundraising via social platforms outperform cold asks via post or phone. Furthermore, two in five Gen Z adults fundraised for a charity in 2024, and 61% expressed a desire to participate in future fundraising. That's the highest enthusiasm of any generation.

Overall, this generation is turning away from institutions that feel distant and opaque. Earning their loyalty is difficult, but possible by making impact transparent and achievable, the journey frictionless, and the experience one that emphasises belonging and community through shared values.



CASE STUDIES



Climate Mentor

In the Finnish city of Lahti, you can access the Climate Mentor programme in its high schools, which pairs students with young climate professionals to turn anxiety into action. Rather than focusing solely on the scale of global warming, the initiative centres on agency. Students learn the science of climate change while working directly with mentors to explore how their own skills can contribute to solutions. Participants write opinion pieces, create social media content and experiment with different forms of advocacy, identifying which approaches suit them best.

So What: A generation raised on creating, commenting and co-producing content expects to be contributors and co-creators. Climate Mentor works because it treats young people as emerging advocates with something to say. To engage Gen Z, move beyond awareness campaigns and create structured roles for youth voice, co-creation and public storytelling.



National Trust

Between March 2024 and February 2025, the National Trust recorded a 39 percent increase in 18–25-year-old members, with more than 40,000 young people joining. Growth continued into 2025, with a further 16 percent rise between March and July. For £48 a year, young members gain access to historic houses, landscapes and events, positioning charitable support as a lifestyle choice rather than a traditional donation. The appeal appears to sit at the intersection of access, identity and values. Membership offers tangible benefits, time outdoors, cultural capital and shared experiences, while signalling alignment with conservation and heritage protection.

So What: The National Trust's growth suggests that young audiences are more responsive when relationships with organisations feel reciprocal and woven into everyday life. This membership model offers identity, access, and community to resonate more deeply.

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Nivea

Nivea UAE has launched Giving Glow, a social media campaign designed to tackle chronic blood shortages across the Gulf region. Targeting women aged 18 to 35, the initiative reframed blood donation as a form of self-care, connecting the language of skincare, renewal and inner glow with the life-saving impact of giving blood. Nivea distributed influencer PR boxes containing symbolic empty blood bags, alongside a QR code directing recipients to local donation centres.

So What: Gen Z expects brands and charities to meet them inside their cultural frameworks. Through Giving Glow, Nivea has aligned a cause with Gen Z's existing habits, aesthetics, and preference for influencer marketing. Redesign how charitable support fits into and aligns with day-to-day life.



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1 Fragmented Generation

Treating this cohort as a unified demographic with a shared worldview would be a mistake. Gen Z spans fifteen years and contains deep fractures, so start by clarifying which segment of Gen Z you're actually engaging. A message that energises one group may alienate another. Trying to toe the middle ground will inspire neither.

2 Design for Fatigue

Gen Z's disengagement is the response of a generation that's been systematically overwhelmed by polycrisis and forced to ration its attention and emotional energy. Breaking through means making action feel manageable. Lower the floor of participation through micro-donations, flexible volunteering, and frictionless pathways.

3 Financial Realities

The stereotype of Gen Z frittering away their money on matcha lattes is as lazy as the avocado toast trope before it. Gen Z is financially precarious because of the cost of living crisis and early-career instability. They have less disposable income and security. Low-commitment models convert better.

4 Meaning-Making

Gen Z is looking for something to believe in, from alternative spirituality to the pull of the manosphere. The third sector can offer a different route: genuine purpose. Framing engagement as meaning and belonging creates the conditions for long-term relationships.

5 Earning Trust

Gen Z have never known systems that reliably worked. Transparency and accountability are non-negotiable. Heritage and scale matter less than peer validation, grassroots credibility, and clearly demonstrated impact.

6 Belonging Over Broadcasting

Gen Z is retreating into closed spaces, from group chats to Discord servers, fleeing constant brand broadcasts on legacy platforms. Instead of broadcasting to mass audiences on platforms they're already leaving, invest in the spaces where two-way conversations can happen. Hand over creative control, prioritise peer-to-peer communication, and measure depth over reach. Your community is your strongest comms asset.

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7 IRL Connection

Gen Z is going offline in search of connection: run clubs, book clubs, Dungeons & Dragons nights, late-night gallery openings, and more. With third spaces shrinking and lockdown disrupting social development, there's a vacuum. Position yourself as a place to belong, whether by creating space or partnering with existing ones.

8 Rethink Family

The oldest Gen Zers are 29, and parenthood is beginning. These families are less likely to be married or homeowners, more diverse, and often financially stretched. They're digitally aware and resistant to pressure-laden messaging. Imagery, language, and programme design built for previous generations' parenting norms will feel outdated.

9 Navigating AI

This is a cohort that is already sceptical of institutional voices and highly attuned to inauthenticity. AI-generated content registers as inauthentic and risks undermining trust. AI also offers the opportunity for personalised engagement, accessibility, and efficiency. Use it transparently, centre human voices, and avoid automating the parts of your work that require human touch.

10 Trusted Voices

Gen Z builds its worldview on TikTok, Instagram, and peer-validated Reddit threads, where emotion and engagement beats accuracy. Facts alone won't land with this cohort. Facts delivered through trusted, relatable voices in socially relevant formats will. Becoming a credible, consistent source of clarity is how trust is rebuilt over time.

CONTACT US

Want to discuss how you can use the horizon scan as an opportunity to innovate?

We're here to help.

Get in touch.

GoodFutures@goodinnovation.co.uk

Click [here](#) to find out more about Good Futures.