

# The PR Guide to communicating with Gen Z

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Engaging Generation Z with your comms

vuelio

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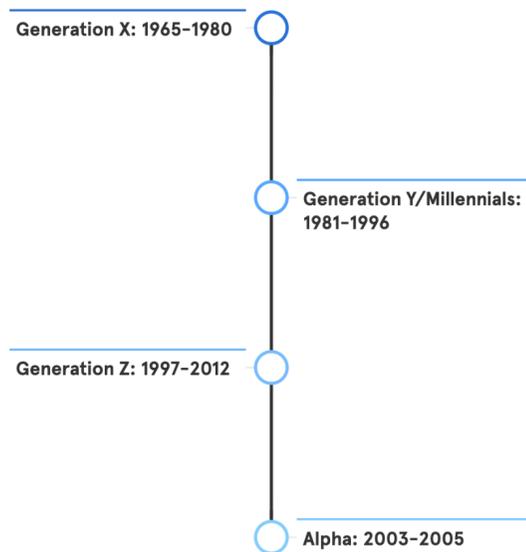
1. Who are Generation Z, and why should PR care about them? .....	3
2. New kids on the block: What do Gen Z care about? .....	4
3. How is the UK PR industry engaging with Generation Z in 2022? .....	6
4. How are the UK media writing about Gen Z? .....	9
5. Memes and the metaverse: Brands engaging Gen Z on their terms.....	12
6. 6 statistics to consider when planning your next campaign.....	14

# Who are Generation Z and why should PR care about them?

If you work in the creative industries, you need to know who your audiences are. The latest segment that needs your attention is Generation Z, AKA Gen Z, AKA 'Zoomers', AKA those that come after the Millennials.

The youngest members of Gen Z, as of 2022, are only 10-years-old, and even the moniker for them is still relatively young. Despite all this newness, there are already plenty of well-established assumptions, cliches and stereotypes. But to start – who exactly makes up this demographic?

There is a general consensus for the age bracket that defines Gen Z, differentiating them from their older cohorts. The breakdown is as follows:



Every generation is subject to the judgements and expectations of those that came before, and just as Millennials have been called *narcissistic*, *self-policing* to the point of paranoia, *easily-offended* 'Snowflakes' and even *lazy*, it is Generation Z's turn to experience this intense scrutiny.

For the media, Gen Z are a fresh group to examine and mine for content, as well as a new audience to write for. For the comms sector, they're a demographic filled with opportunity.

According to data included in Google's 'It's Lit: A Guide To What Teens Think Is Cool' report, Gen Z made up over a quarter of the US population (25.9%) in 2015 and had a potential purchasing power of \$200 billion annually when factoring in their influence on household purchases. Those Gen Zers included in the study have grown up, with many making buying decisions for themselves now (or are still influencing the purchases of their caregivers – don't discount the influence of 2022's 10-year-olds).

Where that money is spent isn't chosen lightly by this generation. One cliché older people often have had about the young, probably throughout history, is that they're flighty, changeable in their desires or don't know what they want. This isn't universally true of Gen Z (no matter what you may hear in the press... or from their parents), who can be an incredibly loyal demographic to brands and businesses.

According to 2017's 'Gen Z Brand Relationships' study from the National Retail Association and the IBM Institute of Business Value, 59% of Gen Z said they trusted the brands they grew up with, while 36% said they feel a strong connection to a brand. Beware of not nurturing this connection, however – from the same study, 47% said that engaging with brands didn't get them a response, or that they weren't satisfied with the manner of response they did receive.

Gen Z care how they're treated – brands and businesses need to see their value and act accordingly.

This is a generation particularly hungry to learn, grow and achieve, holding themselves and others to account. Want to engage them? Do not skip due diligence or research on the right messaging and approach for Gen Z, because if you think Generation Y are demanding...

# What do Gen Z care about?

The first part of putting a campaign, brand strategy or long-term plan together is figuring out your audience's wants and motivations. What does Gen Z care about, and how can these considerations be incorporated into your comms?

## Constant connection

Gen Z go beyond the digital proficiency and literacy of Millennials – tech is an extension of them, fully-integrated into their lives.

When it comes to how Gen Z spend their free time, the [Uniquely Gen Z](#) study from 2015 found that 74% were online, followed by the 44% busy watching TV and movies (likely being streamed online, because how many Gen Zers will own a DVD player? Or a video cassette player... maybe we're going too far back with this). Low on the list were technology-free past-times – 6% participating in organised group activities, 7% in religious activities, and 8% volunteering.

Behind a significant proportion of these digital connections, though were interactions with other people. The social connections among this connected group are global, with [data from JWT Intelligence and the Pew Research Center](#) finding that 26% of Gen Z would need to fly to visit the majority of their friends from social media.

Localised and closely-targeted communications are valuable for the personalised and authentic touch required by this generation, but make sure you are well-versed in what is happening around the globe, because they will be.

## Creativity and collaboration

Access to technology means accessibility to creative tools that empower this audience to create the content they want to see. Mix this with Gen Z's openness to sharing and you have a whole generation of incredibly effective content creators. In fact, 44%

of Gen Z that took part in that 2017 '[Gen Z Brand Relations](#)' study said that they would like to submit ideas for product design to brands, if given the opportunity.

It's no surprise that a majority of Twitch and TikTok's top influencers are Gen Z, including global stars like those in the [Hype House](#), the [Sway House](#) and former [House-inhabitants](#) like [Charli D'Amelio](#). There are also the swathes of micro-influencers in a myriad of niches you may or may not have heard about – the booming beauty sphere ([TikTok being the natural home of the e-girl](#)), the witchcraft ([#witchtok](#)) community and even the [Kawaii-style keyboard set-up sphere](#), if pastel-pink work/gaming spaces are one of your sectors.

Influential sports, music and film stars are also skewing younger, with Gen Zers [Billie Eilish](#), [Millie Bobby Brown](#) and [Marcus Rashford](#) securing brand deals after gaining of legions of followers across social media for their work and activism.

Even the print media sphere – with its reputation for being 'pale, male and stale' – is getting younger. In February 2022, [Vogue China](#) appointed its youngest Editor-in-Chief ever with the 27-year-old (not quite Gen Z) [Margaret Zhang](#), a '[fashion multihyphenate](#)' with 1.1 million followers on Instagram at the time of writing.

Thinking of bringing in an influencer for your next campaign to collaborate on content? Generation Z is where to start looking.

## Feedback and improvement

One stereotype of older demographics, considering the proliferation of 'Okay Boomer' memes and comebacks across social media over the last few years, is that of negativity, disapproval and complaint. Gen Zers, in comparison, are [twice as likely to share positive feedback than they are to share complaints](#).

Mix that with a willingness to interact with brands, and you have the potential for a really useful – and positively-put – feedback loop.

### Honesty

Building trust is important for engaging and keeping any audience, but teams looking to build this with the hyper-informed Gen Z need to be upfront, transparent and honest above all.

Affiliating with well-known faces works – according to a [Defy Media Adumen Survey published by AdWeek in March 2017](#), Gen Z trust social media stars almost as much as ‘mainstream’ celebrities when it comes to recommendations for beauty products, clothes and accessories. And they’re okay with celebrity-branded content – provided that the collaboration is clearly disclosed. A celebrity showing a brand in a video or post and not saying anything about it was the least acceptable type of branded content, according to the

Ad Week report. In fact, 71% of Gen Z are willing to boycott companies that behave in ways they believe to be unethical, as found by Syracuse University’s Generation Z and Corporate Social Responsibility study.

### Politics, diversity and social justice

Gen Z apply that need for honesty, ethics and integrity inwards, too – actively working to make change. According to the Sparks & Honey report ‘[Meeting Generation Z: Forget Everything You Learned About Millennials](#)’, just over a quarter (26%) of 16-to-19-year-olds are volunteering, with social entrepreneurship being one of the top choices for future careers.

Gen Z value diversity at work as much as they do in their day-to-day lives – according to [2018 research from EY](#), around two-thirds (63%) of Generation Z believe it is important to work with those who have

diverse education and skill levels. A further 20% said that the most important part of a team is working with people of different cultures, ethnicities and origins.

As found by the [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#), ‘one of the core characteristics of Generation Z is racial diversity [...] Gen Z will be the last generation that is predominantly white [...] They are more likely to have grown up amid diverse family structures’. Any campaign looking to reflect and engage this generation needs to go beyond portraying the 2.4 children middle-class white family structure beloved of so many 70s/80s/90s/00s adverts – representation of the diversity that is their reality is required.

### The future

Having been born into a world connected through technology, those under-25 see the benefits of technology and its potential to create a better world. In fact, 80% of the Gen Z students polled by Dell

across 17 countries for research into [The Gen Z effect](#) believe that technology and automation will create a more equitable work environment.

And on the subject of the environment – this is a generation thrust into the middle of the worldwide conversation on climate change and sustainability from birth, so naturally, it is a big concern for them.

Three quarters of Generation Z (76%) are concerned about humanity’s impact on the planet, world hunger (78%) and children dying of preventable diseases around the world (77%), according to [Unilever’s Project Sunlight: How Children Inspire Sustainable Behavior in Adults](#).

A positive of the concern – Gen Z are ready to build a better world than the one they were born into. As found by an [MTV survey from 2015](#), 91% believe their generation can achieve this.

# How is the UK PR industry engaging with Generation Z in 2022?

Vuelio surveyed 115 UK practitioners to understand current perceptions of Gen Z and approaches to engaging and connecting with them.

Respondents to the report were made up of a mixture of ages, with 11% identifying as Gen Z, 52% as Millennials, 30% as Gen X and 5% as Boomers. 60% work in-house, 28% agency-side and 12% freelance.

Surveying this group from across the UK industry, we wanted to know if UK PR teams in 2022 fully recognise the potential in communicating with Gen Z.

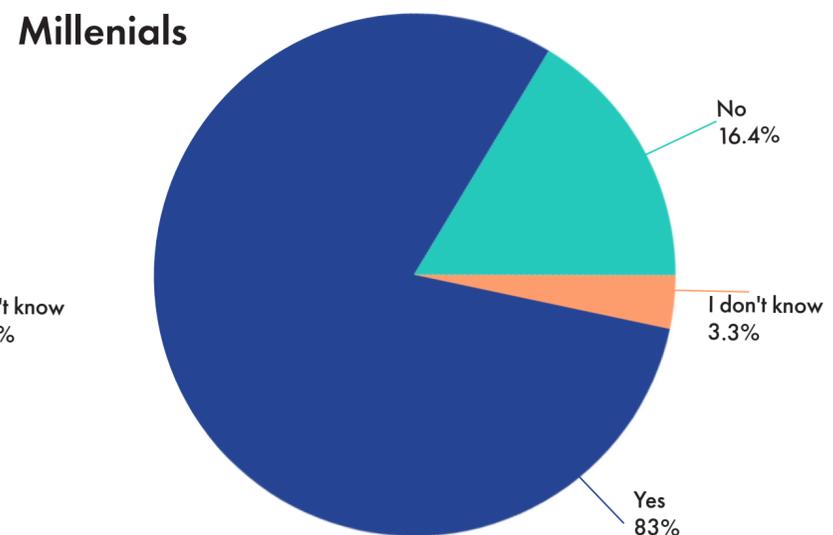
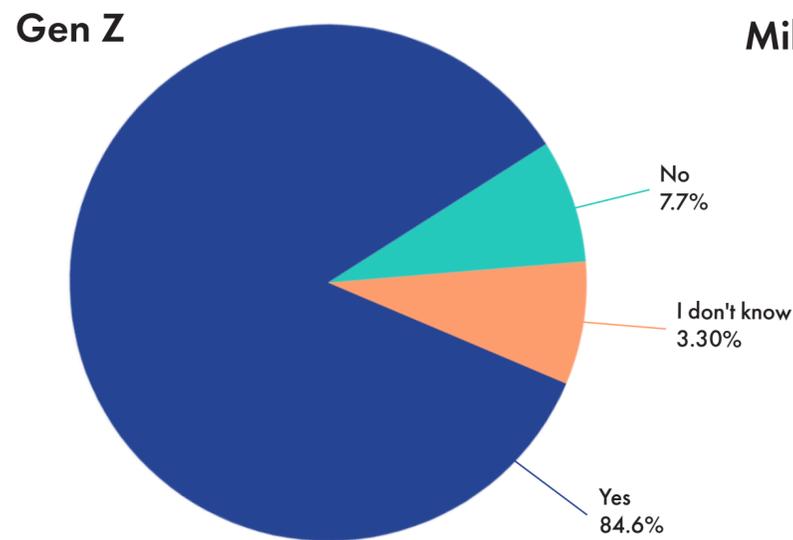
So, which platforms do the industry use to interact with younger generations? Do PRs know what young people care about? And perhaps the most important question of all... does everyone in the PR and comms sector definitely know who 'Generation Z' actually are?



**Most confident about who Gen Z are?**

**Gen Z PR pros!**

'Know thyself' – a phrase perhaps as close to the Gen Z heart as it was to Gen Y. 84% of Gen Z confidently answered 'Yes' to 'Do you fully understand what the term 'Gen Z' means, with 80% of Millennials also answering in the affirmative.



Perhaps unsurprisingly, knowledge of this falls off as the respondents' ages go further and further back from 1997. Only half of Boomers profess to know what 'Gen Z' means.

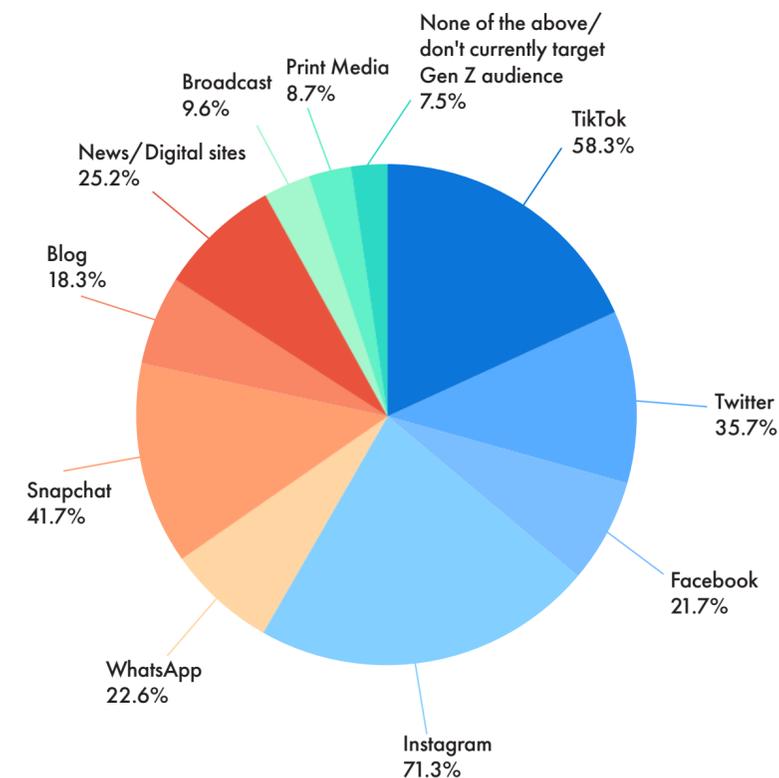
**TikTok, Twitter or Instagram – how do PRs target Gen Z now?**

If your guess was TikTok as the top medium of choice, you may be surprised – Instagram is the number one choice for communicating with Gen Z for UK PRs right now (71%).

Is this because of the perceived value of Instagram... or a skill gap with making use of TikTok for campaigns?

While TikTok comes in second with 58%, Snapchat (41%) is more popular than Twitter (36%) or Facebook (22%). Faring particularly poorly in these stakes is print media, which is only being used as an outlet for gaining the attention of Gen Z by 9% of our recipients.

**Which platforms do you target Gen Z through?**



### Print is dead... according to the over-60s

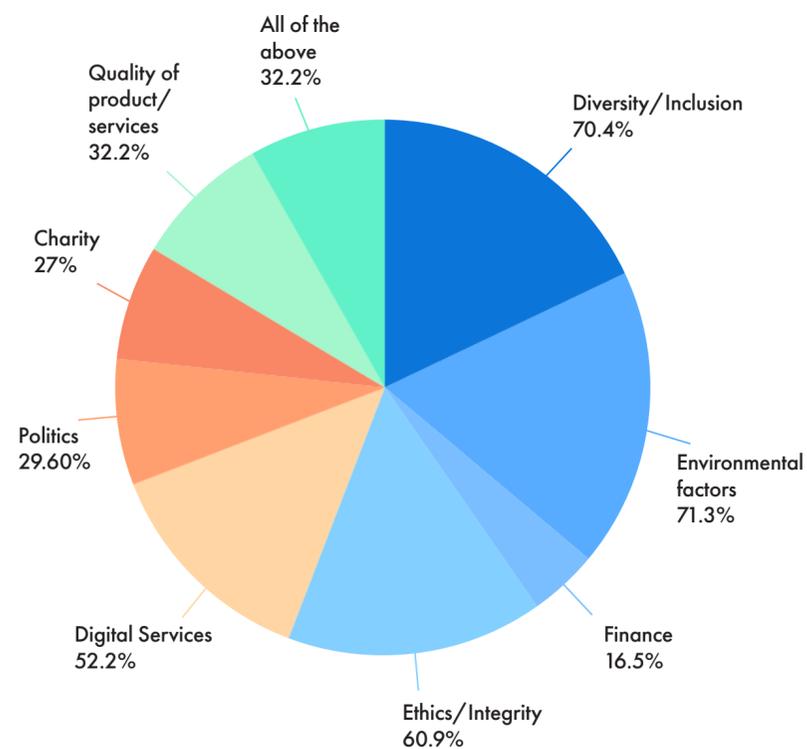
In fact, when asked about the use of print for engaging the younger generations, 82% said that 'traditional' media formats like newspapers and magazine are not good avenues.

The age group with least trust in print for connecting with the 25-and-unders? The over-60s, aka the Boomers, 100% of whom answered 'no' when asked if print was a good way to target Gen Z.

### The kids are alright, according to UK PRs

Especially when it comes to ethical concerns. When asked what is important to Gen Z, top picks from UK PRs were environmental factors (71%), diversity and inclusion (70%) and ethics and integrity (61%). Getting a lower slice – quality of product/service, which only 34% of PRs picked as important to Gen Z. When it comes to the success and popularity of brands with under-25-year-olds, UK PRs believe consistent,

### What do you think is important to Gen Z



transparent and truthful messaging about a product is even more important than its performance.

Ultimately, that is a win-win for both comms teams and consumers – if you are being truthful about your product or service, it will need to be a quality one able to stand-up to scrutiny.

### Gen Z is still untapped by a fifth of the UK PR and comms industry in 2022

PR and comms must always look to the future, and right now the future belongs to Gen Z... before their younger counterparts Alpha – those born between 2013–2025 – come of buying age, of course...

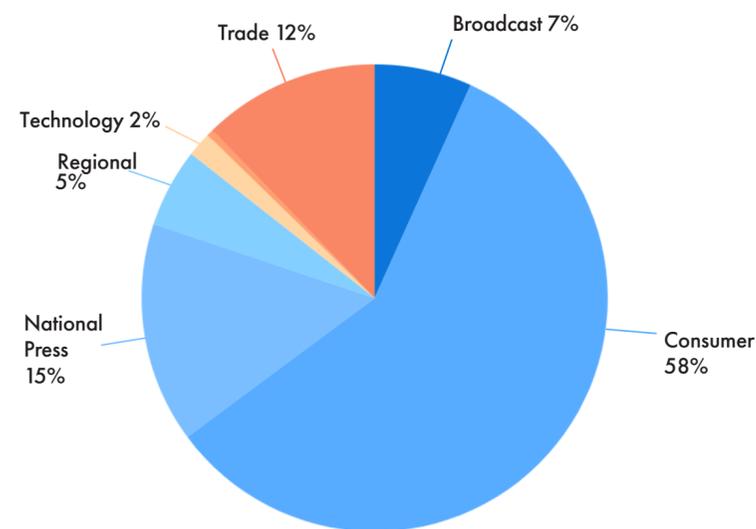
In 2022 in the UK, 17% of comms professionals surveyed said that Gen Z is not part of their target audience, with 6% admitting 'I don't know' when asked. What this means - a fifth of the UK PR industry is yet to tap into this segment of the public with its

messaging. That is a huge missed opportunity, as Generation Z grows in influence and buying power. Gen Z is also missing from comms teams, with only 37% of PR teams having Gen Z members.

# How are the UK media writing about Gen Z?

From the start of 2019 to mid-2022, around 2,000 enquiries related to Gen Z have been sent through the [ResponseSource](#) Journalist Enquiry Service by UK media professionals.

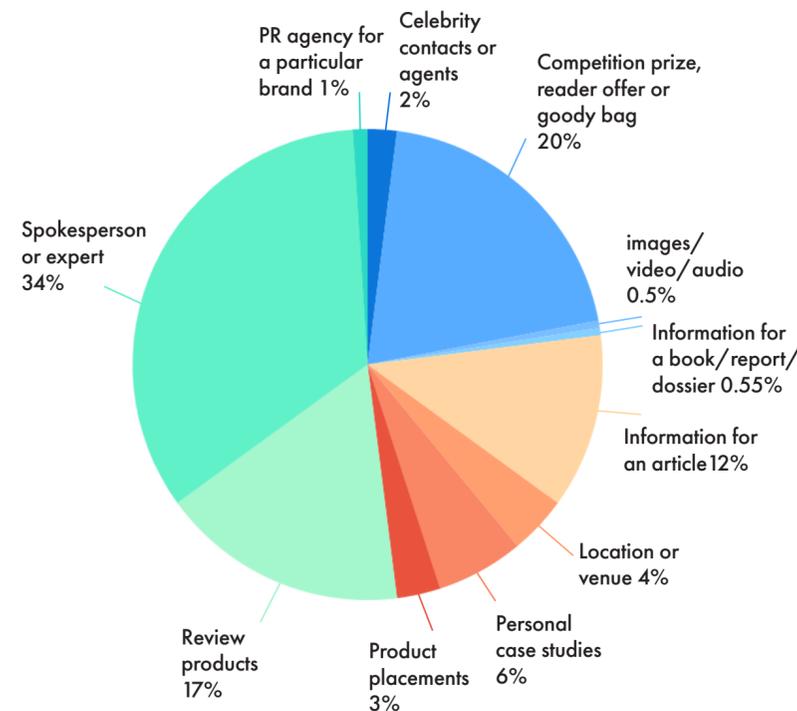
Consumer journalists are most interested in writing about, and for, the under-25 age bracket, followed by



national press writers, trade titles and broadcasters.

## What were the UK media looking for?

Reflecting the broader trend in journalist enquiries, the most popular request was for a spokesperson or expert, with a sizeable number also looking for information for an article, as journalists look to Gen Z experts to support their work.



Requests regarding features on Generation Z frequently came from high-profile consumer outlets that traditionally target younger readers, including Cosmopolitan, Stylist, Grazia, GQ, Closer, Fabulous, Grazia, Marie Claire, Esquire, HELLO! and Refinery29.

Among this group, requests have featured a mix of social activism, diversity, self-improvement, self-care and social media related-topics. The media, alongside PR and comms, is paying attention to what the group themselves report to be their topics of interest:

- Social Activism
- Slackivism
- Western Beauty Standards
- Manifestations
- Fashion-Forward
- Careers
- Influencers
- Mukbang
- Sustainable

“ Need a quote about what 'slacktivism' is and what you think of it, one in response to celebrity slacktivism (e.g. Hailey Baldwin/Kendall Jenner virtue signalling about BLM on Instagram with a hashtag chain), and one positive reflection on Gen-Z social media activism and how it can be a force for good.'

'Considering the housing market Generation Z are bumping up against in 2022, the amount of enquiries related to the under-25s sent through the Journalist Enquiry Service from home and interiors publications was high. When getting on the property ladder isn't possible for everybody – making the most of living spaces is more achievable. Enquiries from outlets including Good Homes, Home & Gardens and HomeStyle covered calming room set-ups and making the most of rented spaces with layouts, accessories and lighting effects.

“ Pinterest's latest report found Gen Z has increasingly searched for 'Zen bedroom ideas' and 'feng shui bedroom layout' – I'd love an expert to talk about what a zen/feng shui bedroom means and simple tricks for how to reproduce it at home.'

#### **National press: Explaining and understanding**

Over the last few years, national press titles including The Sun, Daily Mail, The Guardian, the Daily Star, The Independent, City A.M. and many more have been commissioning news and features focusing on a broad range of subjects. While features are often critical of Gen Z – probably to be expected from previous generations – other requests instead showed a bid to understand the group and explain their motivations to broad national – and international – readerships.

Requests focused on lifestyle, relationships, finance, health, and even how the Gen Z mindset impacts restaurant layouts:

“ I'm writing about restaurant design trends in relation to Gen Z and need a Gen Z talking head from a restaurant, design firm, or hospitality background. Someone comfortable with speaking about the look and feel of restaurants...'

“ Looking to speak to a linguist on Gen Z slang terms e.g. Thicc, Dank, Salty, Shook etc. How does slang develop and form? Why these words...'

“ Seeking a psychologist or behavioural expert to comment on why younger generations are drinking less alcohol than previous generations...'

#### **Trade: Translating Gen Z motivations to Gen Y and X**

Among trade media sending requests, outlets focusing on finance, business, careers and education including Accountancy Age, Inside Packaging, The Grocer,

Business Insider, Data Economy, Finance Digest, Retail Gazette, Business Reporter and HRreview have been seeking to examine and explain the Gen Z audience to their readerships. These tend to be older audiences – Millennial, Gen Z and beyond – who want the practicalities of understanding and supporting the next generation.

Requests from trade magazine journalists have centred on drawing the under-25s into particular careers, how to understand their motivations, what they're investing in and how to support their mental health and nurture their trust.

“ I want to find out how the accountancy industry can adapt in order to appeal to the younger generation. What changes must the industry make in order to entice and support those who are about to enter the world of work?'

“ Is it possible to win over younger shoppers without alienating older consumers? Do you think department store retailers are simply focusing on experiential retail rather than gen z shoppers?’

#### **Broadcast: Protections and warnings**

Considering Gen Z’s tendency to search for their entertainment and education on screens rather than in print, it is perhaps no surprise that broadcast journalists working across television, radio, podcasts and more have been working on features aimed at Gen Z themselves.

Journalists from outlets including BBC News, BBC Three, This Morning, VeggieVision, MTV and Channel 4 have been on the search for case studies and spokespeople from the demographic itself, requesting insight on money management, wellbeing, health and the negatives that come with evolving technology.

“ I am looking for case studies: young people who use the ‘buy now, pay later’ scheme, overestimated how much they can afford, and are now in debt. People who are not happy about how easy it is to just choose to pay later.’

“ I am looking for a dentist, doctor and dermatologist to comment on an article I’m writing on dangerous TikTok beauty hacks..’

#### **Technology: Ethics and security**

With ethics and integrity so important to Generation Z, it is perhaps surprising that it is the technology-focused outlets which have mostly been asking ethical questions relating to this age group. Publications including Wired, FSTech, IPro, Mashable and TNW have been requesting information on AI integrity and digital security, alongside shopping habits, credit checks and online purchasing.

“ Looking for interviews/written comment around TikTok data tracking and what people can do about it. Please ensure you can deliver if you offer an expert, as I have been let down a few times recently.’

“ ...the benefits and drawbacks of AI, machine learning, greenwashing, crypto...’

Content being created about, and for, Generation Z by UK journalists very much depends on the medium of the outlet they’re writing, commissioning and producing for.

PR and comms people wanting to collaborate with the media to engage with Gen Z will need to ensure they’re picking the right platform for their message.

# Mememes and the metaverse: Brands engaging Gen Z on their terms

Alongside all those articles and news pieces being published on Gen Z in the media, the PR-focused press is also filled with mentions of the increasingly valuable – and unavoidable – under-25 audience.

A flurry of news pieces have been published on Gen Z-related appointments within in-house and agency teams, as well as news of heavy investment in areas considered vital for engaging the Gen Z audience.

## Agency-aided engagement

This year, Edelman appointed its first 'ZEO' in fashion designer Harris Reed, with additional plans to employ 100 under-25s as part of [The Gen Z Lab](#).

'The Gen Z Lab will harness their generation's perspective and ambitions to solve issues such as race and diversity, sustainability and climate change, and align with brand interests to become catalysts for change,' went the announcement. 'Brands today have

many challenges with this generation and the insurance costs of getting this wrong are too great,' added Edelman Global Chief Brand Officer Jackie Cooper.

In March, [Mission Group](#) acquired youth marketing agency [Livity](#), which works with brands – including Nike, Google, Footlocker, YouTube, Dr. Martens and more – to understand youth culture and 'engage with the next generation with purpose'. 'Our clients and prospects are acutely aware of the growing influence of Gen Z and are eager to explore how they can successfully engage with a youth audience in the most meaningful way,' said [Krow Group](#) CEO John Quarrey of the importance of the acquisition.

## Big brands move to the metaverse and meme-making

In-house it is no different – influential brands and businesses are investing in hangouts where Gen Z spend a lot of their time: online'.

Already embedding itself into the online culture of memes and mental-health boosters beloved by Gen Z is the ITV-backed media culture brand and marketplace [Woo](#). In the [press release](#) for its launch, [Woo's](#) mission was laid out as 'redefin[ing] wellness for an entire generation, via social channels, podcasts, video, editorial and products' with the team's promise of meme-filled content a focus in [PRWeek](#) write-ups.

Alongside interacting on social media, gaming and all things online entertainment is huge for a big proportion of Gen Z – 66% of 6-11-year-olds polled in 2013 for [Mintel's Activities of Kids and Teens](#) report listed gaming as their main source of entertainment.

That age group is now 15-20. No wonder so many big brands – in among the excitement of the myriad of opportunities supposedly offered by the metaverse – have realised this and jumped onto the bandwagon and invested in bandwidth.

To publicise the new series of 'I'm A Celebrity...' in 2021, [ITV](#) launched a virtual version of the show's castle with [Fortnite Creative](#) for viewers to explore. In fact, [ITV](#) has created a number of new ways for viewers to connect with its programming via the metaverse in this way, including an in-game [Fortnite](#) version of its entertainment show [The Void](#).

[Nintendo's Animal Crossing: New Horizon](#) proved to be an effective (and relatively low-effort) avenue for connecting with younger generations for many brands including [KFC](#), [Hellmann's](#), and even [US President \(then candidate\) Joe Biden](#). All comms teams needed to do was set up their own island (...or find a fan of the game on their workforce to do it for them) and create brand-related in-game ephemera, like downloadable T-shirt designs for their character, or suitably suited-up avatars to interact with.



Another popular choice for plenty of brands and businesses setting up their stand in the metaverse has been Roblox. A Roblox-based ceremony and gig was held as part of the Brit Awards earlier in 2022, with a virtual version of PinkPantheress booked to perform. Artists including Lil Nas X have also teamed up with the platform for performances.

Gaming platforms are no longer just used for gaming – they can be a starting point for events, socialising and much more.

The virtual world is also spilling over into reality, wherever the real world is found to be lacking... and it has been lacking much throughout the course of the pandemic, as finances, interpersonal interaction and mental wellbeing have all fluctuated – shrinking and changing form.

Brands immersing themselves into the opportunity-filled virtual world, unincumbered by the lockdowns and real-world blockers, include Nike.

Having teamed up with Roblox for the creation of NIKELAND, the brand invested further in the metaverse with its acquisition of virtual sneaker brand RTFKT Studios in December 2021. This is paying off in terms of recognition – when looking at social data from Pulsar, Nike is the non-digitally-native brand most associated with the idea of virtual fashion by the public.

 Virtual Fashion: Nike swooshes way to the top of Trad Brands



Mentions of platforms in the Virtual Fashion conversation across Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, News, Tumblr, YouTube, Forums, Blog and more. 28 Jul 2021 - 11 Jan 2022. Source: Pulsar TRAC



# 6 statistics to consider when planning your campaign for Gen Z

**1. Play: 42% of Gen Z consumers would participate in an online game for a brand campaign,** according to data from the [National Retail Federation](#) and IBM Institute of Business Value's 'Gen Z Brand Relationships global study' from 2017.

ITV utilised this by recreating its I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here castle in Fortnite, while plenty of other big brands have spaces set up in Roblox. Is there a way to incorporate gaming into your own upcoming campaigns?

**2. Be social: Almost all Gen Zers (95%) use YouTube, and half (50%) 'can't live without it',** were the findings from [Ad Week's report on the age group in 2017](#).

Are the 71% of UK PRs investing in Instagram for engaging Gen Z wasting their time on the wrong platform? 69% of the Gen Zers polled for the Ad

Week report used Instagram, so not quite. Most valuable platforms alongside YouTube and Instagram – Facebook (67%), Snapchat (67%) and Twitter (52%).

**3. Be quick and concise: Gen Zers have an eight-second attention span, according to research from Microsoft.** That's a whole four-seconds shorter than the [12-second span of Millennials](#). What they need from PR, comms pros and marketers are streamlined and concise communications, whichever platform you're using.

With this challenge comes opportunity - Gen Z has a high ability, and natural tendency, to multitask when consuming content. For engaging with Gen Zers busy streaming a show or film while tweeting about it on social media, [check out this Vuelio webinar](#) on utilising high and low involvement attention with Neuro PR.

**4. Educate and empower: Over half (52%) of teenagers used YouTube and other social media channels for research assignments for school work,** was the findings in the Pew Research Center study '[How Teens Do Research in the Digital World](#)' – social sites aren't just for entertainment or consumption for Generation Z.

If your niche is in education, raising awareness or the third sector, don't overlook social platforms as a way to connect with the younger generation. For more on making use of social media to raise awareness, check out how charities including Tiny Tickers and The Wildlife Trusts are doing it [here](#).

**5. Collaborate: Over three quarters (77%) of Gen Z employees are willing to be technology mentors for their co-workers,** according to Dell Technologies research piece [The Gen Z effect](#).

Not quite sure how to work TikTok and other new(ish) technologies into your upcoming campaign set pieces? If you're one of the 37% of teams that have under-25s on your team, make the most of their skillsets and get them working on it.

**6. Help them to create and communicate their message and motivations, too:** 76% of Generation Z believe they can turn their hobbies into a full-time career, [according to this piece from Forbes](#).

With all of their ability to utilise and adapt to evolving communication styles, platforms and formats, Generation Z are born communicators and creators. They're hungry for fresh content they can enjoy, interact with, add to and transform. That's a lot of opportunity, and responsibility, for those looking to engage with and learn from them.

