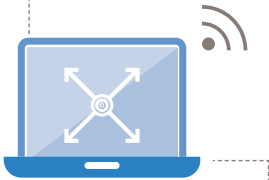




# THE NOW GENERATION

Embracing their difference



SOCIAL



To target consumers precisely, marketers sometimes need to think outside the generational box. For many years, their focus has been squarely on Millennials – the one-time hipsters who have been slowly growing into healthier salaries, smart-equipped cars and fridges, and their own families.

But as Millennials transition from cutting-edge to suburban mainstream, marketers need to pivot to “what’s next” – a new, significant group of consumers who will shape brands and products for years to come. Many marketers have been treating Generation Z, covering kids to late teenagers, as “the next big thing” in buying. But a variety of GfK research points to a different way of defining consumers of the future – one that falls outside standard generational breaks.

## As Millennials transition from cutting-edge to suburban mainstream, marketers need to pivot to “what’s next”

We see a remarkable coalescing of attitudes and behaviors among consumers who range from their mid-teens to mid-twenties. Straddling the Gen Z and Millennial cohorts, this group shares some compelling traits: naturally digital, entrepreneurial, and comfortable in their own skins. We dubbed this leading indicator group – harbingers of what’s to come – the “Now Generation.”

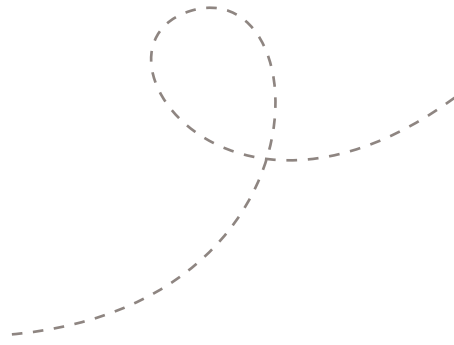
The “Now Generation” name is simple and clear; these consumers are here now, out in the marketplace and making change happen. That makes *now* the appropriate

time to make sure we are understanding who they are and targeting them effectively.

The Now Generation grew up with and was shaped by events we may take for granted. September 11th, 2001, came at a crucial time for many of them, and a world filled with hot spots of unrest and terrorism remains their reality. The Internet and digital technology are like paper and pencil to them – basic equipment that feels second nature. They also experienced the recession of 2008, either directly or through their parents, and therefore have a cautious post-crisis approach to life.

To further define and understand this newly identified contingent, GfK used its YouthPulse Panel – which offers unparalleled data quality and ease for youth research – to conduct the first survey of the Now Generation. Through interviews with 507 consumers ages 15 to 25, we explored their dreams, habits, and pet peeves, and discovered a surprising consistency of perception and action. As marketers plan their product lines and positionings for the next three, five, or ten years, they need to recognize that the Now Generation is distinctly different from those who came before or will likely come after.

As we analyzed our new study, several core traits emerged – currents that run through the Now Generation’s attitudes and activities in a variety of contexts, like themes continually being restated in a symphony. Here are some of these markers of cultural connection – the ties that bind the Now Generation.



This group shares some compelling traits: naturally digital, entrepreneurial, and comfortable in their own skins



### **Pragmatism**

More than half (55%) of the Now Generation is already in the work force, with almost one-third (31%) being working students. “Life hacks” are a normal way of existence for this group, which will take branded products or conventional ideas apart to make them do new things – whatever our young consumers happen to need.

Although they dream of being the next app-developing entrepreneurs (and millionaires), Now Generation consumers are also not averse to hard work. They have high standards and want to be respected, and they may gravitate to brands that show the same combination of practicality and quality focus. Almost three-quarters (72%) of Now Gen workers report that they have high standards at the office, and 70% of non-working students say they have high academic standards (with women 17 points higher than men).

Perhaps the biggest statement about the Now Generation’s values is their attraction to and respect for intelligence. A remarkable 97% of Now Generation students agree that “it’s cool to be smart”; among working non-students, the result is nearly as high (88%). And more than half (55%) of all in this generation feel that society places too little value on a person’s intelligence.

### **Beyond digital**

For the Now Generation, *digital* as a concept is counter-intuitive. They do not separate digital activities from “analog” ones; smartphones, social media, cloud sharing of every kind of document – they are simply a way of life, like water is to fish. Although two-thirds (68%) of students in the Now Generation would describe themselves as “digitally savvy,” the proportion who say they are usually the “first one to try new things” is much



## This group feels liked, respected, and not obliged to follow fashion

lower (28%). So being digital does not necessarily mean being innovative or cutting edge to this group.

And the Now Generation sees the downsides of today's devices and digital services. Almost two-thirds (62%) say that websites are gathering too much information about them when they shop online, with just 11% disagreeing with that statement. And nearly half (46%) of the Now Generation agrees that, in many cases, there is "no substitute for a visit to a physical store" – a step in the other direction from online shopping.

### Breaking type

A clear motif in our findings was the Now Generation's comfort with themselves. At a time when social media seem to

encourage seeing oneself through other people's eyes without pause, this group feels liked, respected, and not obliged to follow fashion or convention. Eight in ten (79%) students in the Now Generation say they "have [their] own way of doing things," and 67% assert that they are "not afraid to do things other people say are uncool."

When asked what they dream about, these young consumers steer away from answers like "being popular" (22%) and "being a famous actor or actress" (17%). But "being smarter" (46%) is definitely appealing, and "being rich" (64%) doesn't seem like such a bad thing. Their #1 dream, however – reported by two-thirds (73%) of the Now Generation – is "travelling to different places around the world."



# 84%

say they have at least  
one major stressor

### **The pressure cooker**

Perhaps the one disconcerting note in our look at this promising new generation is their sense of being under stress – perhaps the flip side of their high standards and demand for quality. According to GfK Consumer Life data, more than eight in ten (84%) say they have at least one major stressor (versus 71% of the overall US population), and their #1 source of pressure is themselves.

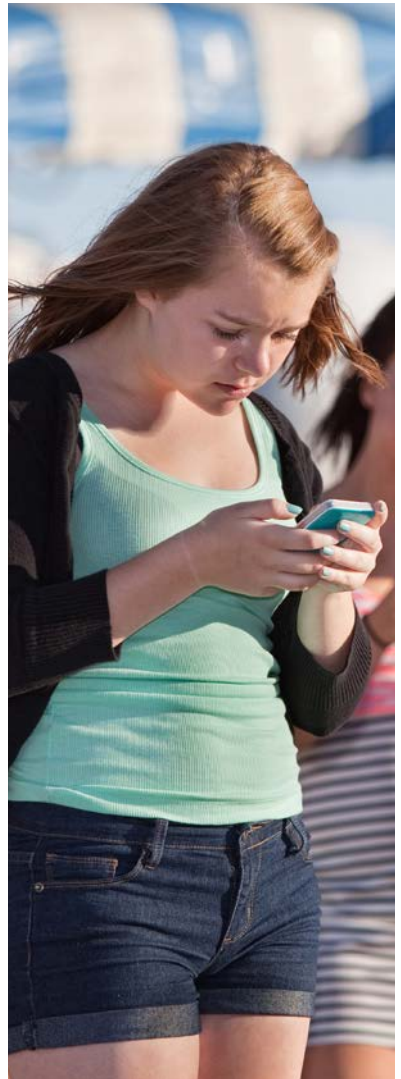
In addition, nearly half (47%) of this generation report having too little free time, while only 14% say they have “too much.”

### **Marketers & the Now Generation**

With their passion for life, their commitment to being exceptional workers and students, and their ambition for success, the Now Generation is complex and sometimes conflicted.

## **Nearly half (47%) of this generation report having too little free time**

Marketers need to embrace at least some of the core values of this up-and-coming group, which will define the futures of so many brands – from automotive to consumer goods to health. The trick is to speak the Now Generation’s cultural language, and resonate with their experiences and ideas, in whatever you say and do.



**Questions? Contact us!**

To learn more about the Now Generation's importance for your company and brand, contact your GfK representative or [marketing@gfk.com](mailto:marketing@gfk.com).



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