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GEN Z: PREPARING TO FACE THE FUTURE

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More than any recent generation, Gen Z faces a future complicated by complex and often contentious global issues: political turmoil, racial tensions and wide-ranging disagreements on policies from immigration to climate change. At home, they're worried about pressing personal concerns—landing a job, finding affordable housing and funding the ever-rising cost of their educations.

Student Affinity Network UNiDAYS recently conducted a survey of 16,747 college-aged Gen Zers from the U.S., U.K., Australia and New Zealand to understand this generation's outlook on the future. The survey found that the majority of college-aged Gen Zers around the world have mixed feelings on

the outlook for the future—as it affects both themselves and society at large.

For the most part, Zs are frustrated with their countries' governments and feel their voices aren't heard by leaders. As such, they're uncertain about how, if at all, their generation can make an impact on the world. On a personal level, career progression and relationships are also a concern. They don't know what to expect for their own careers and personal lives.

But it's not that they're indifferent—they most definitely are not. Rather, they are uncertain, which for smart brands presents an opportunity to empower Zs with information and resources they can act on.

Gen Z is most concerned with healthcare, the cost of education, issues of equality and concerns about the environment.

Gen Z's outlook on the future

When asked about their outlook on the future, Gen Z answered:

- Positive: 31%
- Negative: 12%
- Mixed: 57%

For marketers looking to connect with this generation, we'll dig into some of Gen Z's specific areas of concern about the future and what they mean for brands.

Uncertainty: A marketer's sweet spot

If you're marketing to Gen Z, you face a challenge in appealing to a group with very mixed opinions. Eighty-five percent of this generation feel either very or somewhat empowered to shape the future, but they have differing (or even conflicting) opinions on where and how to start.

Yet Gen Z's uncertainties are actually a marketer's sweet spot. They're your opportunity to encourage decision-making and preference by establishing an authentic relationship with Zs, built entirely on trust for your brand.

By embracing Gen Z's ambivalence, brands can influence and inspire these young consumers. To maximize this opportunity, it's important to be aware of the issues that matter to this group and behave in a way that shows you're informed.

But remember: There's a fine line between demonstrating your values and pushing an agenda. While 61 percent of Gen Z believe brands are better positioned than governments to solve social problems, this isn't carte blanche for brands to hop on a soapbox.

In fact, Zs are split when it comes to how much goodwill brands can gain by speaking out

on issues. Interestingly, 46 percent of survey respondents said, yes, brands should address political issues, while 36 percent said no, they shouldn't. When asked if they trust brands more when they take a stance on political issues, 34 percent of Zers answered yes while 40 percent said no.

While Gen Z's conscious capitalism has been well-documented, it's important to understand it in context. Zs are not telling you, "Yes! We want to know what your company thinks about immigration." Instead what they are asking is that you understand the issues that are important to them—and speak up only when you have a relevant and credible point of view. Don't take a stand just to capitalize on a trend, but because your brand values guide you there. If your activism is nothing but a marketing ploy, Zs will see right through you.

Don't assume (you know what happens if you do)

While Millennials grew up before the days of smartphones and Snapchat, Gen Z was shaped by a more complex and economically fraught time, as many of their families were likely hit by the Great Recession. As true digital natives who haven't known a world that wasn't connected 24/7, Zs are constantly in touch with global issues and current events.

It's this persistent and global eyes-wide-open perspective that likely contributes to increased skepticism and changing attitudes compared to past generations. For example, while 72 percent of survey respondents said they plan to get married, 21 percent said they were unsure. Responses to the question, "Do you plan on having children?" were nearly

identical at 70 percent affirmative and 21 percent unsure. These latter figures represent a departure from a traditional family structure.

So what matters for Gen Zers? When asked which issues were most important, health-care ranked No. 1, with 75 percent of Gen Zs in agreement. The cost of their college education ranked a close second at 71 percent, followed by the environment and equality at 70 percent and jobs and unemployment at 65 percent.

Here are some other surprising takeaways:

- **65 percent agree with the gun laws in their respective countries.** Among the four countries surveyed, the U.S. was the only outlier, with 70 percent of those surveyed saying they want gun laws changed.
- **50 percent agree marijuana should only be legal for medicinal purposes.** At the same time, only 35 percent believe it should be legalized outright.
- **57 percent do not believe that people are treated equally in their countries.** This occurs regardless of race, creed, color or sexual orientation—presenting an opening for brands to broach the subject with Gen Z.

Brand takeaway: No two Gen Zs are exactly alike. The key takeaway for brands here is that beyond being different from past generations, Gen Zs are also diverse in their own right.

Zs value their individuality. As a brand, you should take care to know your audience segments and avoid the slippery slope of generalization. Just because a topic is trending, it doesn't necessarily mean that it will resonate with the segment of Gen Z you're targeting.

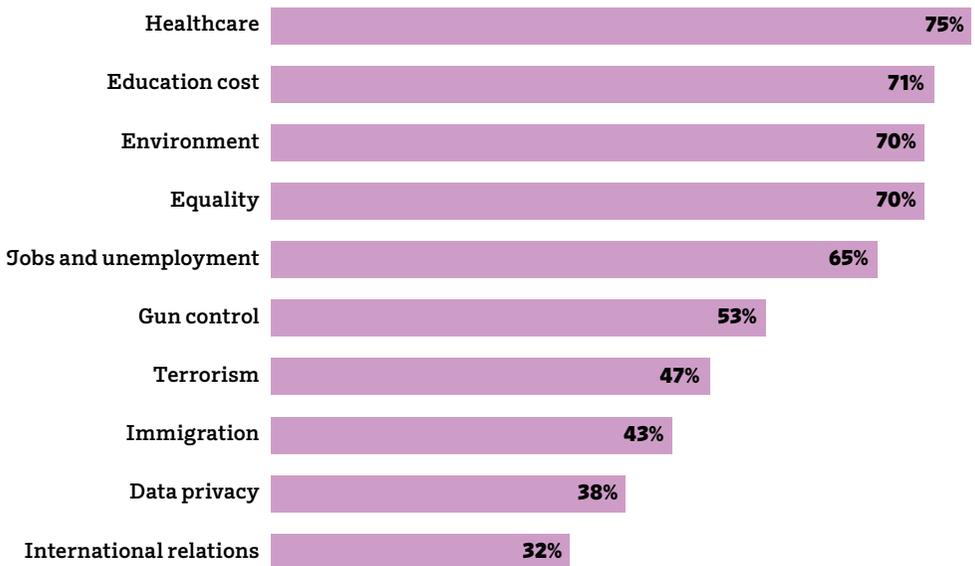
When you treat Gen Z as individuals rather than a group, you can avoid sounding tone-deaf as a brand. Zs need to feel they are being heard on issues that are important to them. For most brands, that means getting behind an issue without becoming overly political. When you do decide to take a stand, concentrate on topics that strike the core of your brand values. Don't stray too far from those values, or your message might fall flat and, as a result, alienate Zs instead.

Gen Zs are hopeful but realistic

While Gen Z has worries, they also have hope. When asked if they felt responsible for fixing

Gen Z's 10 top issues

What issues are most important to you?



Source: Future Survey, answers multiselect, all respondents.

mistakes made by previous generations, survey-takers had some pretty surprising responses. These included:

- “It is not my responsibility, but it is now my duty.”
- “Mistakes from the past need to be acknowledged and understood so we can move toward a better today and tomorrow.”

When it comes to government policy, Gen Z is keeping an eye on their respective countries’ leaders. With the exception of New Zealand respondents, Gen Zers overall are unhappy with their leaders, as 54 percent say they don’t trust elected officials. Overall, 58 percent believe their governments are not making progress on issues that are important to them, and 64 percent say their voices aren’t being heard.

At least for now, Zs plan on showing up and expressing their opinions, with 80 percent of U.S. and U.K. respondents saying they will vote in the next election—well ahead of Pew Research Center data showing 70 percent or lower turnout for all generations in the last U.S. presidential election.

Brand takeaway: Help Gen Zs help others.

Many Gen Zs are not satisfied with the status quo. Help them feel empowered to enact change that matters. If your brand sources materials responsibly, doesn’t test on animals or pays a fair wage, let Gen Zs know. Point out the impact of buying locally, and be transparent about your production process. But, most importantly, remember that Zs will expect your brand to stand behind these actions as you conduct business. In other words: Practice what you preach.

Remember that this generation is planning their future in a political and economic landscape that’s uncertain. While they want change, they are unsure about whether they can achieve lasting, meaningful transformations.

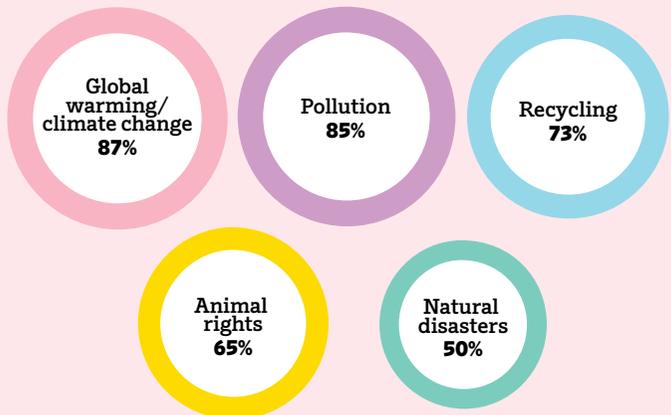
To connect with Gen Z, approach them as collaborators rather than just consumers. Engage them with messaging that encourages their feedback and supports the issues important to them. For example, encourage Gen Z to submit their own sustainable product ideas or invite them to participate in your social good initiatives.

THE GREAT UNITER: THE ENVIRONMENT

When it comes to corporate social responsibility, one issue where Gen Z showed consensus was the environment. When asked if they would be more likely to buy a product if it were environmentally friendly, 82 percent said yes. For brands, this is one relatively safe (and welcome) place to take a stand.

Top five environmental issues

Specific environmental issues are a major concern for Gen Z and an area in which they are far from ambivalent.



Source: Future Survey, answers multiselectable, all respondents.

How do you rate your government on a scale of 1 (worst) to 10 (best)?

7 → New Zealand 4 → U.K.

5 → Australia 3 → U.S.

When your brand's actions show a true understanding of Gen Z—one that goes deeper than your marketing messages—you'll succeed in tapping into their social consciousness.

Be the brand Gen Z wants to work for

Although Gen Zs feel ambivalent about the future, when it comes to life immediately after college graduation, they are most definitely worried: 70 percent say they're concerned about getting a job, and 85 percent are afraid they won't find affordable housing.

Yet, while Gen Zers aim for financial success via employment, 77 would prefer to work for a company that doesn't just offer a good salary, but also shares their political views.

Whether as employees or as customers, Zs seek brands that reflect their own points of view. The way you position your brand on social issues will shape your company's future—for better or worse.

Remember, you're not just building relationships with Gen Z consumers. You're also connecting with people who might work for your company one day soon—if they believe you're aligned with their values. Crafting the right message—one that empowers and engages Gen Z while staying true to your brand—will help you attract passionate talent and build a loyal consumer base.

Brand takeaway: Be authentic. If you're an outdoor apparel company, suddenly taking a stand on immigration would be weird. And questionable. If, instead, your company donated a percentage of your sales to keeping rivers or oceans clean, that wouldn't just make sense, it would also be believable.

When brands' actions align with their core values, Gen Z will listen. More than previous generations, they want to work with (and give

their money to) companies that make a difference in areas they care about.

They might worry about finding a job, but where they get that job is just as important. This underscores the importance of communicating with them in meaningful ways and offering them substance rather than sales come-ons. Companies that make an effort to build that relationship as this generation comes of age will enjoy their loyalty for years to come.

Building the future with Gen Z: What brands can do

The issues Gen Zs face are real and complex. Instead of sugar-coating them or offering a patronizing solution (both approaches that will backfire with Gen Z), brands should treat Zs with the respect they deserve.

- Acknowledge the issues at hand. Recognize what motivates them—and what worries them.
- Encourage dialogue and participation. Empower Gen Z through messaging that respects and responds to their individuality, not shoehorning them into a single group with homogenized views.
- Be clear on your purpose, but don't push an agenda. Demonstrate the beliefs that are important to your company and operate by them without ulterior motives.

By acknowledging Gen Zers' mixed points of view and giving them the tools and information they seek, you can inspire Gen Z to connect with your brand and take action.

Or, as one respondent wrote: "At some point someone's got to step up and be the change. Just because someone else dirtied the dish doesn't mean you can't wash it."

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About UNiDAYS

UNiDAYS is the world's leading Student Affinity Network. We connect brands to more than 10 million Gen Z college students around the world, giving them the power to make every experience more valuable and rewarding. Our award-winning marketing platform provides student verification technology and integrated marketing solutions to some of the world's most recognizable brands, including Levi's, Adidas and Samsung. Founded in 2011 by CEO Josh Rathour, UNiDAYS has offices in London, New York and Sydney, and is headquartered in Nottingham, U.K.

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