

What we know about

GEN **Z**

LITERATURE REVIEW  
OCTOBER 2018



# GEN Z

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# GEN Z INTRODUCTION

Young people today have their own view of the world, of faith, of themselves, and of their future that is different from individuals born at another time in history. Research on generational cohorts continues to be a useful way to segment the population based on age and examine their shared traits, the events that shape them, and the common attitudes and behaviors they express. As further research and experience fill in the picture, an archetype tends to emerge for each generation. Researchers may not agree on every point, and the profile will not fit every individual born within the specified birth years (which themselves are usually debated and remain somewhat flexible). But overall, a generational profile serves as a helpful construct. It helps us understand the events that shape each generation in their critical “coming of age” years, study the shared generational response to these events, and illuminate the broad-level generational identity that has evolved.

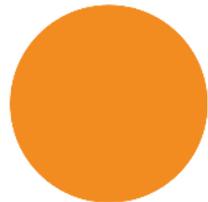
Like the generations before them, Millennials (born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s) have been widely researched, analyzed, critiqued, and satirized along with their contributions—good and bad—to society, pop culture, and the workforce. As they age into parents, entrepreneurs, CEOs, and young politicians, we are now facing a new next generation.

## **Say Hello to Generation Z**

The members of this new generation go by a variety of names coined by cultural analysts and in some cases legitimized by informal surveys of teens themselves. You may see them referred to as Generation Z (Gen Z), iGeneration (iGen), the Homeland Generation (Homelanders), the Plurals, or simply as post-Millennials. It should be noted that these cohort names have originated within the Western context and more research is needed to discover if teens around the world are aware of, or identify with, these monikers.

While there is a lack of consensus around official birth years, the oldest members of this generation are believed to have been born in the mid to late 1990s (generally 1995 and later) and the youngest members were born in the mid 2000s. Some are putting the cutoff years for Generation Z between 2012-2014, but again there is no consensus on this. As such, members of Generation Z may currently be as young as four or nearly ready to graduate college. Sources cited within this lit review reflect the broad spectrum of proposed ages for Gen Z, and in some cases dip into sampling older Millennials who are right on the cusp of the generational cutoff.

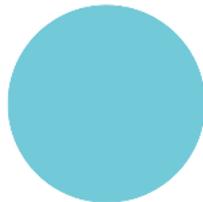
Generation Z's parents are primarily part of Generation X, though some of the earliest Gen Zers may have been born to young Baby Boomers, and some of the youngest Gen Zers are being born to Millennials. Gen Zers may also have been born to parents who can claim membership in the micro-generation of Xennials which is shorter than a decade and falls just between Gen X and Millennials.



**SILENT  
GENERATION**

The Great  
Depression

WWII

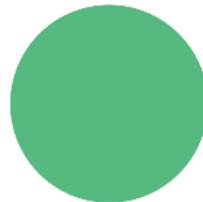


**BOOMERS**

Vietnam War

Civil Rights  
Movement

Kennedy  
Assasination

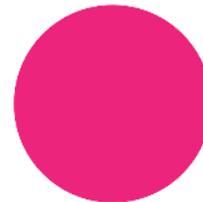


**GEN X**

Fall of the Berlin  
Wall

Challenger Disaster

Desert Storm



**MILLENNIALS**

Millennium  
Change (Y2K)

9/11

Social Media



**GEN Z**

The Great  
Recession

Smartphones

LGBTQ



**Born**

**1928-1945**

**1946-1964**

**1965-1980**

**1981-1996**

**1997-2012**



# Gen Z Age Cohort by Region



Born  
1994-2013



Total Population  
(millions)



Gen Z  
Population (millions)



Gen Z %  
in World



Gen Z %  
in Region

## NORTH AMERICA



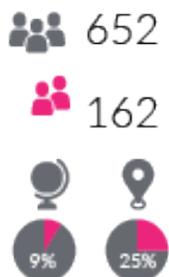
## EUROPE



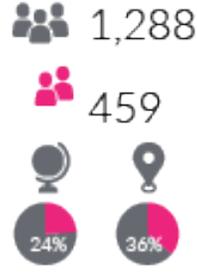
## ASIA



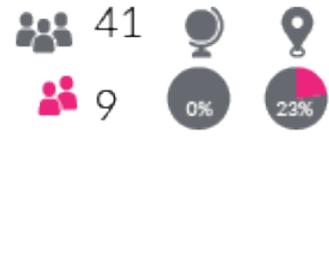
## LATIN AMERICA



## AFRICA



## OCEANIA

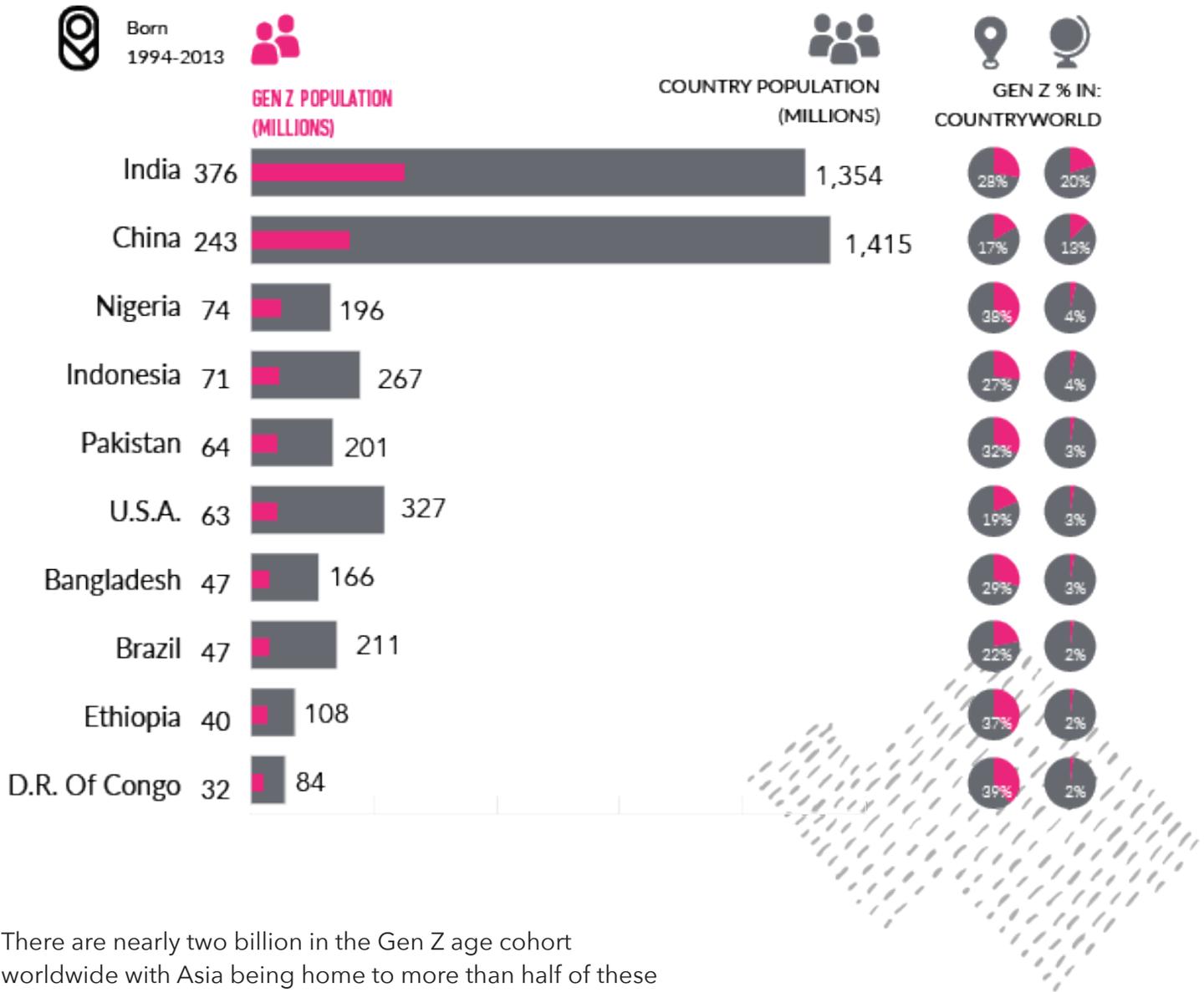


## WORLD



Those born in the Gen Z age cohort currently make up 25% of the world's total population.

# Top 10 Countries by Gen Z Age Cohort



There are nearly two billion in the Gen Z age cohort worldwide with Asia being home to more than half of these young people. India and China alone account for one-third of the global Gen Z population, with Nigeria, Indonesia, and Pakistan rounding out the top 5 youngest countries. The United States ranks sixth with approximately 63 million Gen Zers. Globally, 62% of Gen Z are in low-income or lower-middle-income countries (defined as having under \$4,000 average annual per capita income).<sup>1</sup>

India and China alone account for one-third of the global Gen Z population.

<sup>1</sup> Source data are from: United Nations Population Division, Total Population Database, <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/DataQuery/>

## Exploring Existing Answers

The purpose of this report is to provide a look at existing research on Generation Z that reveals their identity, influences, and faith beliefs. Much of the current research on the next generation is designed to inform marketing and brand positioning by exploring young people's attitudes toward spending and saving, their lifestyle habits, and the role of technology and social media in their purchasing decisions. Technology use is another area of widespread interest, with numerous studies on how Gen Z is spending its time digitally, the devices they are using, and the platforms they favor.

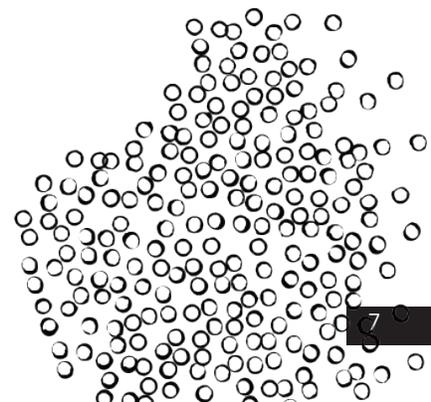
Other areas where research on Gen Z is prevalent include education and employment. Universities have commissioned studies to determine young people's attitudes toward higher education, likelihood to be able to afford their tuition, and the social and political attitudes of incoming freshman. Employment agencies are researching how Gen Z differs from previous cohorts in their attitudes toward work, their career aspirations, and how they are likely to perform in the workplace alongside older coworkers and bosses. Additional research on topics including Gen Z's religious, political, and social outlook, as well as health and risk indicators is being generated by non-profits, think tanks, and government agencies.

But there is a noticeable lack of international research on the next generation of young people, particularly in the area of religious attitudes and faith development. The majority of sources located for this report include only North American teens, and it appears that the same questions have not been asked around the world, at least among sources available in English. In fact, it may still be unclear whether Gen Z is a Western conception or a truly global phenomenon. It is also important to note that many of the statistics cited in this report were gleaned from Internet-connected teens.

Each research initiative has specific questions it is trying to answer for a specific audience. In this literature review, we will explore U.S. and international studies available in English that speak to various aspects of Generation Z. Our goal is to understand what work has already been conducted as we at OneHope consider a next-gen research study of our own.



This lit review features 38 primary research studies on teens in the Gen Z age range. It should be noted that of those, 21 included data only from teens in the U.S. or Canada.



# GEN Z INFLUENCES



**3 hours** the average time an internet-connected teen is spending on social media daily <sup>1</sup>



**9 out of 10** US teens don't go to bed without their phone <sup>2</sup>



**8/10** "second screen" while watching TV <sup>4</sup>

**12**

the average age a U.S. young person gets their own smartphone <sup>3</sup>



**98%** of Gen Z aged internet users own a smartphone <sup>5</sup>



**8 hours** the average time an internet-connected teen is spending online daily <sup>6</sup>

<sup>1,4,5,6</sup> Global Web Index | <sup>2</sup> Pew | <sup>3</sup> Google/Ipsos | <sup>7</sup> Adobe



Economic recession of 2008 was a critical influence on Gen Z as they came of age, making them hyper-concerned about their future financial outlook.

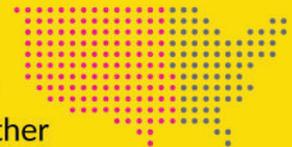
*Sparks and Honey*



## EQUALITY

is emerging as Gen Z's non-negotiable value.<sup>8</sup>

**58%** of US teens agree <sup>9</sup> "It is important not to offend other cultures or ethnicities."



**48%** of Americans under age 18 are minority ethnic groups.<sup>10</sup>

**69%** of US teens agree <sup>11</sup> "It's acceptable to be born one gender and feel like another."

Gen Z teens born into a post-9/11 world and ongoing war on terror that shapes a view of the world as unsafe.



Pew

<sup>8</sup> Barkley and Futurecast  
<sup>9</sup> Sensis and Think Now

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Census Bureau  
<sup>11</sup> Barna and Impact 360

# GEN Z

# KEY FINDINGS

## Gen Z's Faith Beliefs

- Researchers have noted declining rates of religious affiliation, particularly in the U.S. and Europe. The “rise of the nones” as it has been called continues to be a trend among Generation Z.<sup>1</sup>
- In 18 of 21 European countries, fewer than 10% of young adults attend religious services each week.<sup>2</sup>
- Today’s U.S. teens “report being less spiritual, and spend less time praying or meditating,” compared with previous generations of young people.<sup>3</sup>
- U.S. teens are twice as likely to call themselves atheist as compared to U.S. adults.<sup>4</sup>
- Though more than half (58%) of U.S. teens today self-identify as Christian, this percentage is lower than in any previous generation. Even among American teens who say they are Christian, less than half (43%) have recently attended church and 16% can be considered “unchurched.”<sup>5</sup>
- Among American Gen Z church-goers, the majority find church to be relevant and meaningful. But more than a third (36%) say the people at church are hypocritical.<sup>6</sup>
- In the UK, of the one-third of teens who say they believe in God, more than half (56%) said they wouldn’t be interested to know more about Him even if invited; an additional 26% responded that they didn’t know if they would be interested.<sup>7</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Stephen Bullivant, “Europe’s Young Adults and Religion: Findings from the European Social Survey (2014-16) to Inform the 2018 Synod of Bishops” (Twickenham, UK: Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society, 2018)

<sup>2</sup> Twenge, et al., “Generational and Time Period Differences.”

<sup>3</sup> Barna, Impact 360, “Gen Z.”

<sup>4</sup> Joshua Crossman, director and CEO, Pinetops Foundation, “The Great Opportunity: The American Church in 2050” (Seattle, WA: Pinetops Foundation, 2018), 18.

<sup>5</sup> Barna, Impact 360, “Gen Z.”

<sup>6</sup> Barna, Impact 360, “Gen Z.”

<sup>7</sup> Laura Hancock, ed., “Gen Z: Rethinking Culture” (Englewood, CO: Youth for Christ International, no date).



## Gen Z Attitudes and Behaviors

- Influenced by the economic recession of 2008, Gen Z teens appear to be hyper-focused on their future financial outlook and say that financial independence is the mark of adulthood.
- Gen Z's youthful optimism is tempered by anxiety about the future and the expectation of having to work harder and to an older age than previous generations.
- Some researchers say Generation Z is harkening back to the Baby Boomer generation in terms of conservative behaviors and a focus on hard work as a means to success.
- Risk behaviors among U.S. teens are at their lowest in decades, including drinking, smoking, drug use and teen pregnancy rates.<sup>1</sup>
- In contrast to their conservative personal attitudes and behaviors, U.S. teens tend to hold progressive views on healthcare, immigration, and other social issues such as rights for transgender people and same-sex couples. Furthermore, U.S. college students have been more politically and socially engaged recently than any other time in the past 50 years.<sup>2</sup>
- Coming of age in an increasingly diverse culture that emphasizes tolerance, U.S. teens express a strong desire to not offend others—yet they also report having difficulty dialoguing with others who don't share their ethnic background or beliefs.
- Although American teens report that their family background/upbringing is not central to their sense of self—a major departure from previous generations, most teens in the U.S. and in other regions still place a high value on family and wish to make their families proud.

<sup>1</sup> Jean M. Twenge, "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?" The Atlantic September 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Eagan, Ellen Bara Stolzenburg et al, "The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2015," Cooperative Institutional Research Program (Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA, 2016).



## Gen Z and Technology

- Gen Z teens are digital and mobile natives. Globally, Internet-connected Gen Zers are spending nearly 8 hours a day online.<sup>1</sup>
- Some researchers say they are also the first generation of “social natives,” having grown up documenting their lives on the Internet and social media.
- Some researchers are linking Gen Z’s always-connected, always-on lifestyle to a correlated rise of depression, anxiety, and even suicide.
- Nearly two-thirds (64%) of U.S. teens say they are either currently taking a break from social media, or have done so in the past.<sup>2</sup>

## Learning, Working & Leading

- Gen Z globally exhibits a high value for educational attainment as the path to their chosen career. However, they express doubt about the feasibility of obtaining and/or paying for a college degree.
- The majority of Gen Z teens prefer a hands-on, active approach to learning.
- YouTube is a hugely popular educational tool for Gen Z - yet they also value and rely on personal interaction with friends, classmates, and teachers in the learning process.
- Gen Z is entrepreneurial and self-motivated, with more than two-thirds globally - and 86% in developing markets - saying their dream is to start their own business.<sup>3</sup>
- The majority of Gen Z globally aspire to becoming leaders during their careers.
- More than any previous generation, Gen Z is crafting apparent “non-linear paths of education and work,” and may expect to have multiple careers and employers over the course of their working lives.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Generation Z,” GlobalWebIndex.net, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Hill Holiday, “Meet Gen Z: The Social Generation,” a Trilia and Origin report (2017).

<sup>3</sup> Ipsos and Citi Foundation, “Pathways to Progress.”

<sup>4</sup> Sparks and Honey, “Gen Z 2025.”

# What has shaped

# GEN Z



As with each generation, Gen Zers faced a unique set of world events that have shaped their generational psyche and influenced how they see the world. Much of what Gen Z witnessed has taught them that the world is uncertain, and possibly unsafe.<sup>1</sup> Today's teens were coming of age during the global financial crisis of 2008; and at least in the U.S., were born into a post-9/11 world and ongoing war on terror. Their growing-up years have been marked by some of the most deadly natural disasters around the world (2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami; 2010 Haiti Earthquake; 2011 Japan Earthquake and Tsunami).<sup>2</sup>

Internet-connected mobile devices have allowed Gen Z to be more in touch with what is going on around them than any previous generation. The word "social" has taken on new dimensions of meaning with the widespread usage of social media networks. But some of the negative effects of an always-on, always-connected digital life are also starting to appear.

As they look inward, Gen Z expresses the hopefulness young people naturally have, paired with similarly natural insecurities about their lack of experience and ability to predict what the future might hold. As they look outward on a unique social and cultural landscape, Gen Z is expressing a value for equality in all its forms and for the social good of all people. As they look (or don't look) upward, Gen Z teens are evaluating whether religion holds meaning for life or if spirituality is just one possible decision among many. In this lit review, we will explore these themes and others in our goal to better understand this new generation.

<sup>1</sup> Sparks and Honey, "Gen Z 2025: The Final Generation" (New York, NY: Sparks and Honey, 2015).  
<sup>2</sup> Mark McCrindle, "The Generation Map," *The ABC of XYZ: Understanding the Global Generations* (Sydney, Australia: University of New South Wales Press Ltd, 2008); Leah Swartz, Skyler Huff, and Jason Harper,

# GEN Z

# FAITH BELIEFS

Compared to other topics that will be explored in this literature review, the faith beliefs and religious attitudes of Generation Z appear to be under-researched areas. With regard to North American teens, Barna conducted an extensive U.S. survey, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada commissioned a slightly older study in 2011. Internationally there are several recent studies in the UK and one in Europe. We hardly feel this is adequate coverage to make broad statements about the religious views of an entire generation and demonstrates a need for global research that will equip the Church and others to understand the position of today's teens toward religion and Christianity in particular. Let's look at what we do know about young people's religious attitudes based on the research that has been conducted.

## **The Decline of Religion among Generation Z**

Gen Z appears so far to be the least religious generation we have ever seen. Researchers who have been tracking the religious attitudes of American young people across a nearly 50-year span say that in general, "recent birth cohorts report less approval of religious organizations, are less likely to say that religion is important in their lives, report being less spiritual, and spend less time praying or meditating."<sup>1</sup> As one expert stated, "these results are not consistent with the idea that Americans are less religious but not less spiritual."<sup>2</sup> A mere 16% of U.S. teens rank becoming spiritually mature as a future goal for their life.<sup>3</sup> Only about half report that faith is important in their daily lives, ranking it below their studies, their smartphones, and even their pets.<sup>4</sup>

Barna has discovered that the number of teens who call themselves atheists (13%) is double that of U.S. adults (6%).<sup>5</sup> Among U.S. teens, there is also an observed rise in the "nones"—those who report no religious affiliation, with more than a third (34%) of Gen Z saying this describes them.<sup>6</sup> One study found that American 12th graders today are more than twice as likely to choose "none" for their religious affiliation compared to 12th graders of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>7</sup>

Internationally, this seems to be the trend as well. In Australia, young people may be attracted to the idea of spirituality, but as much as 23% of those ages 15-24 do not identify with any religion.<sup>8</sup> A European research study conducted across multiple

<sup>1</sup> Twenge, et al., "Generational and Time Period Differences."

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Barna, Impact 360, "Gen Z," 38.

<sup>4</sup> Swartz, Huff, and Harper, "Getting to Know."

<sup>5</sup> Barna, Impact 360, "Gen Z."

<sup>6</sup> Barna, Impact 360, "Gen Z," 26.

<sup>7</sup> Jean M. Twenge, et al., "Generational and Time Period Differences."

<sup>8</sup> McCrindle, "Generation Map," 41.

countries also confirms low levels of religious affiliation and practice among their teens. In 12 of the 21 European countries studied, over half of young adults (55%-91%) don't identify with a religion or denomination. Non-affiliation is most pronounced in the Eastern European nations of the Czech Republic (91%) and Estonia (80%), but also in the Northern European countries of Sweden (75%) and the Netherlands (72%), with the UK (70%) and France (64%) also ranking highly.<sup>1</sup>

Other regions of the world may not be so bleak. For example, when East African youth were asked what they value most, the vast majority (75-88%) across the four countries said they value faith first.<sup>2</sup> More research is needed on this subject for additional regions of the world.

On its face, the religious non-affiliation of Gen Z is a discouraging finding. But some are suggesting that this research points to a strategic opportunity. The teens who identify as "nones" don't necessarily have a negative attitude toward Christianity or the church, but have simply been born into a post-Christian culture and lack knowledge of faith and the Bible.<sup>3</sup> "They are not an embittered, angry generation shaking their fists at the heavens," writes one report. "They just don't think looking up is all that important."<sup>4</sup>

### **Gen Z's Attitudes toward Christianity**

One research study projects that more than 35 million U.S. young people who were raised in Christian households will walk away from a life with Jesus by the year 2050.<sup>5</sup> Though more than half (58%) of U.S. teens today self-identify as Christian, this percentage is lower than in any previous generation. In Canada, a 2011 study of young adults age 18-34 also found a significant drop in religious affiliation. Among those raised Evangelical, Mainline, or Catholic, 63%, 34%, and 45%, respectively remained affiliated as Evangelical, Mainline, or Catholic by the time they became young adults.<sup>6</sup> In Australia, declining rates of Christianity have also been observed over the past century. Nearly all Australians identified themselves as Christian in the 1920s, whereas today this has dropped to less than 70% of the population.<sup>7</sup>

In one European study, 16 of the 21 countries surveyed report that fewer than half of their young adults consider themselves Christian. For example, in France, only 26% of young adults say they are Christians; in the UK, 21%; and in the Netherlands, 19%. Percentages that would roughly match the U.S. level are found in Ireland, Slovenia, and Portugal. The most Christian country was Poland who reports 83% of its young people are Christian. It should be noted that these percentages only give us a rough idea of Christian affiliation among Gen Z, since the study also included Millennials. A Gen Z-specific study conducted in the UK revealed that more than a third (35%) of teens say they just don't think about God and spirituality.<sup>8</sup>

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1 Bullivant, "Europe's Young."

2 Alex O. Awiti and Bruce Scott, *The East Africa Youth Survey Report*, 2016.

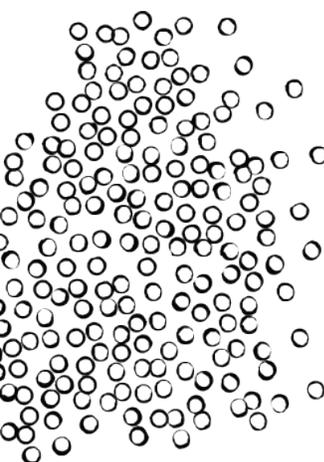
3 Barna, *Impact 360*, "Gen Z," 26;

4 Crossman, "Great Opportunity," 58.

5 *Ibid*, 18.

6 James Penner & the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, "Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and When Canadian Young Adults are Leaving, Staying and Returning to Church," 2011: 25.

7 Hancock, "Rethinking Culture."



## Is Gen Z Going to Church?

Barna reports that even of the American teens who say they are Christian, less than half (43%) have recently attended church and 16% can be considered “unchurched,” defined as not having attended church in the past six months.<sup>1</sup> Among U.S. Gen Z teens as a whole, more than half (54%) say church is “not too important” or “not at all” important to their lives. When asked to give a reason for this, the leading answer among non-Christian teens was that church is not relevant to them personally, while Christian teens opted to say they find God elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, young adults (age 18-34) in Canada who were raised Evangelical, Mainline, and Catholic all reported a sharp decline in church attendance since childhood. The percent who attended church at least once a month as children ranged from 78%, 76%, and 45% among Evangelicals, Mainline, and Catholics, respectively; as young adults, attendance declined to 48%, 18%, and 16%, respectively.<sup>3</sup>

This is not just a North American problem. A study of 21 European countries revealed that in 18 of them, fewer than 1 in 10 young adults attend religious services weekly or more frequently.<sup>4</sup> The only three countries who see more than 10% of their youth in a religious service weekly are Poland (39%), Portugal (20%), and Ireland (15%). According to some research, a mere 5% of young adults in Australia are attending church regularly, with polls showing religion is one of their lowest priorities.<sup>5</sup> “There is a perception from many that organised religion is one of the last places they’d expect to find meaning in their spiritual search,” the researcher writes in reference to Australian young people.<sup>6</sup>

There may not be specifically negative reasons for why teens have stopped going to church. At least in the U.S., fewer than 1 in 5 teens say dissatisfaction or a negative impression made them become less religious. Thirty-two percent say they just stopped attending because they were disinterested, with an additional 10% admitting they couldn’t think of a specific reason. “The majority of the disaffiliated did not go through a crisis of faith or abandon the teachings of the church,” the report summarizes. “Rather, they seemingly lost interest and drifted away... young people don’t think a life with Jesus is worth their time.”<sup>7</sup>

1 Barna, *Impact 360*, “Gen Z,” 26.

2 *Ibid.*

3 Penner & the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, “Hemorrhaging Faith,” 22.

4 Bullivant, “Europe’s Young.”

5 McCrindle, “Generation Map,” 40.

6 *Ibid.*, 42.

7 Crossman, “Great Opportunity,” 55.

## Gen Z's Attitudes toward the Church

For those young people who do find themselves at church with some regularity, what do they think about it? Again, data is extremely limited globally for this question, but we have some insight into American teen attitudes. Of those teens who do attend church, 82% say it is relevant to them and a good place to find answers for how to live a meaningful life. Churchgoing teens also say they feel they can be authentic at church (77%) and that the congregation is tolerant of those with different beliefs (63%).<sup>1</sup>

But teens hold some negative perceptions of the church in addition to these positive ones. Half of churchgoing teens in the U.S. feel the church rejects much of what science tells them about the world, more than a third (36%) say the people at church are hypocritical, and 1 in 4 say the church is not a safe place to express doubts.<sup>2</sup> When shown a variety of images and asked which best represents the Christian church, a significant number (1 out of 5) of Gen Z teens chose a negative, judgemental image (someone pointing a finger accusingly over a Bible), though a larger number (35%) chose a neutral symbol (that of a cross).<sup>3</sup>

In focus groups of Australian teens, researchers note that “the church generally does not get a great review from young people...their perceptions are of a big, structured institution rather than a community of people with a passion and a purpose”.<sup>4</sup> In the UK, of the one-third of teens who say they believe in God, more than half (56%) said they wouldn't be interested to know more about Him even if invited; an additional 26% responded that they didn't know if they would be interested.<sup>5</sup>

While teens are exhibiting a lack of curiosity about faith, churches are at the same time reporting a lack of confidence in how to minister to them. A survey of more than 2,000 churches in the UK revealed that on average only around half of the respondents believe their youth work is effective.<sup>6</sup> There is a direct correlation to church size in the responses to this question, with larger churches more likely to believe their ministry is making a difference and smaller churches less likely to. Researchers also asked UK teens what topics they would be most interested to talk about at church and compared those responses to the conversations churches are actually having. Fewer than 1 in 10 churches are regularly discussing the topics that head Gen Z's list (mental health and self-esteem, sex and relationships, and same-sex attraction).<sup>7</sup> Parents of U.S. churchgoing teens also worry that church is not engaging their youth effectively. Fewer than 1 in 4 parents believe youth group is a good place for teens to ask serious questions about the Bible or foundational Christian beliefs.<sup>8</sup>

1 Barna, Impact 360, “Gen Z.”

2 Ibid, 61.

3 Ibid, 67.

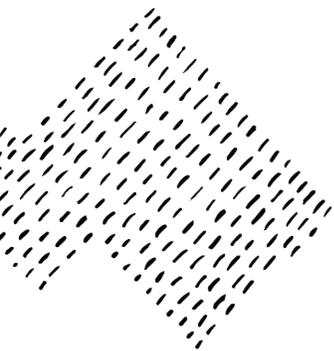
4 McCrindle, “Generation Map,” 22.

5 Hancock, “Rethinking Culture.”

6 OneHope, The Youthscape Center for Research, “Losing Heart: How Churches Have Lost Confidence in Their Work with Children and Young People” (Pompano Beach, FL: OneHope, Inc. 2016).

7 OneHope, Youthscape, “Losing Heart.”

8 Barna, Impact 360, “Gen Z.”



## Generation Z and the Bible

Gen Z is not only less religious than previous generations and less likely to attend church even if they are believers, but young people are also exhibiting a lack of strong faith in core Christian beliefs as set out in the Bible. Due to the lack of global data on this topic, this section focuses on U.S. teens. Although 58% of American teens today self-identify as Christian, just 4% of them have a biblical worldview compared to 6% of Millennials, 7% of Gen X, and 10% of Boomers.<sup>1</sup> For purposes of the study, a biblical worldview was defined by teens' responses to seven statements of belief, along with having made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their lives today.<sup>2</sup>

It is also revealing to look at how confident teens are in the beliefs they claim to hold. The Barna study points out that while Christian teens still mostly subscribe to "traditional" faith beliefs, they are not in all cases entirely convinced of those beliefs.<sup>3</sup> For example, though 98% of U.S. teens who regularly attend church agree that Jesus is the divine Son of God, only 63% say they are very sure about this; eighty-five percent agree Jesus was a real person who was crucified by Rome and was actually physically raised from the dead, but only 63% would say they are sure.<sup>4</sup>

Even among the subset of American Christians who self-identify as Evangelical, there is an observed decline in orthodoxy among the younger generation. Participants in one study were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with 47 statements such as "God answers specific prayers," "God cannot make a mistake," or, "There is one true God in three persons." Those in the 18-34 age bracket were less likely to strongly agree with foundational Evangelical beliefs than older people surveyed.<sup>5</sup> While this study lumps together some of the oldest members of Gen Z with their Millennial predecessors, it does show a gap in biblically-grounded faith beliefs among the younger generation. Results can be explored through the [State of Theology Data Explorer website](#).

Certainty about faith is declining at the same time that teens are growing up in a culture of relativism where absolute truth is not necessarily a value. Whereas 85% of Boomers would say that someone can turn out to be wrong about something they sincerely believe in, only two-thirds of Gen Z agree with that statement.<sup>6</sup> This points to a growing minority of young people who seem to think that sincere belief makes something true. In addition, only 34% of U.S. teens say lying is morally wrong, compared with 42% and 50% of Millennials and Gen X, respectively.<sup>7</sup>

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1 Barna, Impact 360, "Gen Z," 25.

2 Ibid, 113.

3 Ibid, 78.

4 Ibid.

5 LifeWay Research and Ligonier Ministries, The State of Theology Data Explorer (2016), <https://thestateoftheology.com/data-explorer/>.

6 Barna, Impact 360, "Gen Z," 65.

7 Ibid, 56.

## **Struggling to Evangelize in a Culture of Tolerance**

Gen Z faces a strong cultural emphasis on tolerance, perhaps fostered by the fact that they are the most diverse generation the world has ever raised.<sup>1</sup> Fifty-eight percent of U.S. teens agree that it is important not to offend other cultures or ethnicities.<sup>2</sup> But not all are sure how to do that. Around half report that dialoguing with those from a different ethnic background or who do not share their religious beliefs is difficult.<sup>3</sup> In the focus groups Barna conducted for its study, researchers observed that teens were “deeply reluctant to make declarative statements about anything that could cause offense,” and seemed to struggle with anxiety over giving definite answers, opting instead to say “I’m not sure” or “I’m so confused.”<sup>4</sup> This holds some concerning implications for whether Gen Z will be able to hold firmly to their faith and share it with others.

It may be the case that sharing their faith is something that is not being modeled for Gen Z. Fewer than 1 in 5 Christian parents in the U.S. believe the youth group their teen is attending is equipping them to talk about their faith with others.<sup>5</sup> Among American Christian Evangelicals of all ages, opinion is evenly divided on the importance of personal evangelism: 53% agree it is very important to personally encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior, but 47% disagree.<sup>6</sup> How can young people be expected to share their faith when the adults in their lives may not even see this as important?

**The need for intentional, costly discipleship for children and youth from an early age has never been greater.”**

**- Joshua Crossman, *The Great Opportunity***

The report goes on to say that engaging young people with their faith and retaining them within the Church is one of the greatest missions opportunities we have ever faced, but it will require intentionality.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 104; Robert P. Jones, Daniel Cox, Molly Fisch-Friedman and Alex Vandermaas-Peeler, “Diversity, Division Discrimination: The State of Young America” PRRI/MTV (2018).

<sup>2</sup> Sensis and Think Now Research, We Are Gen Z Report (2018), <http://www.wearegenzreport.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, et al., “Diversity.”

<sup>4</sup> Barna, Impact 360, “Gen Z,” 26.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>6</sup> LifeWay, State of Theology.

<sup>7</sup> Crossman, “Great Opportunity,” 59.

# GEN Z

# ATTITUDES & BEHAVIORS

## Goals & Priorities

"Whereas Millennials dreamed of changing the world, [Gen Z] actually will through a much more practical approach," says one research report.<sup>1</sup> Gen Z's practical approach includes being career-focused, ready to work hard and pursue new opportunities.<sup>2</sup> Two-thirds of U.S. teens report that they want to finish their education (66%), start a career (66%), and become financially independent (65%) by age 30.<sup>3</sup> Though the order is shuffled, these are the same top 3 goals that Millennials identified for themselves at the same age in Barna's previous research. These tangible goals rank higher than more intangible pursuits such as "follow my dreams" (important to 55% of Gen Z), "enjoy life before you have the responsibilities of being an adult (38% said this was a top priority), and "find out who you really are" (31% said this was important).<sup>4</sup>

How Generation Z defines happiness is seen to differ depending on their cultural context. Canadian teens rank "enjoying life" as their number one priority over "finding a great job" and "becoming a better person." Nearly three-quarters of them agree it's important to "have fun now because you only live once."<sup>5</sup> Teens in Vietnam say they hope to have a "happy family with people that I love" as their top goal, followed by the desire to "have a good job and live a normal peaceful life" as their second.<sup>6</sup> When U.S. teens are pressed to define what happiness looks like, nearly half (43%) of them define it as financial success, while 23% say educational attainment and 20% family.<sup>7</sup> In responding to this survey question, teens literally selected the image of a person holding a handful of \$100 dollar bills to represent their picture of success.

For teens in the U.S. at least, this fierce ambition for financial success may trace back to the uncertainty of the times in which they grew up.<sup>8</sup> In the global financial crisis between 2007-2010, young people watched their parents lose opportunities and that may be making Gen Z hyper-concerned about their own future.<sup>9</sup> They saw the net

1 Swartz, Huff, and Harper, "Getting to Know."

2 Vision Critical, "The Everything Guide to Generation Z," research by Maru/VCR&C, 2016, [https://www.visioncritical.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/GenZ\\_Final.pdf](https://www.visioncritical.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/GenZ_Final.pdf).

3 Barna, Impact 360, "Gen Z."

4 Ibid, 53.

5 Giselle Kovary, Robert Pearson, "A Generation to Look Up To: 2017 Gen Z National Survey," n-gen People Performance, Inc. (2017).

6 OMD Decision Lab, "Genzilla: They're Coming. Get Ready," Vietnam, 2015.

7 Barna, Impact 360, "Gen Z," 14, 21.

8 Barna, Impact 360, "Gen Z," 29.

9 Claudine McCarthy, "Prepare for Changes on Campus by Gaining Insight into New Generation of Students," Student Affairs Today 20:3 (2017).

worth of their parents fall by as much as 45% during these years and their Millennial siblings struggle to find jobs and leave the home.<sup>1</sup> Nearly two-thirds of U.S. Gen Zers admit they are worried about their future.<sup>2</sup>

Gen Z is keenly aware that things can change drastically overnight, and they are determined not to get caught unprepared.<sup>3</sup> Eighty-five percent of Gen Z teens in Canada agree that it is important to save money for the future.<sup>4</sup> In America, 70% of U.S. teens say they are working entrepreneurial jobs already.<sup>5</sup> Teens also do not believe anything will be handed to them. Sixty-nine percent of U.S. teens report they believe becoming successful has little or nothing to do with luck and 77% believe they'll need to work harder than previous generations to have a fulfilling professional life.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, teens are bracing themselves to work into their later years, with more than half (54%) of Canadian and American teens reporting they expect to work until age 70.<sup>7</sup>

One area where Gen Z diverges from Millennials is how they define having reached adulthood. U.S. Millennials believe emotional maturity is the primary mark of being an adult (49%), followed by financial independence (25%), while Gen Z reverses the priority of these two values with a very similar statistical spread. Forty-two percent of U.S. teens say financial independence is the benchmark of adulthood, and only 23% believe emotional maturity is the benchmark.<sup>8</sup>

### **A Pragmatic Yet Positive Outlook**

This is a generation living with eyes wide open as they look critically at the world around them. Only half of U.S. teens express optimism about the national economy, and fewer than that (46%) report feeling optimistic about the global economy, lower percentages than any other generation surveyed. American Gen Zers are also more depressed about the state of the environment than their parents and grandparents (52% say they are optimistic about this compared to 60% of Gen X).

Yet Gen Z pairs pragmatism with a personal optimism that outpaces any other generation alive today. According to the same study, 88% of American teens say they are optimistic about their personal futures and 66% say they feel the same about the future of their future children.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, a survey conducted across 7 countries in Africa found that 81% of African teens report feeling optimistic about their futures, and 65% are optimistic about the future of their country. Globally, teens believe that relative to their parents they are better off in many areas, including their ability to get an education (83%), achieve their professional goals (78%) and have opportunities for professional success (77%).<sup>10</sup>

1 Sparks and Honey, "Gen Z 2025."

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 Kovary and Pearson, "A Generation."

5 Sparks and Honey, "Gen Z 2025."

6 Swartz, Huff, and Harper, "Getting to Know"; Robert Half and Enactus, "Get Ready for Generation Z" (Menlo Park, CA: Robert Half International Inc., 2015).

7 Half and Enactus, "Get Ready."

8 Gallup and Operation HOPE, "2016 Gallup-HOPE Index," 54.

9 Vision Critical, "Everything Guide."

10 Ipsos and Citi Foundation, "Pathways to Progress Global Youth Survey 2017: Economic Prospects and Expectations," Global Youth Survey 2017, (2017).



When asked to pick words to describe themselves, U.S. teens selected happy (42%), confident (34%), excited (29%), motivated (29%), and optimistic (28%).<sup>1</sup> African teens describe themselves mainly as hard-working (31%), ambitious (21%), and resourceful (20%).<sup>2</sup> Four in ten young Americans say they want to invent something that will change the world.<sup>3</sup>

## Conservative Behaviors

When asked what they spend their time on daily, U.S. teens ranked their grades in school as number one and getting into college as their second focus, even above other things including time relaxing and hanging out with friends.<sup>4</sup> Gen Z exhibits a strong focus on hard work and educational attainment, attitudes that have caused researchers to call them a conservative generation that is reverting back to traditional values of older generations such as Baby Boomers.<sup>5</sup> African teens are among those exhibiting a strong allegiance to traditional values of behavior, with the vast majority (73%) agreeing they are very important and should be preserved for future generations, in contrast to modern values.<sup>6</sup>

Gen Z is pairing these traditional values with conservative personal behaviors. Researchers are pointing out that risk behaviors among young people in the U.S. are at their lowest in decades. This includes drinking, smoking, drug use and teen pregnancy rates.<sup>7</sup> In Europe, a study of youth in the Netherlands shows that risk behaviors for Dutch school-aged children are relatively low and in some cases decreasing. Only 16% report having been drunk once as a teenager, 12% having smoked a joint, and 9% as having had sex.<sup>8</sup>

Drawing from studies of more than 8 million U.S. teens over 40 years, cultural researcher Jean Twenge says that the observed decline in adult activities among teens even for example driving suggests “a slow life strategy.”<sup>9</sup> Especially in Western contexts, the need to grow up quickly and be a financial provider for the family is not as pronounced among young people as it may have been at previous times in our history, so teens can take their time in adolescence. According to Twenge, today’s 18-year-old more closely resembles a 15-year-old of the 1970s or ‘80s, specifically with regard to how they are (not) experimenting with adult behaviors such as drinking, drugs, and sex.

In fact, only 1 in 5 of U.S. teens say they are enthusiastic about the advent of adulthood.<sup>10</sup> This reluctance to grow up is also being seen in other parts of the world. In Vietnam, two-thirds of teens disagree when asked if they are excited to grow up and move out of their parent's homes.<sup>11</sup>

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1 Vision Critical, “Everything Guide.”

2 Florence de Bigault, “African Youth: Meet the 15-24 Year-Olds with Ipsos Africap,” Ipsos (2016).

3 Gallup and Operation HOPE, “The 2016 Gallup-HOPE Index: Quantifying the Economic Energy of America’s Youth” (Washington, DC: Gallup, Inc., 2017).

4 Swartz, Huff, and Harper, “Getting to Know.”

5 Ibid.

6 Bigault, “African Youth.”

7 Twenge, “Have Smartphones.”

8 Letty Darwish, Thomas van Gaal, Nienke Nuyens, “Being Young in the Netherlands,” Netherlands Youth Institute (2012).

9 Jean M. Twenge and Heejung Park, “The Decline in Adult Activities Among U.S. Adolescents, 1976-2016,” *Child Development* 18 September 2017.

10 Barna, Impact 360, “Gen Z,” 52.

11 OMD Decision Lab, “Genzilla.”

## Family Relationships

Gen Z is the first generation Barna studied that does not rank family at the top of their list of influences. Teens say professional and educational achievement is most important to their sense of self (43%), followed by their hobbies and pastimes (42%), and gender/sexuality (37%).<sup>1</sup> The role their family background and upbringing plays on shaping their identity is fifth on the list. U.S. teens are just as likely to say friends are central to their identity as their family. Yet despite that, they still report respecting and admiring their family. Sixty-nine percent of U.S. teens have reported their parents are their top role model.<sup>2</sup> And in the UK, 82% of teens say making their family proud is a priority.<sup>3</sup>

In a global study that included 16 countries, teens reported they are just as likely to spend time with their family (44%) as hanging out with friends or watching TV or movies.<sup>4</sup> For teens in Vietnam, making their parents proud heads their list of values, with 45% of teens saying this makes them the most happy, followed by getting good grades (29%) and actually spending time with their family (28%).<sup>5</sup> The vast majority of East African teens (40%-60%) report valuing family most highly, a priority that comes second only to their emphasis on their faith.<sup>6</sup>

Globally, family still claims an influential place in the life of young people, and it remains to be seen whether the decline in U.S. teens' attitudes toward their parents is reflective of their life stage or indeed a generational shift in priorities.

## Social and Cultural Attitudes

Researchers are noting that today's teens are a generation full of contrasts.<sup>7</sup> One area where this becomes apparent is in how they pair conservative personal attitudes and behaviors with highly progressive views on social issues. Seven out of 10 U.S. teens report they believe it's acceptable to be born one gender and feel like another; three in 10 report personally knowing someone who has changed his or her gender identity.<sup>8</sup> Gender identity is a banner issue for Gen Z, but there are many other social causes they are expressing strong opinions about as well. The majority of American teens believe transgender people should have equal rights (74%), everyone should have the right to marry regardless of sexual orientation (73%), healthcare should be free for everyone (64%), and everyone should have the right to become a U.S. citizen regardless of birth country or how they came to be here (55%).<sup>9</sup>

Headlining their list of very important social causes, 94% report being concerned about human rights issues, 89% about poverty issues, and 87% about racial inequality.<sup>10</sup> These are mature concerns for young people. A national survey of incoming college freshman in 2015 found that U.S. students were the most politically

1 Barna, Impact 360, "Gen Z," 41.

2 Northeastern University and FTI Consulting, "Innovation Imperative: Portrait of Generation Z," Northeastern University 4th Annual Innovation Poll (FTI Consulting, Inc., 2015).

3 Hancock, "Rethinking Culture."

4 Jane Cheung, Simon Glass, David McCarty, Christopher K. Wong, "Uniquely Generation Z: What Brands Should Know About Today's Youngest Consumers," National Retail Federation and IBM Institute for Business Value (Somers, NY: IBM Corporation, 2017).

5 OMD Decision Lab, "Genzilla."

6 Awiti and Scott, East Africa.

7 Swartz, Huff, and Harper, "Getting to Know."

8 Barna, Impact 360, "Gen Z," 47.

9 Northeastern University and FTI Consulting, "Innovation Imperative."

10 Vision Critical, "Everything Guide."

and socially engaged that they've been since the poll was launched 50 years ago.<sup>1</sup> That data also revealed the highest proportion of left-leaning students since 1973, with roughly one-third of students self-identifying as "liberal" or "far left."

There's no question Gen Z is the most ethnically diverse generation we have ever seen. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 48% of Gen Z is non-Caucasian.<sup>2</sup> Today's young people appear to be embracing diversity as a defining quality of their generation. Among U.S. teens, 75% indicate they have friends from different backgrounds, races and beliefs, and 61% agree that having diverse friends makes them better people.<sup>3</sup>

According to some research, equality is the key issue of this generation, with teens rallying behind the topics of racial, gender, and sexual orientation equality as non-negotiables.<sup>4</sup> Yet their passion for equality does not yet match their lived experience. One in four young people in the U.S. report having been discriminated against in the past year.<sup>5</sup> Racial discrimination is the most common type of bias reported, with nearly three-fifths of those who experienced it describing it as direct and purposeful.<sup>6</sup> Specific population segments that appear to be the victims of increased discrimination include Muslims, transgenders and women.<sup>7</sup>

Fifty-eight percent of American teens agree it is important not to offend.<sup>8</sup> But they don't necessarily know how to accomplish that goal. The same study that spotlighted the prevalence of discrimination also discovered that young people feel conflicted about how to have open and honest conversations on topics including race and religion. Around half report that dialoguing with those from a different ethnic background or who do not share their religious beliefs is difficult.<sup>9</sup>

Some appear to be coping by avoiding or ignoring the issue entirely. When Barna asked teens if most of their friends share their beliefs in common, the highest reporting segment (34%) say they are not sure. "Their tolerance thresholds tend to be high and their appetite for antagonizing low," says the report.<sup>10</sup>

## Teens will be Teens

When it comes right down to it, the majority of young people are worrying most about the issues that impact them and their immediate future. This includes potential unemployment (60%), terrorism (60%) and the cost of college (57%).<sup>11</sup> So despite being called a generation "mature beyond its years," at the end of the day, Gen Z is

1 Kevin Eagan, Ellen Bara Stolzenburg et al, "The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2015," Cooperative Institutional Research Program (Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA, 2016).

2 Libby Kane, "Meet Generation Z, the 'Millennials on Steroids' Who Could Lead the Charge for Change in the US," Business Insider, accessed September 22, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com/generation-z-profile-2017-9>.

3 Pearson, "Beyond Millennials: The Next Generation of Learners," Global Research and Insights, August 2018. [https://www.pearson.com/content/dam/one-dot-com/one-dot-com/global/Files/news/news-announcements/2018/The-Next-Generation-of-Learners\\_final.pdf](https://www.pearson.com/content/dam/one-dot-com/one-dot-com/global/Files/news/news-announcements/2018/The-Next-Generation-of-Learners_final.pdf)

4 Swartz, Huff, and Harper, "Getting to Know."

5 Jones, et al., "Diversity."

6 Ibid.

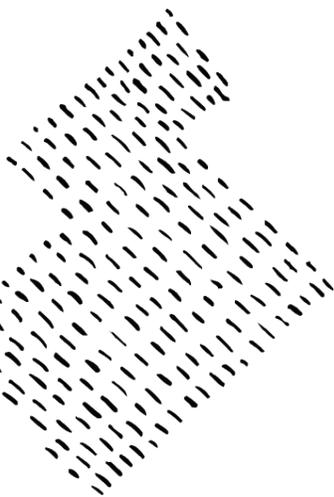
7 Ibid.

8 Sensis and Think Now, We Are Gen Z.

9 Jones, et al, "Diversity, Division, Discrimination."

10 Barna, Impact 360, "Gen Z," 104.

11 Jones, et al., "Diversity."



still a cohort of young people with the priorities that come along with being young.<sup>1</sup> After homework, their top daily activities are relaxing and hanging out with friends.<sup>2</sup> The old adage “have fun now because you only live once” is in full effect for some, with 74% of Canadian teens saying this characterizes their attitude.<sup>3</sup> Young people are spending their money on food, clothes, and video games.<sup>4</sup> And 59% of them are financing those purchases out of an allowance from their parents.<sup>5</sup> They are even willing to call themselves lazy, a description upon which both Gen Xers and Millennials agree.<sup>6</sup>

They may think they know it all—nearly half (47%) of U.S. teens say they already consider themselves an expert on something.<sup>7</sup> But they are also willing to admit they don’t—more than a quarter say they don’t have clear goals for where they want to be in five years.<sup>8</sup> What the majority (51%) agree on is that their ultimate goal in life is happiness.<sup>9</sup> Driven, ambitious, and progressive, yes, but a Gen Z teen is still a teen—with hopes and dreams and plenty in life still to figure out.



1 Vision Critical, “Everything Guide,” 6.

2 Swartz, Huff, and Harper, “Getting to Know.”

3 Kovary and Pearson, “Gen Z.”

4 Google/Ipsos, U.S., “The Mobile-First Mindset of Gen Z,” 2016.

5 Cheung, et al., “Uniquely.”

6 Universum, “Building Leaders for the Next Decade: How to Support the Workplace Goals of Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z,” Generations Series, Insead: The Business School for the World, Emerging Markets Institute, The HEAD Foundation, and Leadership Center: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, contributors (2017).

7 Sparks and Honey, “Gen Z 2025.”

8 Barna, Impact 360, “Gen Z,” 51.

9 Ibid.

# GEN Z

## THE TECH EFFECT

One of the more studied areas with regard to Gen Z is the influence technology and social media is exerting on them and the importance they ascribe to it. Gen Z has the distinction of being a generation of digital natives who grew up on the Internet, mobile natives who grew up with smartphones, and they are now being called the first generation of true “social natives” who also grew up on social media.<sup>1</sup> We do not yet know what effects this complex cocktail of influences will have or how far-reaching the potential consequences on generational identity and behavior. But let’s look at a few things research has revealed.

### Life in Digital

Today’s young people do not recall a time before the Internet and mobile devices, in contrast to other generations who have pioneered these things or been given the choice to adopt them later in life.<sup>2</sup> Globally, 98% of Gen Z Internet users report personally owning a smartphone.<sup>3</sup> In the U.S. at least, teens report having received their first smartphone at age 12, a device nine out ten report they don’t go to bed without.<sup>4</sup> Two-thirds of U.S. teens report spending most of their time outside of school and jobs connected to the Internet, even admitting they probably spend too much time online—but they don’t intend to cut back.<sup>5</sup>

Internet-connected Gen Zers globally are spending nearly 8 hours of their day online.<sup>6</sup> In some countries, that average is even higher, such as in the UK where are spending 10.6 hours online on average.<sup>7</sup>

Overall, teens report spending longer online on their mobile devices (4 hours and 10 minutes daily) than on all other devices combined and their screen time across all devices is more than an hour longer than the global average for adults.<sup>8</sup> Not only

1 Dimock, “Defining Generations”; Google/Ipsos, U.S., “The Mobile-First Mindset of Gen Z,” 2016; Hill Holiday, “Meet Gen Z: The Social Generation,” a Trilia and Origin report (2017).

2 The Center for Generational Kinetics and Jason Dorsey, “iGen Tech Disruption: 2016 National Study on Technology and the Generation after Millennials” (Austin, TX: The Center for Generational Kinetics, LLC, 2016).

3 “Generation Z,” GlobalWebIndex.net, 2017. <https://insight.globalwebindex.net/hubfs/Downloads/Generation-Z-Infographic.pdf?t=1517499026100>.

4 Google/Ipsos, “Mobile-First”; Amanda Lenhart, “Teen, Social Media and Technology Overview 2015,” Pew Research Center, April 2015.

5 Sparks and Honey, “Gen Z 2025.”

6 “Generation Z,” GlobalWebIndex.net.

7 Digital Europe, “Adobe Experience Manager 6.4: Defining the Next Wave of Content Driven Experiences,” Adobe Digital Experience Blog 8 February 2018, <https://blogs.adobe.com/digitaleurope/digital-marketing/adobe-experience-manager-6-4-defining-the-next-wave-of-content-driven-experiences/>.

8 “Generation Z,” GlobalWebIndex.net.

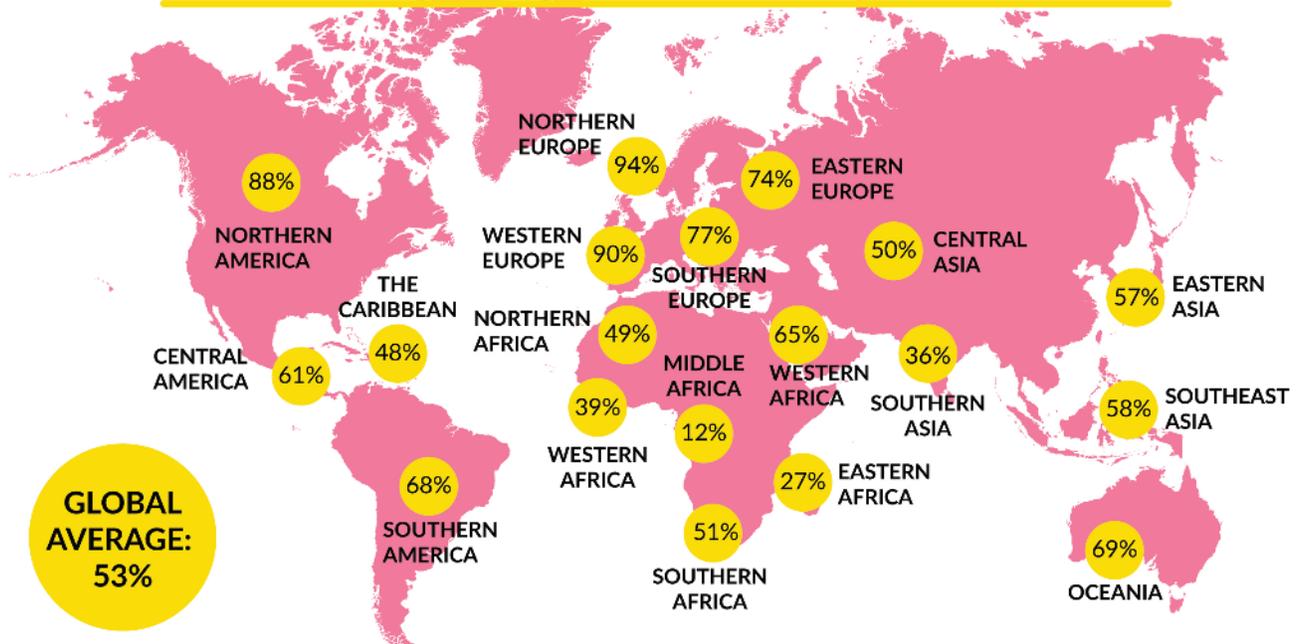
are they spending more time on their devices, but they are also using more of them than any previous generation. Eight out of ten Gen Z Internet users report they regularly use another device while watching TV, a phenomenon called “second screening.”<sup>1</sup> Another global study confirmed that 66% of Gen Z frequently uses more than one device at the same time.<sup>2</sup> “[This generation] will determine how every other generation ultimately uses technology,” says one study, noting how young people lead the way and their usage of new devices and platforms tends to ripple up to older generations.<sup>3</sup>

However, it is important to note that the effects of technology are not being equally or simultaneously felt in all markets. For example, the average Internet penetration in Africa is only 21%. Millions of African youth are not growing up fully digital natives, and may in fact be more similar to Millennials than to their Gen Z counterparts in the developed world.<sup>4</sup> Even in South Africa, a country widely considered to be on the leading edge of the continent, there is no observed difference between the number of Millennials or Gen Zers who are accessing the Internet, and in both groups only 38% spend more than 10 hours a week online.<sup>5</sup> This is in sharp contrast to Western teens for whom Internet access is essentially an assumption.

But on the whole, technology is a factor that is positioned to smooth out geographic differences and give way to global teen norms for Generation Z. As this influence is growing stronger, some researchers are saying the differences between youth in separate countries are becoming fewer.<sup>6</sup>

## INTERNET PENETRATION BY REGION

REGIONAL PENETRATION FIGURES COMPARING INTERNET USERS TO TOTAL POPULATION



SOURCES: INTERNETWORLDSTATS; ITU; EUROSTAT; INTERNETLIVESTATS; CIA WORLD FACTBOOK; MIDEASTMEDIA.ORG; FACEBOOK; GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS; REGULATORY AUTHORITIES; REPUTABLE MEDIA. NOTE: PENETRATION FIGURES ARE FOR TOTAL POPULATION REGARDLESS OF AGE.

Excerpted from <https://wearesocial.com/blog/2018/01/global-digital-report-2018> (slide 29)

1 Ibid.

2 Cheung, et al., “Uniquely.”

3 The Center for Generational Kinetics and Dorsey, “iGen Tech Disruption.”

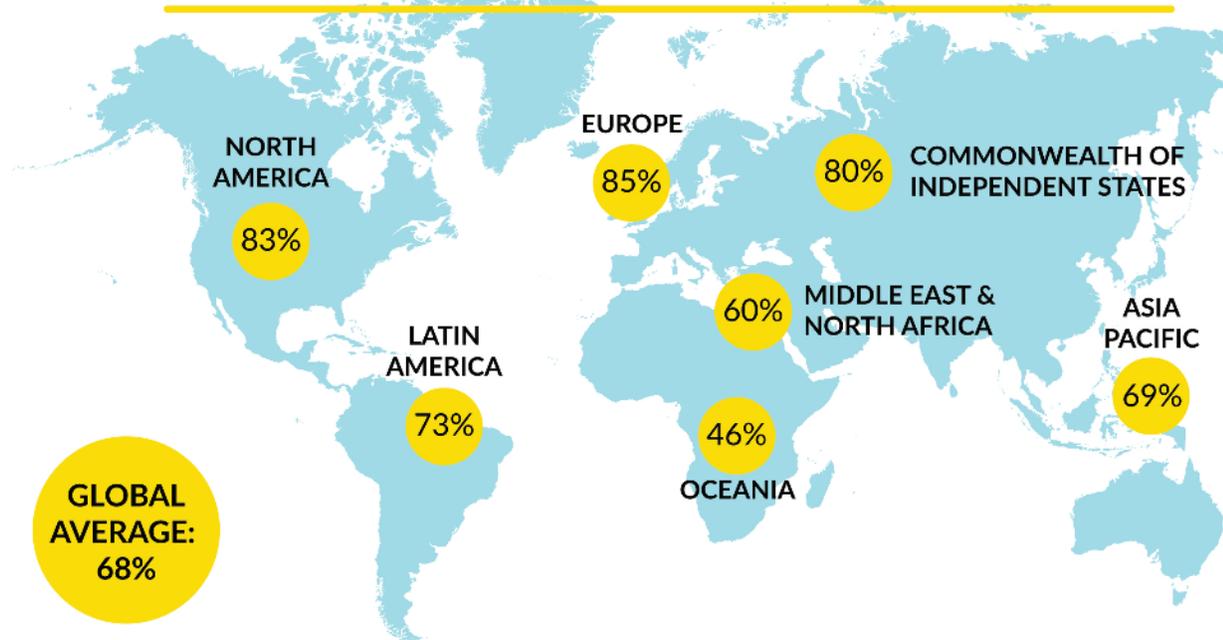
4 Gabriella Mulligan and Tracy Burrow, “African Gen Z Report 2018,” Alex Hawkes, ed., (London, UK: Liquid Telecom, 2018).

5 Rachel Thompson, “Capturing the Gen Z Opportunity,” Growth for Knowledge press release 10 October 2017, <https://www.gfk.com/en-za/insights/press-release/capturing-the-generation-z-opportunity/>.

6 The Center for Generational Kinetics and Dorsey, “iGen Tech Disruption.”

# UNIQUE MOBILE USER PENETRATION BY REGION

THE NUMBER OF UNIQUE MOBILE USERS IN EACH COUNTRY COMPARED TO THE TOTAL POPULATION

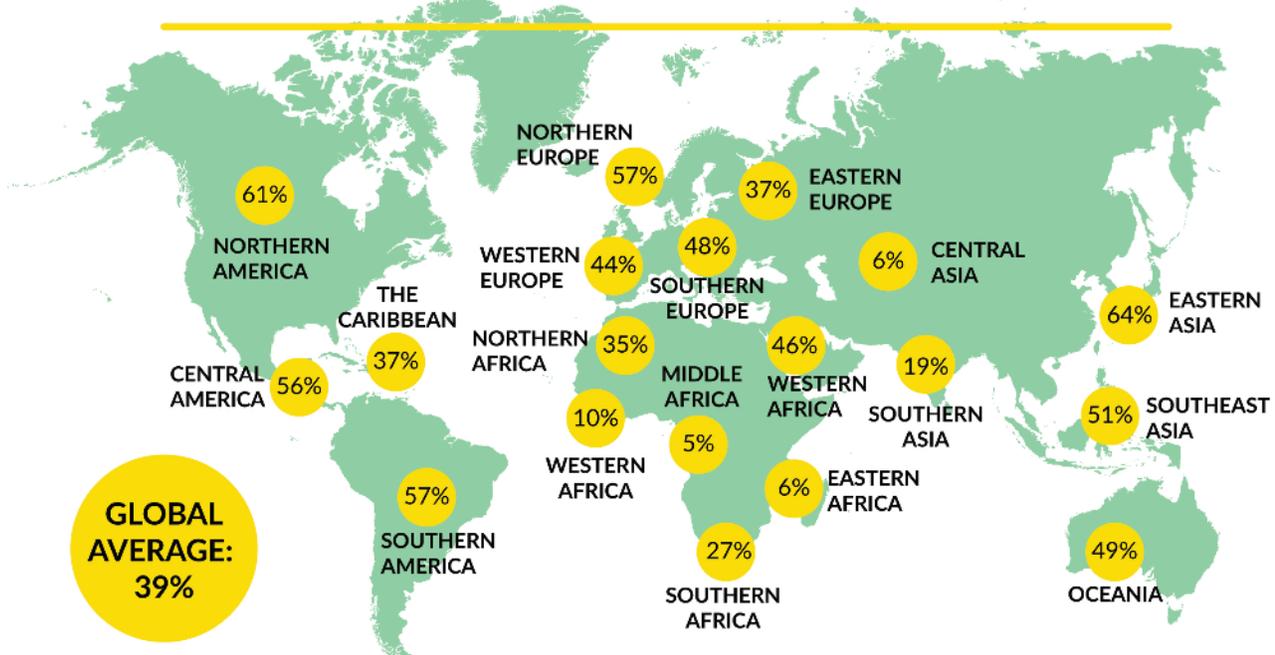


SOURCES: EXTRAPOLATED DATA FROM GSMA INTELLIGENCE, 2017.

Excerpted from <https://wearesocial.com/blog/2018/01/global-digital-report-2018> (slide 93)

# MOBILE SOCIAL MEDIA PENETRATION BY REGION

ACTIVE ACCOUNTS ON THE TOP SOCIAL NETWORK IN EACH COUNTRY ADDRESSING VIA MOBILE, COMPARED TO POPULATION



SOURCES: FACEBOOK; TENCENT; VKONTAKTE; KAKAO; NAVER; DING; TECHRASA; SIMILARWEB; KEPIOS ANALYSIS. NOTE: PENETRATION FIGURES ARE TOTAL POPULATION REGARDLESS OF AGE..

Excerpted from <https://wearesocial.com/blog/2018/01/global-digital-report-2018> (slide 83)

## How Digital is Shaping Them

The long-term effects of Gen Z growing up online are yet to be seen, particularly on a global scale, however some observations have surfaced. Gen Z is being called an “on-demand generation” that has come to expect the content they want when they want it, wherever they happen to be.<sup>1</sup> The expectation of immediacy is being fostered by an on-demand economy that ranges from media streaming platforms to web services such as Amazon Prime and to delivery apps that enable a user to get almost any item brought to them in as little as an hour.<sup>2</sup> Gen Z appears to be demonstrating a level of impatience when it comes to digital products and services. Sixty-two percent say they will not use an app or website that is hard to navigate and almost as many (60%) agree they will not use an app or website that is too slow to load.<sup>3</sup>

With a seemingly unlimited number of platforms at their fingertips, Gen Zers are constantly curating their online identity. “Teens have the ability to decide who they want to be at any given point in time and how they want to share that image,” one study says.<sup>4</sup> In fact, some are making the argument that the image teens want to pursue online may be driving their off-line choices and behaviors. For example, of teens in Vietnam, 88% say they will choose to join an activity if it lets them have fun with friends and later on they will have photos to post of the experience.<sup>5</sup> Another report calls this “the Instagram effect” and notes that teens may feel a need to constantly document an experience-rich, fun view of their life on social media.<sup>6</sup> Nearly a third of U.S. Gen Z teens say that social media directly affects your popularity; almost half of teens in Vietnam agree the number of likes and/or comments on a social media post shows their popularity.<sup>7</sup> Given how public their digital lives are, Gen Z cares about presenting the right image to their peers.

Teens are more cautious online than one might expect, and are developing ways to protect themselves as citizens of a digital world. For example, young people are exhibiting a skepticism of things they see online. 79% of teens in Vietnam report they enjoy reading news on Facebook, but 83% say they don’t trust comments or feedback given on the platform. Only about 1 in 4 say they trust information even their friends share on social media.<sup>8</sup> Young people are watching what they post too. More than half of U.S. teens (57%) report having refrained from posting something because they felt it would reflect badly on them in the future; two-thirds confirm they have gone back to edit or delete a post; and nearly half (45%) report they have removed their name from photos they were tagged in.<sup>9</sup> Nearly 1 in 5 of U.S. teens say they published something online that they later regretted.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps largely for this reason, young people are showing a preference for platforms that enable impermanence, such as Snapchat where messages and images disappear immediately after viewing or Instagram’s

1 Vision Critical, “Everything Guide.”

2 Deborah Weinswig, “Gen Z: Get Ready for the Most Self-Conscious, Demanding Consumer Segment,” Fung Global Retail and Technology (Hong Kong: The Fung Group, 2016).

3 Cheung, et al., “Uniquely.”

4 Swartz, Huff, and Harper, “Getting to Know.”

5 OMD Decision Lab, “Genzilla.”

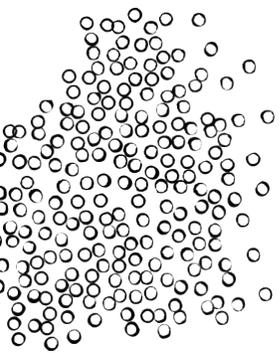
6 Weinswig, “Gen Z.”

7 The Center for Generational Kinetics and Dorsey, “iGen Tech Disruption.”

8 OMD Decision Lab, “Genzilla.”

9 Mary Madden, Amanda Lenhart, Sandra Cortesi, Urs Gasser, Maeve Duggan, Aaron Smith, and Meredith Beaton, *Teens, Social Media, and Privacy*, Pew Research Center and The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, 21 May 2013, 13.

10 Ibid.



stories feature which makes content available for only 24 hours.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Double Edged Sword of Social Media**

What do teens themselves think and feel about the interconnected, always-on digital lives they lead? Around half of U.S. teens say they use social media “almost constantly” and that it “blends together with other ways in which I interact with friends and find content.”<sup>2</sup> The large majority (81%) agree that technology improves their lives, with almost as many (77%) specifically saying that social media provides more benefits than drawbacks.<sup>3</sup> They say it has a positive impact on their friendships (71%) and makes it easier to connect with people (66%).<sup>4</sup>

However, research is uncovering an emerging awareness in young people of the potentially negative effects of their digital lives. More than two-thirds of teens in the UK rank social media at the top of their list of things that make them feel bad about themselves.<sup>5</sup> A study of U.S. teens shows a nearly identical number (68%) say social media sometimes or often makes them feel sad, anxious, or depressed. Nearly 1 in 4 (22%) say social media makes them feel like they are missing out; 29% say it hurts their self-esteem or makes them feel insecure.<sup>6</sup> Less than two-thirds of U.S. teens say social media helps them express themselves (58%).<sup>7</sup>

Some are tiring of the never-ending social media loop, recognizing not-so-positive effects on their lives and taking action. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of U.S. teens say they are either currently taking a break from social media, or have done so in the past; more than a third (34%) report they have quit a platform for good. Wasting too much time on the platform was a leading motivation for quitting, but young people also said there was too much negativity, too much pressure to get attention, and that social media was making them feel bad about themselves.<sup>8</sup>

This may be getting to the heart of the issue. “Social media is where they feel most “seen”—but the version of themselves that is being seen isn’t authentic,” Barna writes. Teens appear to be sharing their real lives with others, but the things they post online may not match how they really feel. Some generational researchers on the forefront of this issue have already started to highlight the correlation between higher screen time and higher rates of depression, general unhappiness, and even suicidal tendencies. In 2011, for the first time in nearly a quarter of a century, the teen suicide rate surpassed the homicide rate at the very time that the first Gen Zers would be squarely in their teenage years.<sup>9</sup> Is this coincidence or something more sinister?

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1 Hill Holiday, “Meet Gen Z.”

2 Ibid.

3 Sensis and Think Now, *We Are Gen Z*; Hill Holiday, “Meet Gen Z.”

4 Hill Holiday, “Meet Gen Z.”

5 Hancock, “Rethinking Culture.”

6 Hill Holiday, “Meet Gen Z.”

7 Sensis and Think Now, *We Are Gen Z*.

8 Hill Holiday, “Meet Gen Z.”

9 Twenge, “Have Smartphones.”

## As teens have started spending less time together, they have become less likely to kill one another, and more likely to kill themselves.”

writes generational researcher Jean Twenge in an article titled “Have smartphones destroyed a generation?”<sup>1</sup> Twenge is one of the first to so blatantly blame technology and social media for young people’s mental health issues, but she may not be the last, and it will be interesting to see if these same trends begin to be uncovered around the world.



# GEN Z

# LEARNING, WORKING, & LEADING

Generation Z are the employees of tomorrow, poised to comprise as much as 20% of the workforce by the year 2020.<sup>1</sup> Many are wondering what this new generation will be like to work with, so research is being aimed at revealing the attitudes today's young people have toward education, work, and career.

## How Gen Z Prefers to Learn

When it comes to how Gen Z likes to learn, students and educators agree that today's young people learn best by doing/creating.<sup>2</sup> This was the most highly ranked learning method among the 3,500 students and teachers polled across four countries (USA, UK, Australia, and Germany). "Watching" was the second highest ranked learning method, followed by researching online, and collaborating.

It is clear Gen Z students are not passive learners. "Gen Z students flourish in any learning environment where they can flex their aptitude for self-reliance and their ability to self-educate," says one report.<sup>3</sup>

But that is not to say that teachers are unnecessary to the learning process. In a study of US high schoolers and college students, 78% agreed that teachers are very important to their learning and development.<sup>4</sup> It's just that young people dislike some of the facets of a more traditional learning model. Reading and writing ranked among the bottom of the list of students' preferred learning methods.<sup>5</sup> Only 12% of U.S. teens say they learn best by listening to a lecture and fewer than half (46%) say homework is a helpful learning tool.<sup>6</sup> Though technology aids interactivity and increases relevance, it needs to be used thoughtfully and strategically in order to be effective. Students say that simply having a digital component—such as making classroom notes available online—is not enough to help them learn better.<sup>7</sup>

One platform that is capturing their attention is YouTube. More than half of U.S. Gen Z-aged students say YouTube has contributed to their education, with as many as 59% reporting it is their number one preferred learning method. Nearly half (47%) say they spend three or more hours a day on the platform.<sup>8</sup> YouTube may be hitting the sweet spot for Gen Z in appealing to their self-reliant nature and instinct to do their own

1 McCrindle, "Generation Map"; Half and Enactus, "Get Ready."

2 Adobe, "Gen Z in the Classroom: Creating the Future," an Adobe Education Creativity Study, 2018. <http://www.adobeeducate.com/genz/global-education-genz>, 23.

3 Barnes & Noble College, "Getting to Know Gen Z: Exploring Middle and High Schoolers' Expectations for Higher Education," 2018. <https://www.bncollege.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Gen-Z-Report.pdf>

4 Pearson, "Beyond Millennials." Additional information can be found at this website: <http://www.pearson-learningnews.com/beyond-millennials-the-next-generation-of-learners/>

5 Adobe, "Gen Z in the Classroom."

6 Barnes & Noble College, "Getting to Know."

7 Barnes & Noble College, "Getting to Know."

8 Pearson, "Beyond Millennials," 15.

research. When confronted with a learning challenge, nearly 3 in 4 (71%) of U.S. Gen Z students say they will try to figure it out on their own through the Internet, textbooks or friends/classmates before asking a teacher for help.<sup>1</sup>

This “do it yourself” mindset and the accessibility of the Internet to provide answers has not, however, displaced Gen Z’s appetite for face-to-face interaction as a key part of their education. Eighty percent of U.S. Gen Z teens say they study best with friends and 64% say classroom discussion is the most helpful tool for their learning, more so than study guides or textbooks.<sup>2</sup> So though self-motivated, Gen Z continues to need guides, support structures, and the company of their peers on their learning journey.

## **Gen Z Believes Education is Key to their Future**

Gen Z believes higher education is key to their future careers. Globally, 67% of young people say they think college is necessary to be successful.<sup>3</sup> This sentiment is stronger in developed countries, with 81% of teens in the U.S. saying a college degree is important to their career goals.<sup>4</sup> However, Gen Z is also thinking creatively about the educational system, at least in Western countries. Nearly three-quarters of young Americans believe that colleges should allow students to design their own major.<sup>5</sup> Exactly three-quarters of U.S. teens say there are ways of getting a good education without going to college, though 66% of them still plan to attend.<sup>6</sup> According to another U.S. study, as many as 82% of teens plan to go straight from high school into college.<sup>7</sup>

But regardless of their desire for it, how attainable is higher education for the next generation? “While seen as vital, 69% of young people globally believe higher education is beyond their financial means,” one study reports.<sup>8</sup> The percentage who doubt their ability to pay for college is higher in developing countries (77%) versus developed countries (64%), but still the large majority across the board.<sup>9</sup> So at the same time that a university degree is perceived by young people as key to their future success, it is also being perceived by many as financially out of reach.

Some areas of the world lack educational opportunities for their young people more than others, as shown in the map below. According to one study across several countries in East Africa, 56-82% of youth have a post-primary level of education, but only 12-42% have post-secondary education.<sup>10</sup> Expectations for teens in Asia, however, are very different. Teens in Vietnam rank a bachelor’s degree among the top things they can’t live without—right alongside the Internet and their vehicle. They also say a master’s degree is something that would be nice to have.<sup>11</sup>

On the whole, in line with their generational outlook (and perhaps also a function of being young) Gen Z remains optimistic about their educational opportunities. Globally, teens believe that, relative to their parent’s generation, they are much better

1 Ibid.

2 Barnes & Noble College, “Getting to Know.”

3 Ipsos and Citi Foundation, “Pathways to Progress.”

4 Northeastern University and FTI Consulting, “Innovation Imperative,” 9.

5 Ibid.

6 Sparks and Honey, “Gen Z 2025.”

7 Barnes & Noble College, “Getting to Know.”

8 Ipsos and Citi Foundation, “Pathways to Progress.”

9 Ibid.

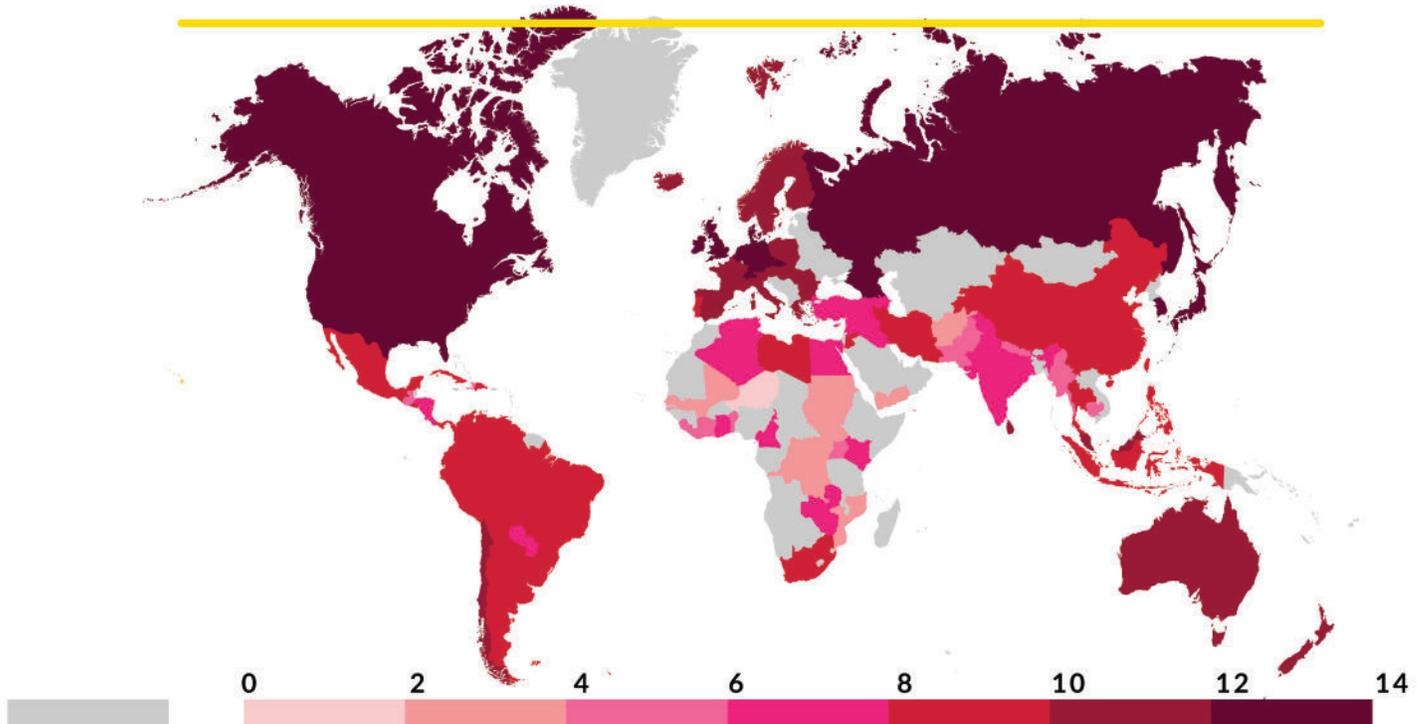
10 Awiti and Scott, East Africa.

11 OMD Decision Lab, “Genzilla.”

off in their ability to get an education (83%), achieve their professional goals (78%) and have opportunities for professional success (77%).<sup>1</sup> Additionally, at least in some areas of the world, Generation Z is indicating they value education not solely for employment purposes. Seventy-one percent of teens in Canada say that education is much more important for how it develops their critical thinking skills than just qualifying them for a job.<sup>2</sup> Whatever it is they value most about a university degree, it seems clear that Generation Z is making educational attainment a priority.

## MEAN YEARS OF SCHOOLING , 2019

AVERAGE NUMBER OF YEARS OF TOTAL SCHOOLING ACROSS ALL EDUCATION LEVELS, FOR THE POPULATION AGED 15-64.



SOURCE: LEE AND LEE (2016)

Excerpted from OUR WORD DATA (<https://ourworldindata.org/global-rise-of-education>)

### Gen Z's Entrepreneurial Appetite

With the support of traditional education structures, Gen Z foresee themselves crafting their own career paths in life. "Generation Z exhibits a strong entrepreneurial, independent and self-sustaining spirit, with a driving motivation to map out their own futures," one study reads.<sup>3</sup> Nearly half (46%) of Gen Z students believe what they learn outside the classroom is more important to their future careers as what they learn in school.<sup>4</sup> Two-thirds of U.S. teens believe it is important for colleges to teach students about entrepreneurship.<sup>5</sup>

Globally, 69% of young people say their dream is to start their own business, with this percentage being much higher in developing markets (86%) than developed markets (56%). However, 79% of teens admit they need more education and skill development before they will be ready for this, and more than two-thirds believe it was easier to

1 Ipsos and Citi Foundation, "Pathways to Progress."

2 Kovary and Pearson, "A Generation."

3 Northeastern University and FTI Consulting, "Innovation Imperative."

4 Adobe, "Gen Z in the Classroom."

5 Northeastern University and FTI Consulting, "Innovation Imperative."

start a new business in their parents' time.<sup>1</sup> The anxieties that accompany Gen Z's entrepreneurial spirit are perhaps natural given this generation's pragmatic attitude and the influence the global economic recession has exerted on them.

But despite the potential for risk, the appetite for entrepreneurship is being exhibited at younger and younger ages. The most recent Gallup-HOPE poll of American students reveals that younger students (grades 5-8) are twice as likely to report a desire to start their own business (55%) compared with older students up to grade twelve (27%).<sup>2</sup> The survey revealed, however, a gap in the availability of internships for the many students who desired them (only 5% are involved in internships). This has been confirmed for teens globally, with nearly 8 in 10 saying an internship is critical to their career success, but 6 in ten saying there are not enough in their city.<sup>3</sup>

### **Gen Z's Ambitions to Lead in the Workforce**

The ambitious nature of Gen Z becomes abundantly clear when questioned about their future goals in the workforce. Among U.S. teens, 65% say their goal is to make it to the top of their career field.<sup>4</sup> They may not know yet what that career field will be. Globally, only about half of young people say they have identified their dream job.<sup>5</sup> But whatever it is they choose to do, they plan to do it well. The majority (56%) of teens in the U.S. and Canada believe they will either be working their way up the corporate ladder or already supervising employees in a corporate environment within the first 5 years of their career.<sup>6</sup>

Sixty-three percent of Gen Z teens across the globe report that it is important to them that they become a leader during their career. These responses varied widely by geography, with as many as 77% of teens in India answering this affirmatively, while fewer than half (49%) of teens in Denmark did so.<sup>7</sup> As they evaluate their future leaders in the workplace, Gen Z ranks a positive attitude as the top trait they value (42%), followed by having clear targets for success (37%) and open communication with their bosses (33%).<sup>8</sup> This emphasis on positivity is unique for Gen Z, compared to other generations already in the workplace who value communication and feedback most highly.<sup>9</sup>

Though Gen Z yearns for future positions of leadership and responsibility, they are willing to admit this comes with its own set of fears and challenges. Globally, one-third report they feel a lack of confidence to lead and nearly the same number say the fear of failure is a barrier to desiring a leadership position.<sup>10</sup> Findings, of course, vary by geography. More than half (52%) of Canadian teens fear failure, half of Mexico's teens worry about lack of skills, and 45% of teens in the UK say confidence is their issue. Despite these candid fears, more than one-third (35%) of Gen Z is attracted to the higher level of responsibility a leadership position would bring. That it would potentially bring higher future earnings was a lower priority (third on their list)

1 Ipsos and Citi Foundation, "Pathways to Progress."

2 Gallup and Operation HOPE, "2016 Gallup-HOPE Index."

3 Ipsos and Citi Foundation, "Pathways to Progress."

4 Pearson, "Beyond Millennials."

5 Adobe, "Gen Z in the Classroom."

6 Half and Enactus, "Get Ready."

7 Universum, "Building Leaders."

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Universum, "Building Leaders."

compared to the additional freedom they could have, and the opportunity to coach and mentor others.<sup>1</sup>

## Gen Z's Attitudes toward their Future Careers

It's impossible to say with certainty what Gen Z teens globally value most for their future careers. Responses vary from being passionate and enjoying what they do for a living,<sup>2</sup> to simply being able to rely on a steady paycheck.<sup>3</sup> Generous pay, career growth, and the ability to make a difference or leave a positive impact on society have all been mentioned by teens as well.<sup>4</sup> Answers vary not only by geography, but are continuing to evolve as Gen Z ages and matures in its perspective.

But whether they are leading others in a corporate environment, or leading themselves and a small team in an entrepreneurial venture, it is clear Gen Z plans to work hard and probably in new ways. Students believe a lot of professions require creativity to meet the world's challenges, and believe they will be doing creative things in their future career. They also believe they are uniquely suited to this, saying they are more creative than past generations and are "always looking for a better way to do something."<sup>5</sup>

While some may be seeking the structure and advancement opportunities of a traditional career field, there is also a sense of openness to a wide variety of opportunities. Researchers say that more than any previous generation, Gen Z is crafting apparent "non-linear paths of education and work".<sup>6</sup> For example, 60% of U.S. teens say they expect to have multiple careers by age 30.<sup>7</sup> Around 4 in 10 say they expect to work for themselves at some point in their overall career.<sup>8</sup> With their entrepreneurial spirit and the access provided to them by technology, they may have many jobs simultaneously and form networks that extend their reach and employment opportunities around the world.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, Gen Z appears to be heading into a brave new future where careers may look very different. Of teachers interviewed globally, 93% agree their students will have careers that are currently unfamiliar.<sup>10</sup> "Based on today's average teen, the vocationally mobile, entrepreneurial, and truly global Generation Z will have 17 employers across 5 separate careers, working in jobs that don't even currently exist," writes Australian researcher Mark McCrindle.<sup>11</sup> Are they ready for this? Gen Z would be the first to tell you they are both nervous and excited about the future, and are more than willing to admit that they do not currently feel fully prepared for the "real world" and all it holds.<sup>12</sup> Only time will tell how these various predictions unfold.

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1 Ibid.

2 Sensis and Think Now, *We Are Gen Z*.

3 Adobe, "Gen Z in the Classroom."

4 Half and Enactus, "Get Ready."

5 Ibid, 4.

6 Sparks and Honey, "Gen Z 2025."

7 Sparks and Honey, "Gen Z 2025."

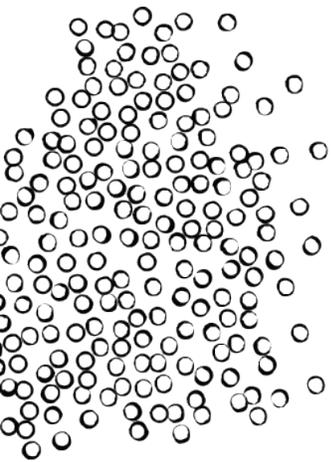
8 Northeastern University and FTI Consulting, "Innovation Imperative."

9 Sparks and Honey, "Gen Z 2025."

10 Adobe, "Gen Z in the Classroom."

11 Mark McCrindle, "Education," *Generation Z*, no date, <http://generationz.com.au/education/>.

12 Adobe, "Gen Z in the Classroom."



# GEN Z



## CONCLUSION

This literature review has examined the questions Gen Z has already been asked and the answers they have already given as a first step toward defining what unique place a OneHope research study could occupy in the landscape. We believe there is still much frontier to be explored with regard to the next generation and that a OneHope-sponsored research study on a global scale could be a significant contribution toward understanding Gen Z and how to reach them with the Gospel.

### **Research Gaps**

We believe that the premise of a “global Gen Z” archetype for today’s teens has yet to be deeply explored. The overwhelming majority of sources located for this report include only U.S. teens or a limited number of others in primarily Western contexts, and it appears that the same questions have not been asked around the world. There is a sizable gap in international research on the next generation of young people, particularly in the area of religious attitudes and faith development.

Even the cohort name is largely a Western World conception that is not necessarily used around the world. Many of the more far-reaching sources cited in this study gleaned their data from Internet-connected teens. Since Internet penetration rates vary widely by country, we must avoid broad characterizations that apply these findings to all teens in the Gen Z age cohort.

### **Where are we headed?**

Given OneHope’s mission to reach every child with God’s Word, it is critical that we continue to understand every child at every age in every region of the world. In the same way that our Attitudes and Behaviors of Youth research study helped us understand the teens of a decade ago, a new research study would help us test assumptions and get to know the teens of today.

Our proposed research study will target teens ages 13-19, with data collection happening in the year 2020. That means teens in our study will have been born between 2001-2007—squarely within the accepted birth years of Gen Z. We hope the results of this study will inform ministry and program design while also contributing to the body of research about Gen Z. An exploration of whether or not a “global Gen Z” does, in fact, exist would be a valuable contribution to the research landscape, not only for ministries but for anyone seeking to more fully understand today’s young people.

While this lit review has been as comprehensive as we could make it, there is still much to learn about the up and coming generation and new research is constantly being published that may bring new understanding and revelation. We hope that this introduction to Generation Z has helped inform your perspective and spotlighted not only the challenges, but the opportunities we face that can be leveraged to reach young people with the truth and hope of the Gospel.

## **References**

See more details and original PDF's for source studies (where available) here:

<https://airtable.com/tbl1clPVq2ZVncd7O/viw5OLKuMyOKraApZ>



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