

Busting the Gen Z myths: what brands really need to grow

Gen Z are the most environmentally-friendly and health-conscious younger generation the world has ever seen...right? WRONG.



Jonny Forsyth

Director of Mintel Food & Drink

May 2023

Definitions and introductions

Gen Z (b.1997-2010)

Millennials (b.1980-96)

Gen X (b.1965-79)

Baby Boomers (b.1946-64)



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Cringelord.

Someone who is of extreme cringe; the cringiest

Urban dictionary definition



Three reasons why brands need to engage now with Gen Z

Marketers have mastered the complex art of understanding Millennials but Gen Z is now emerging as the new, influential kid on the block. Gen Z already boast significant:

SIZE

1.9bn

is the global population of Generation Z in 2022, which is 24%* of the total population

INFLUENCE

27%

of the global workforce will be Generation Z in 2025, according to an estimate cited by the World Economic Forum

PURCHASING POWER

\$33tn

is the forecast income of Gen Z^ globally in 2030, according to the Bank Of America. This is five times higher than in 2020

Today, I hope to break down the Gen Z myths and stereotypes



Myth: "A widely held but false belief or idea."



"A widely held, fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing"



Which of these descriptions about Gen Z, from TIME magazine, do you recognise?

'Companies are discovering that to win the best talent, they must cater to a young workforce that is considered overly sensitive at best and lazy at worst.'

TIME

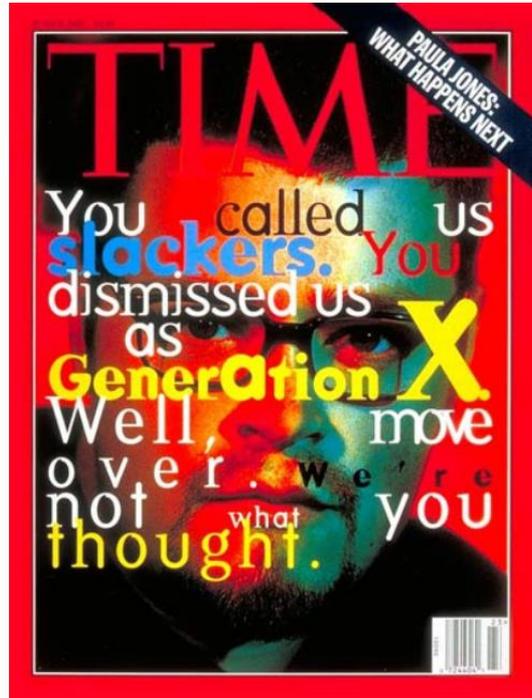
“Those in their twenties 'feel paralyzed by the social problems they see as their inheritance”

'They crave entertainment, but their attention span is [very] short

'They would rather hike in the Himalayas than climb a corporate ladder.'

This is actually from a 1990 article about Gen X!

This represents 2 things: 1. how lifestage matters more than generational differences and 2. that younger generations always attract lazy stereotypes.



The media is creating other, more positive, Gen Z myths and stereotypes

INVESTING

Gen Z Is Emerging As The Sustainability Generation

Greg Petro Contributor

Apr 30, 2021, 02:26pm EDT



COLLEGE VOICES

The environment is Gen Z's No. 1 concern – and some companies are taking advantage of that

PUBLISHED TUE, AUG 10 2021-9:09 AM EDT | UPDATED WED, AUG 11 2021-8:23 AM EDT

Katie Jahns @KATIEMJAHNS

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April 24, 2021

Gen Z: The Ultimate Wellness Consumer

in



Young people now 'prefer protein shakes to boozing' as Generation Z gets healthy

A new report claims that the vast majority of 18-24-year-olds take daily vitamin supplements, and nearly have are teetotal

By Gemma Francis
15:44, 5 Dec 2020

f t w s | 2 COMMENTS



But the headlines are not true

I have looked at 500+ different global consumer questions (over 200 in EMEA alone).



This presentation will shed light on the real Gen Z

The danger for marketers, innovators and researchers is that they are basing decisions on myth rather than reality. I will shed light on the real Gen Z and how to target them.



MYTH: How Gen Z are not as sustainable as you think



MYTH: How Gen Z are not as healthy as you think

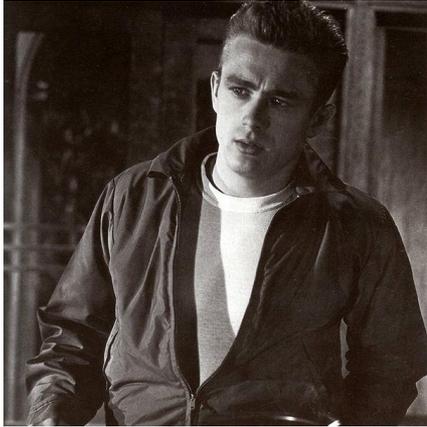


TRUTH: How this Gen Z's DNA is digitalisation

GEN Z AND SUSTAINABILITY



Gen Z are rebels with a cause.....



In the old days, rebels did not have a cause...!

James Dean in the 1955 film classic *Rebel Without A Cause* which helped define "teenage culture", which had previously not existed as a cultural phenomenon.

Dean would have been part of the World War II/Swing generation if still alive today.



But Gen Z has been inspired by the "Greta effect"

As Swedish Gen Z [Greta Thunberg](#) told the UN: "You are failing us. But the young people are starting to understand your betrayal... The world is waking up. And change is coming, whether you like it or not."



TikTok has become a forum for Gen Z activism

Gen Z's social media of choice morphs from silly dances to activism.

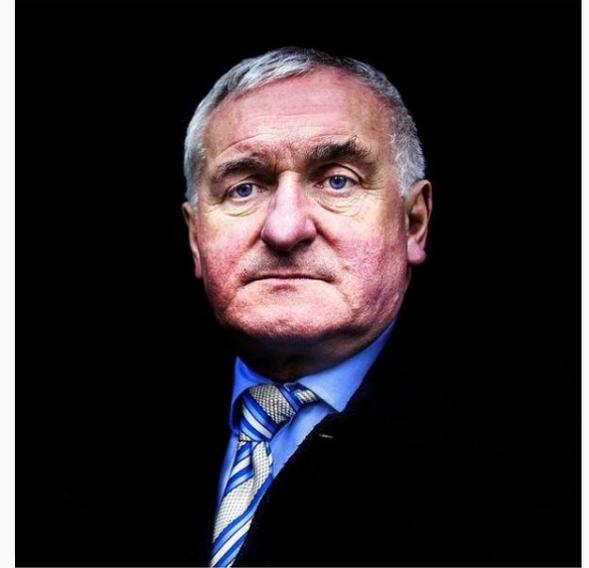
Jacob Donegan, 1.4m followers: "My goal on TikTok is to help show people that being your true self is more rewarding than living into a life other people designed for you."

Rebels with a cause...which stirs generational wars!

“OK Boomer” has taken off as a meme [because](#):

"Everybody in Gen Z is affected by the choices of the Boomers, that they made and are still making."

[In Germany](#), 84% of 16-25s 'consider how ethical a company/brand is before buying any product or service' vs 68% of Baby Boomers.



Oatley's "Help Dad" campaign encapsulates a generational divide



But then why the success of Shein?

Despite being criticised for "unethical working practices", Shein's global sales rose 60% in 2021, to \$16bn – driven by Gen Z customers.



“Generation Eco” or “Generation Don’t Want To Know”?

When it comes to everyday sustainability, Gen Z could learn a lot from Baby Boomers...

LESS EVERYDAY ECO-ACTIONS

69%

[of ROI 16-25 year-olds](#) always recycle vs **88% of Baby Boomers** (age 58-76)

LESS EVERYDAY ECO-ACTIONS

57%

[of ROI 16-25 year-olds](#) always take re-usable bags with them when shopping vs **83% of 55+**

MORE FATALISTIC

41%

[of UK 16-24 year-olds](#) think their behaviour can make a positive difference to the environment vs **57% of 55+**

Base: Ireland: 110 internet users aged 16-25, 193 aged 55+; UK: 138 internet users aged 16-24, 346 aged 55+

Source: Dynata/Mintel, June 2022, Sustainability Barometer II, November 2021



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

“It is no surprise that the public have the wrong impression. Endless articles and analyses paint the picture of a clean generational break in environmental concern and action, with a new cohort of young people coming through who will drive change, if only older people would stop blocking them.”

- The New Scientist

But as ever with Gen Z, the truth is complicated

Irish Gen Z ARE [more likely](#) to consume plant-based meat or dairy alternatives – primarily for environmentally-friendly reasons.

But according to Arla research, [29% of UK Gen Zs](#) have ordered non-dairy in public but switched to dairy at home because they "feel ashamed"!



GEN Z AND SUSTAINABILITY



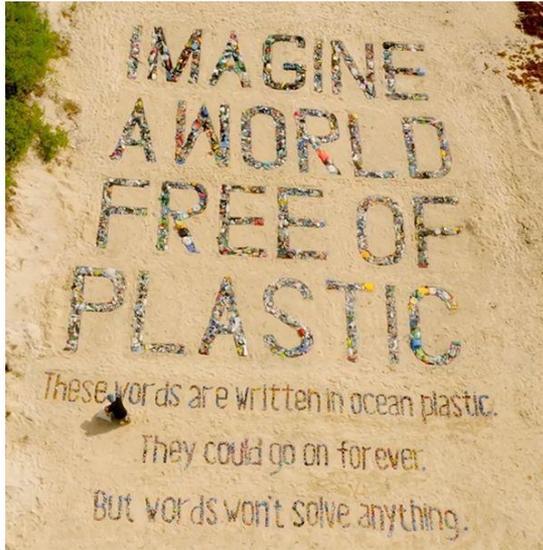
What does it
mean for
brands?

Brands need to "eco-engage" Gen Z

Help Gen Z to get a grip on their:

ECO-ANXIETY: in 2021, [a global study](#) of 10,000 young people found 45% of 16-25's said climate anxiety was affecting their daily lives.

LACK OF CONTROL: Studies show younger people score lower on '[locus of control](#)'.



EDUCATE: [Corona](#) created a visual plastic installation in Mexico



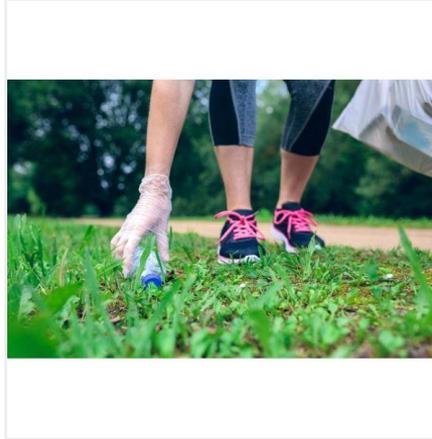
TANGIBLE ACTIONS: [Corona](#) launch annual fishing plastic competitions

Reward Gen Z with "eco-incentives"



Reward Gen Z emotionally

Newly launched Dutch organic dairy brand Kalverliefde sources ethical milk from farms that do not separate calves and cows. As many as [55% of German and 45% of Polish Gen Zs](#) buy ethical food and drink due to concerns for animal welfare.



Reward Gen Z financially

Chocolate brand [Ritter Sport has launched a campaign](#) to encourage people to pick up trash in nature by rewarding them with Rittercoins, which can be exchanged for Ritter Sport chocolates or even a PlayStation 5.

Make it emotionally or financially rewarding...

Keep it light

US brand Gen Z Water accentuates fun first, and sustainability credentials second.

It tap into the trend for "fauxstalgia".

The [brand's](#) secondary message is that its *bottles are made out of aluminum because it's way more recyclable*.



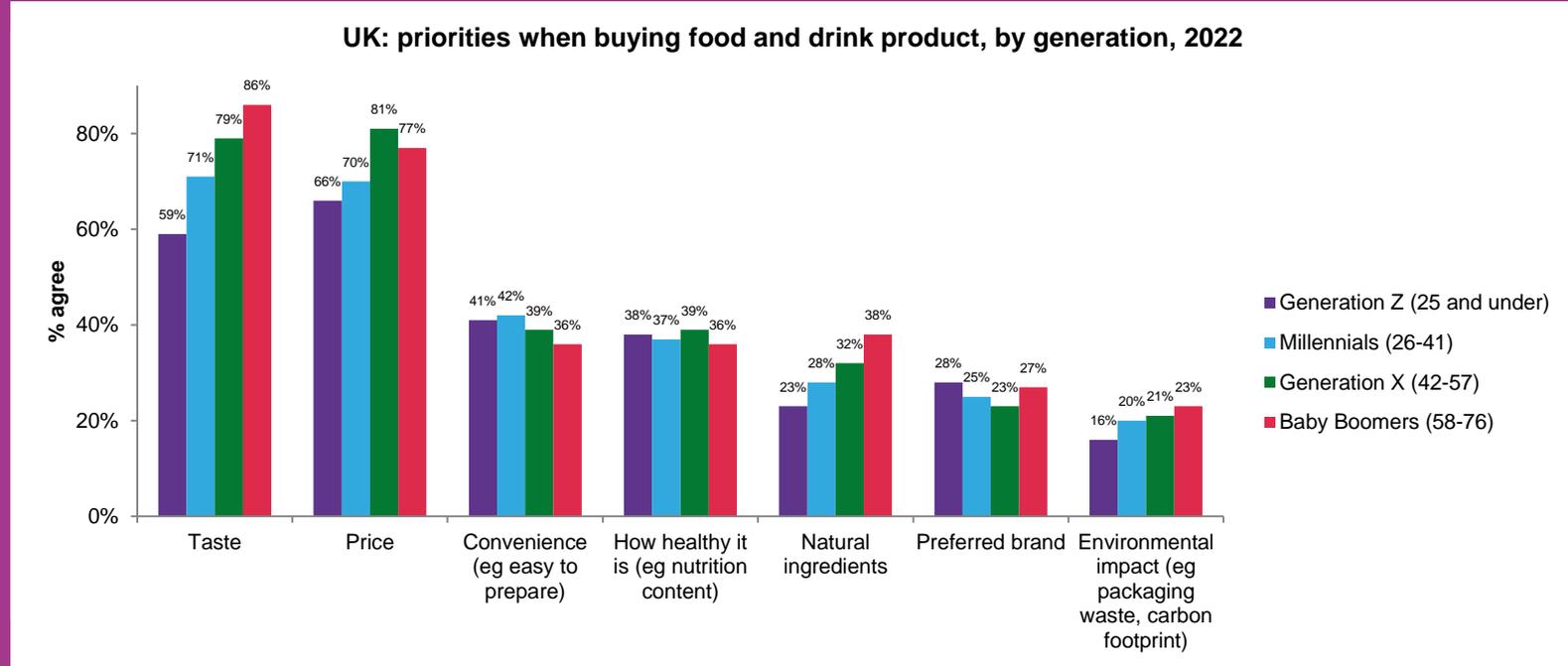
[Gen Z Water](#) comes in an aluminum bottle



Its [instagram post](#) reads: "You know it. But its worth repeating..."

Focus on taste and value

Whatever the category, market, or time period, consumers prioritise taste and value when choosing what to buy.



Base: UK: internet users aged 16+ Gen Z 301, Millennials 564, Gen X 499, Baby Boomers 548

Source: Kantar Profiles/Mintel, October 2022



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

Taste trumps ethics



"Oumph! is here to rock your taste buds"

Oumph! [Ch*cken Style Chunk](#). The vegan brand puts flavour front and central in its messaging. "Oumph! is here to rock your taste buds with epic, plant-based food."[Secondary is its purpose](#) to 'secure the longevity of this planet' (Sweden).

Source: Mintel GNPDS; Mintel Purchase Intelligence



Pea protein which goes pop
[Wicked Kitchen Wicked Little Brats](#) were perceived (by all ages) as [tastiest US meat substitute launch between Jan 2021-Jul 2022](#) (61%). Gen Z is likely to respond to its edgy branding and use of sweet maple syrup and popping mustard (UK/US).

This particularly applies to plant-based proteins...



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

"Morals are a luxury of the rich"

Gen Z currently lack purchasing power — so value is even more important to them.

This is another major issue for the growth of plant-based brands.

<https://www.just-food.com/news/oatly-sales-outlook-sours-as-headwinds-stack-up/> "the pace at which we have been able to convert new consumers from dairy to plant-based milk is taking longer than we had hoped for."

It means the UK's [Cadbury Plant Bar](#) is likely to struggle.



At £2.50, a 90g bar costs twice a 120g bar of standard Dairy Milk (UK)

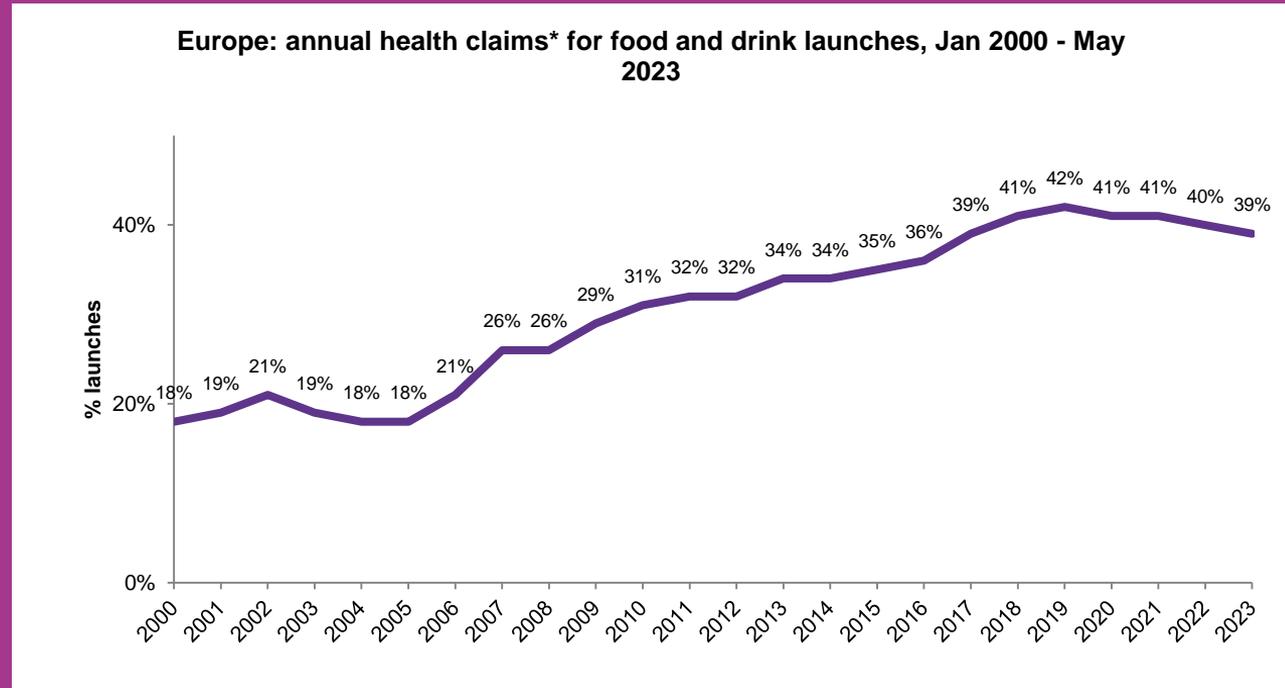
GEN Z AND HEALTH



Gen Z have grown up in era of healthier living

Healthier positioned food and drink has gone increasingly mainstream.

As a society, nutritional knowledge is far more advanced than it was when previous youth cohorts grew up.



Health messages have driven healthier behaviours



Prevalence of smoking among Irish 15-16 year-olds is down from 41% in 1995 to 13% in 2015.

Source: TobaccoFree Research Institute Ireland, Dublin, Ireland; Drinks Ireland



Alcohol consumption in Ireland is down 30% in past 20 years, accelerated by Gen Z



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

But for healthy diets, Gen Z are trying...yet failing

Gen Z claim to be healthy *attitudinally*, but their *behaviour* tells a very different story.

TRYING TO BE HEALTHY

38%

[of Irish 16-24 year-olds](#) try to eat and drink healthily all or most of the time vs 28% of 45+ adults

FAILING TO BE HEALTHY

44%

[of Irish 16-24 year-olds](#) prioritise spending on fruit and vegetables vs 57% of 45+ adults

FEELING GUILTY ABOUT IT

34%

[of Irish 16-24 year-old](#) often feel guilty about their food or drink choices vs 20% of 45+ adults

Base: Ireland (ROI & NI): 156 internet users aged 16-24, 461 aged 45+

Source: Dynata/Mintel, March 2023



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

Why the disconnect? Blame science



[Recent research shows](#) in neurological terms, we are all teenagers until the age 25.

[Studies](#) also consistently show teenagers have a biological preference for sweeter, more sugary food and drink than adults.

So science predisposes Gen Z to choose treats over health.

[Gen Z try to be healthy to be happier](#), whereas older generations seek longevity.

Mental wellness is their defining health issue

Gen Z may just be more honest about mental frailty, but more likely are victims of being the first smartphone generation. Many Gen Zs see food as part of the solution.

MENTAL HEALTH PRIORITY

68%

[of Irish Gen Zers](#) say depression and anxiety are the biggest issues facing young people living in Ireland today

STRESSED OUT

68%

[of ROI working 18-26 year-olds](#) often feel burnt out after work vs. 48% of 55+

LINKING FOOD TO MOOD

61%

[of ROI 16-24 year-olds](#) want food/drink products with ingredients that aid relaxation are appealing vs 44% of 55+

Base: 196 ROI internet users aged 16-24 who are working, 161 aged 55+; ROI: 215 internet users aged 16-24, 609 aged 41+

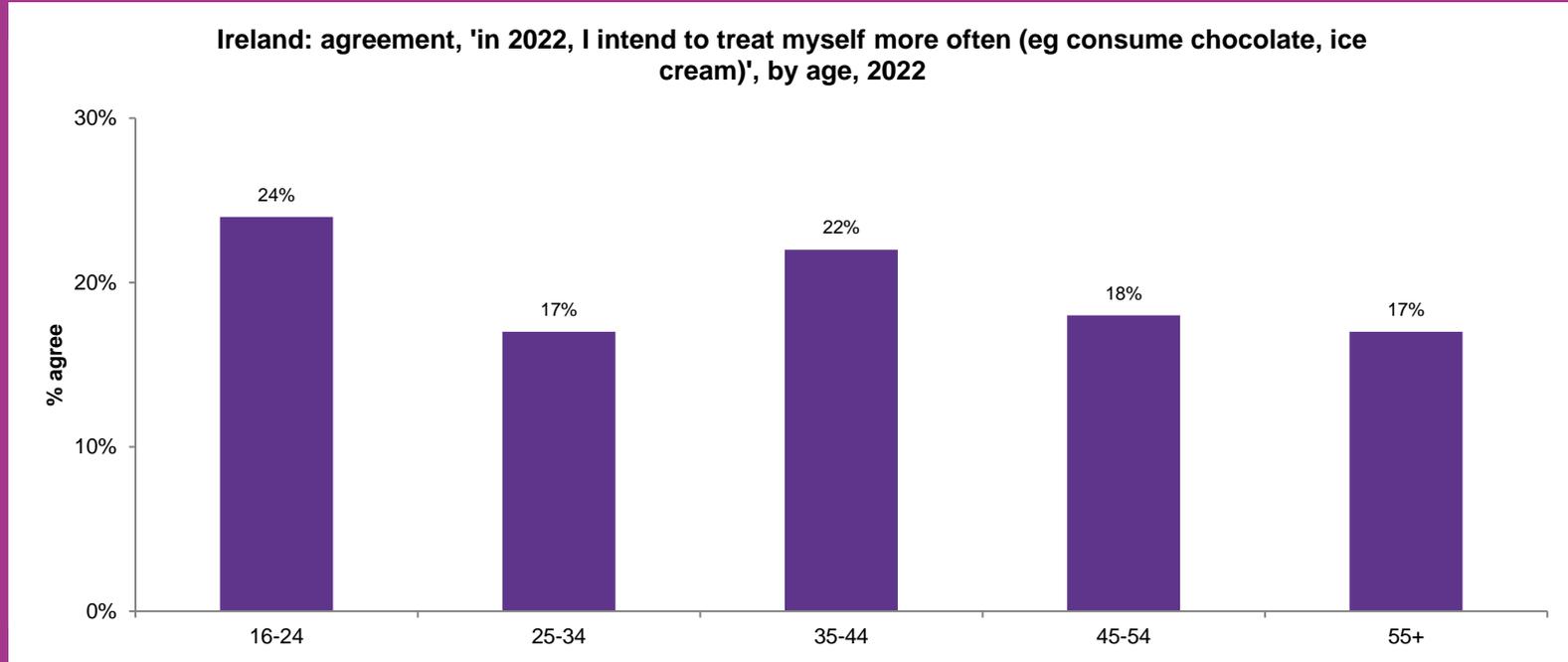
Source: YSI Gen Z Index conducted in partnership with Amárach Research; Dynata/Mintel, March 2023, September 2022



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

Comfort eating is a coping strategy

The prevalence of [Irish adolescents](#) with overweight/obesity has increased from 13% in 1990, to 18% in 2006 and 24% in 2020. COVID-19 is likely to have raised this further...



Base: 1,000 internet users aged 16+ in each market except Germany (2,000)

Source: [Kantar Profiles/Mintel, February 2022](#)



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

Snacks won't ruin the meal, they ARE the meal

Gen Z eschews the traditional 'wisdom' of older generations who were taught that snacking would ruin a meal, and that snacking should not happen before bedtime.

IN NORWAY

38%

[of 16-24 year olds*](#) substitute a meal with a snack or drink *at least* a few times in the week, vs 14% of 25+, in 2021

IN THE US

39%

[of 18-25 Gen Z adults](#) have an evening/late-night snack *every day*, vs 21% of 25+ adults

IN IRELAND

60%

[of 16-25 Gen Z adults](#) snack twice a day or more between meals vs 27% of those aged 55+

Base: Norway: 142 internet users aged 16-24 (858 aged 25+); US: 272 internet users aged 18-25 (1,728 aged 25+); Ireland :230 internet users aged 16-25 who have eaten snacks in the past three months, 259 aged 55+

Source: Kantar Profiles/Mintel, August 2021, February 2022; Dynata/Mintel, March 2022



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

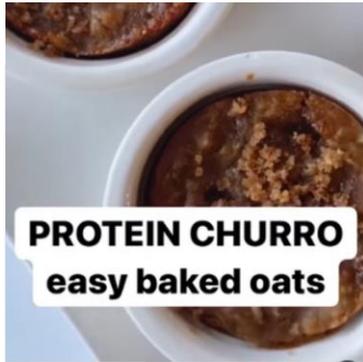
GEN Z AND HEALTH



What does it
mean for
brands?

Use TikTok to create snack hacks

Brands are appealing to Gen Z's love of creative snacking by using influencers to post simple and tantalizing 'snack hack' recipes.



Spreading easy recipe tips

The chocolate spread brand [Wanna Date](#) is highly active on TikTok, where it showcases how it can be used in creative recipes. These include baked oats, smoothies and easy freezer fudge.



McVities shows how to make S'mores in 20 seconds

The UK chocolate biscuit brand McVities worked with TikTok macro-influencers during Halloween to boost engagement. This included a video 'duet' with Marshmallow brand Mallow & Marsh to create a 20 second [S'mores snack hack](#).



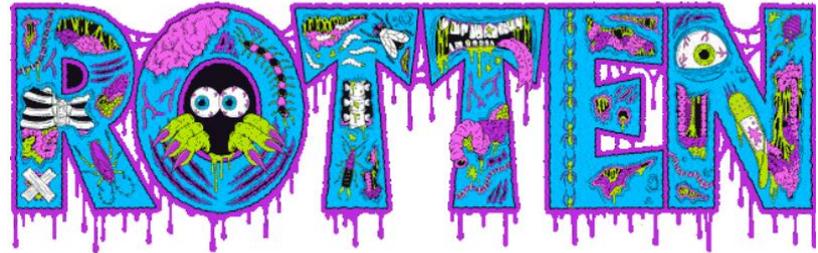
Pringles to make fried chicken and chocolate tart

[Sour Cream & Onion Flavour Crisps](#). Pringles has used TikTok influencers to create short snack hack videos, such as [chicken fried in Pringles crisps](#), using an air fryer, a [Pringles chocolate tart](#), [Pringles mashed potatoes](#) and [Pringles nachos](#).

Deliver Gen Z indulgence with attitude

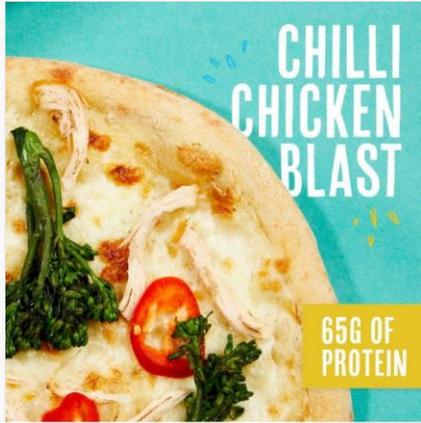


"If you're worried about [FFUPS](#) being healthy, you're on the wrong site" (US)



[Rotten Gummies](#): "Sickeningly delicious gummy worms"

Give Gen Z tasty health shortcuts and lifestyle "hacks"



"Pizza base with almost double amount of protein"

<https://www.instagram.com/proteinpizzaco/?hl=en>"Protein-packed pizza perfection...our game-changing pizzas have almost double the amount of protein per kcal, but we've achieved it with 30% fewer calories*. Plus, they taste fantastic." (UK)

Source: [instagram/proteinpizzaco](https://www.instagram.com/proteinpizzaco); [instagram/liquidiv](https://www.instagram.com/liquidiv)



"Drink Hydration multiplier"

[Liquid I.V.](#) claims to hydrate twice as fast as water and thus 'multiply your energy and "eazz" your sleep faster' (US).

Focus on how the product will help Gen Z feel better right now – protein is especially appealing to a generation that seeks healthy energy to propel their busy lifestyles.

MINTEL

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Where possible, use "good sugar" to sweeten the deal

Gen Z know that sugar is bad for you...but their "sweet tooth" has not gone away.

European Gen Zs view honey as by far the most appealing and familiar sweetener.

This health halo likely reflects honey's use by ancient civilisations as a "healing medicine".



[Beelemon Natural Lemonade with Juicy Lemon and Honey](#) (Poland)



[Tesco Fruit Granola: "Gently honey-toasted wholegrain oats"](#) (Ireland)

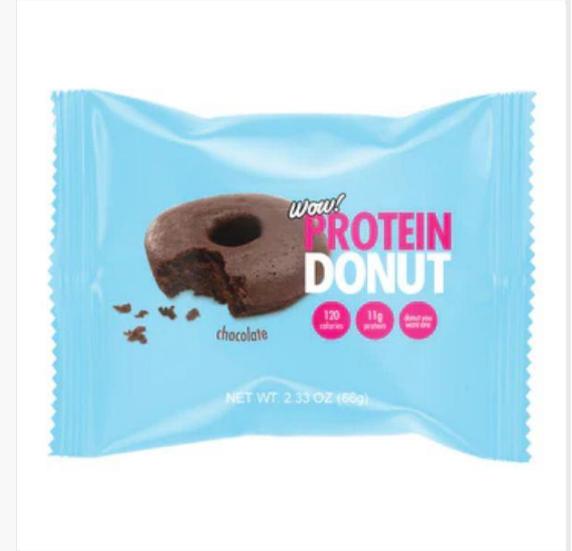
Join the new wave of "feel-good" snacks

Remember Gen Z are primarily motivated to be healthy by happiness over long-life.

Opportunity for flavour-forward "feel-good" snacks.



Scrumdiddly's: "Happiness inside" (Ireland)



Wow! Protein donut: "One bite will make you say 'Wow!'" (UK).

Ease pressure by celebrating and playing with Gen Z



Challenge an animal to blink first

KitKat's interactive campaign dared mobile users to out-stare a lineup of animals. "[Blink Break](#)" uses AI and a camera to detect when a participant blinks. One of the primary reasons Gen Z game is to relax (UK).

Source: [instagram/KITKATInstagram/offlimits](https://www.instagram.com/KITKATInstagram/offlimits)



"Turn your cereal into a disco party"

"In a world full of rules, we do what's OffLimits...turn your cereal into a disco party with Cereal Glitter. Sprinkle it over a bowl of cereal while making a wish. If the milk turns blue, your wish *might* come true." (US).

This is especially important given Gen Z's missed out on fun, "coming of age" experiences during the pandemic 2020-21.

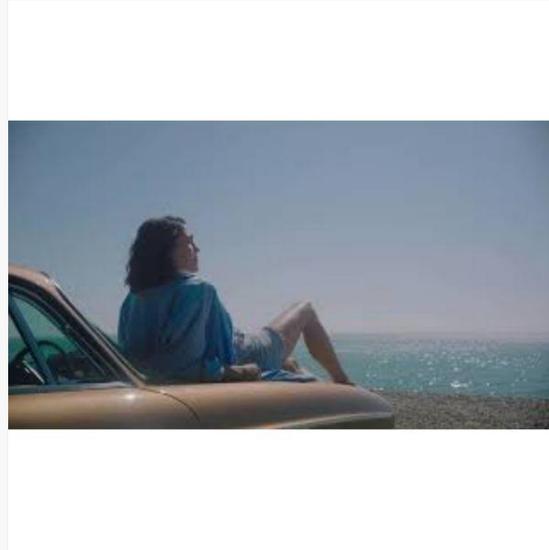


Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

Help Gen Z to relax.....



Mynd: a new plant-based CBD drink (Ireland)



Twinings reminds consumers to 'Stop. Breathe. Be Present.' (UK)

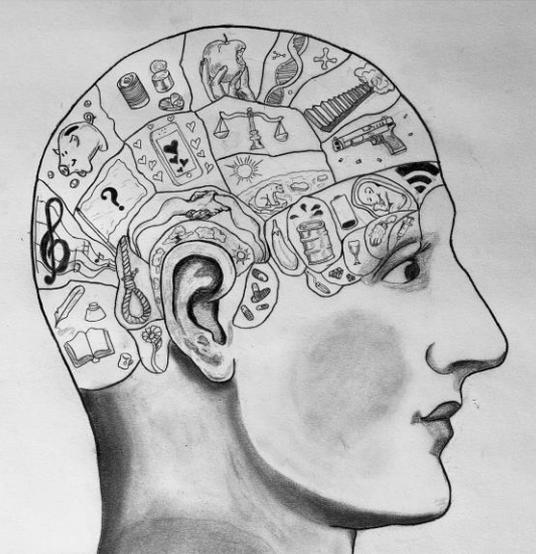
There is a huge potential market for relaxation drinks especially.

They *could* grow to be the next "energy drinks" *if* companies can identify a "caffeine".

GEN Z AND DIGITALISATION



What creates Gen Z? nature vs nurture



My guess is that, it is around 70% nature / 30% nurture.

BUT, that 30% is very different because of growing up 'digital natives'.

Gen Z live and breathe and shop social media

Gen Zs access social media primarily through smartphones, not desktops. For example, 33% of [Gen Z in APAC](#) spend 6+ hours per day on their phone, rising to 8.5 for Indonesians.

THE TIKTOK EFFECT

91

[is the average number of minutes](#), globally, that kids and teenagers spent *per day* on TikTok in 2021, vs 56 minutes for YouTube

IMPACT OF COVID-19

16%

[is the increase](#) in total amount of screen media used each day by US 13-18 year olds, between 2019 and 2021

SOCIAL COMMERCE

48%

[Of ROI 16-24 social network users](#) are interested in making purchases directly within social networks vs 40% of Millennials and 26% of Gen X

Base: 216 Rol internet users aged 16-24 who have used social networks in the last 3 months, Millennials 419, Gen X 363.

Source: TechCrunch based on data from Qustodio; The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens, 2021; Dynata/Mintel, March 2021



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

For Gen Z, influencing is the new advertising

For Gen Z, traditional advertising has less impact than the opinion of influencers. Celebrity influencers have more reach, but micro influencers are seen as more authentic.

DON'T SELL TO ME

54%

of social media users in the UK aged 16-25 claim excessive advertising has made them limit their use of a particular social media

INFLUENCE ME INSTEAD

38%

of Irish 16-24 social media users think Influencers can be a more trustworthy source of info than tradi media vs **28% of Millennials**

INFLUENCE ME FAST

78%

Of UK 16-24s who follow social media personalities have viewed their content in Short videos (<5 mins) vs **66%** for long videos (>5 mins) and **49%** for written posts

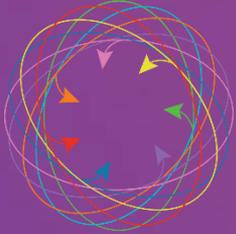
Base: UK: 299 16-25 internet users aged 16+ who have used social media in the last three months; Ireland: 216 users aged 16-24 who have used social networks in the last 3 months, 419 aged 25-40; UK: 267 16-24 internet users aged 16+ who follow/frequently view posts from social media personalities on selected social media

Source: Kantar Profiles/Mintel, March 2022, Dynata/Mintel, March 2021; Kantar Profiles, October 2022



Read on [mintel.com](https://www.mintel.com)

3 FINAL TAKEAWAYS



Believe in science vs myth

It is a myth that Gen Z cares more about sustainability than older people or that they are a healthy generation. And science is much to blame; it predisposes Gen Z - like all previous youth generations - to be more impulsive and think more short-term.



Eco-engage an apathetic generation

Brands have an opportunity to engage Gen Z consumers to make a difference and feel more in control of the solution. Make messages tangible, positive, fun and give Gen Z incentives to act, whether emotional or financial.



Prioritise taste and value

In your brand hierarchy of messaging, make sure sustainability takes a backseat to taste and value. This is especially true of plant-based proteins which Gen Z want to gravitate towards if only they tasted a bit better.

Meet the Expert



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The world's leading market intelligence agency

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Experts in what consumers want and why

