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FASHION & STYLE

Move Over, Millennials, Here Comes Generation Z

By ALEX WILLIAMS SEPT. 18, 2015

Hear the word “millennial,” and plenty of images spring to mind.

There’s Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg, in his hoodie, earning his first billion by the age of 23.

There’s Miley Cyrus, preening for the cameras in a flesh-baring act that recalls a Snapchat sexting session.

There’s Lena Dunham, TV’s queen of overshare, spiraling into navel-gazing soliloquies that seem scripted from the therapist’s couch.

They’re brash, they’re narcissistic, they’re entitled. Or so the cliché goes.

But what about “Generation Z,” the generation born after millennials that is emerging as the next big thing for market researchers, cultural observers and trend forecasters?

With the oldest members of this cohort barely out of high school, these tweens and teens of today are primed to become the dominant youth influencers of tomorrow. Flush with billions in spending power, they promise untold riches to marketers who can find the master key to their psyche.

No wonder the race to define, and market to, this demographic juggernaut is on. They are “the next big retail disrupter,” according to Women’s Wear Daily. They have “the weight of saving the world and fixing our past mistakes on their small shoulders,” according to an article on Fast Company’s Co.Exist site by Jeremy Finch, an innovation consultant. Lucie Greene, the worldwide director of the Innovation Group at J. Walter Thompson, calls them “millennials on steroids.”

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While it is easy to mock the efforts of marketers to shoehorn tens of millions of adolescents into a generational archetype, à la the baby boomers, it is also clear that a 14-year-old in 2015 really does inhabit a substantially different world than one of 2005.

Millennials, after all, were raised during the boom times and relative peace of the 1990s, only to see their sunny world dashed by the Sept. 11 attacks and two economic crashes, in 2000 and 2008. Theirs is a story of innocence lost.

Generation Z, by contrast, has had its eyes open from the beginning, coming along in the aftermath of those cataclysms in the era of the war on terror and the Great Recession, Ms. Greene said.

“If Hannah Horvath from ‘Girls’ is the typical millennial — self-involved, dependent, flailing financially in the real world as her expectations of a dream job and life collide with reality — then Alex Dunphy from ‘Modern Family’ represents the Gen Z antidote,” Ms. Greene said. “Alex is a true Gen Z: conscientious, hard-working, somewhat anxious and mindful of the future.”

Generational study being more art than science, there is considerable dispute about the definition of Generation Z. Demographers place its beginning anywhere from the early ’90s to the mid-2000s. Marketers and trend forecasters, however, who tend to slice generations into bite-size units, often characterize this group as a roughly 15-year bloc starting around 1996, making them 5 to 19 years old now. (By that definition, millennials were born between about 1980 and 1995, and are roughly 20 to 35 now.)

Even accepting those rather narrow boundaries, Generation Z still commands attention through its sheer size. At approximately 60 million, native-born American members of Generation Z outnumber their endlessly dissected millennial older siblings by nearly one million, according to census data compiled by Susan Weber-Stoger, a demographer at Queens College.

The fact that some are still in their post-toddler years, however, makes it difficult for marketers trying to distill their generational essence. Among the 5-year-olds, cultural tastes do not reach much further than “Shaun the Sheep” and “Bubble Guppies.”

As for the older end of the Generation Z spectrum, some demographers still lump them in with the millennials, but increasingly, many marketers see them as a breed apart.

So, who are they? To answer that question, you have to take a deeper look at the world in which they are coming of age.

“When I think of Generation Z, technology is the first thing that comes to mind,” said Emily Citarella, a 16-year-old high school student in Atlanta. “I know people who have made their closest relationships from Tumblr, Instagram and Facebook.”

Sure, millennials were digital; their teenage years were defined by iPods and MySpace. But Generation Z is the first generation to be raised in the era of smartphones. Many do not remember a time before social media.

“We are the first true digital natives,” said Hannah Payne, an 18-year-old U.C.L.A. student and lifestyle blogger. “I can almost simultaneously create a document, edit it, post a photo on Instagram and talk on the phone, all from the user-friendly interface of my iPhone.”

“Generation Z takes in information instantaneously,” she said, “and loses interest just as fast.”

That point is not lost on marketers. In an era of emoji and six-second Vine videos, “we tell our advertising partners that if they don’t communicate in five words

and a big picture, they will not reach this generation,” said Dan Schawbel, the managing partner of **Millennial Branding**, a New York consultancy.

So far, they sound pretty much like millennials. But those who study youth trends are starting to discern big differences in how the two generations view their online personas, starting with privacy.

While the millennial generation infamously pioneered the Facebook beer-bong selfie, many in Generation Z have embraced later, anonymous social media platforms like Secret or Whisper, as well as Snapchat, where any incriminating images disappear almost instantly, said Dan Gould, a trend consultant for **Sparks & Honey**, an advertising agency in New York.

“As far as privacy, they are aware of their personal brand, and have seen older Gen Y-ers screw up by posting too openly,” Mr. Gould said.

That point was driven home in a 2013 Mashable article titled “I’m 13 and None of My Friends Use Facebook,” in which Ruby Karp, a New York teenager, wrote: “Let’s say I get invited to a party and there’s underage drinking. I’m not drinking, but someone pulls out a camera. Even if I’m not carrying a red Solo cup, I could be photographed behind a girl doing shots.”

But the difference between generations goes much deeper than choosing Snapchat over Facebook.

Between 2000 and 2010, the country’s Hispanic population grew at four times the rate of the total population, according to the **Census Bureau**. The number of Americans self-identifying as mixed white-and-black biracial rose 134 percent. The number of Americans of mixed white and Asian descent grew by 87 percent.

Those profound demographic shifts are reflected at the cultural level, too. Attitudes on social issues have shifted, in some cases seismically, in the decade since millennials were teenagers.

Same-sex marriage, for example, has gone from a controversial political issue to a constitutional right recognized by the Supreme Court. For today’s 14-year-olds, the

nation's first African-American president is less a historic breakthrough than a fact of life.

"America becomes more multicultural on a daily basis," said Anthony Richard Jr., a 17-year-old in Gretna, La. "It's exponential compared to previous generations."

This vision of a generation with wired brains, making their way in an ethnic-stew society of the future, makes them sound like the replicants from "Blade Runner."

But the parents of Generation Z teenagers play an equally powerful role in shaping their collective outlook. Millennials, who are often painted, however unfairly, as narcissistic brats who expect the boss to fetch them coffee, were largely raised by baby boomers, who, according to many, are the most iconoclastic, self-absorbed and grandiose generation in history. Think: Steve Jobs. (To be more charitable, maybe it's no surprise that a New York Times article from last year called millennials "Generation Nice," and lauded their communal spirit, given that their parents were save-the-world boomers.)

By contrast, Generation Z tends to be the product of Generation X, a relatively small, jaded generation that came of age in the post-Watergate, post-Vietnam funk of the 1970s, when horizons seemed limited. Those former latchkey kids, who grew up on Nirvana records and slasher movies, have tried to give their children the safe, secure childhood that they never had, said Neil Howe, an economist and the co-author of more than a dozen books about American generations.

"You see the mommy blogs by Generation X-ers, and safety is a huge concern: the stainless-steel sippy cups that are BPA-free, the side-impact baby carriages, the home preparation of baby food," said Mr. Howe, who runs Saeculum Research, a Virginia-based social trends consultancy. (As a historian who takes the long view, however, Mr. Howe defines the cohort quite differently; he has called it the "Homeland Generation" because they grew up in post-9/11 America, and argues that it did not begin until around 2004.)

Part of that obsession with safety is likely due to the hard times that both Generation Z members and their parents experienced during their formative years.

“I definitely think growing up in a time of hardship, global conflict and economic troubles has affected my future,” said Seimi Park, a 17-year-old high school senior in Virginia Beach, who always dreamed of a career in fashion, but has recently shifted her sights to law, because it seems safer.

“This applies to all my friends,” she said. “I think I can speak for my generation when I say that our optimism has long ago been replaced with pragmatism.”

That sober sensibility goes beyond career, it seems. A Sparks & Honey trend report called “Meet Generation Z: Forget Everything You Learned About Millennials” asserted that the cohort places heavy emphasis on being “mature and in control.” According to a survey of risky behavior by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the percentage of high school students who had had at least one drink of alcohol in their lives declined to about 66 percent in 2013, from about 82 percent in 1991. The number who reported never or rarely wearing a seatbelt in a car driven by someone else declined to about 8 percent, compared with about 26 percent in 1991.

Put it all together — the privacy, the caution, the focus on sensible careers — and Generation Z starts to look less like the brash millennials and more like their grandparents (or, in some cases great-grandparents), Mr. Howe said.

Those children of the late 1920s through the early '40s, members of the so-called Silent Generation, were shaped by war and the Depression and grew up to be the diligent, go-along-to-get-along careerists of the '50s and '60s — picture Peggy from “Mad Men.”

“The parallels with the Silent Generation are obvious,” Mr. Howe said. “There has been a recession, jobs are hard to get, you can’t take risks. You’ve got to be careful what you put on Facebook. You don’t want to taint your record.”

Those children of the New Deal, epitomized by the low-key Warren Buffett, “didn’t want to change the system, they wanted to work within the system,” Mr. Howe said. “They were the men in the gray flannel suits. They got married early, had kids early. Their first question in job interviews was about pension plans.”

That analogy only goes so far for a generation predisposed to making Vine videos of themselves doing cartwheels over their cats. (Let's not forget that the Silents, too, had no shortage of mavericks who made noise on the world stage — Martin Luther King Jr., Elvis Presley and Andy Warhol, to name but a few.) As for the gray flannel suits, parents may not want to send their teenagers off to the tailor just yet. The Sparks & Honey report argued that “entrepreneurship is in their DNA.”

“Kids are witnessing start-up companies make it big instantly via social media,” said Andrew Schoonover, a 15-year-old in Olathe, Kan. “We do not want to work at a local fast-food joint for a summer job. We want to make our own business because we see the lucky few who make it big.”

Which leads to a final point worth mentioning about the Silent Generation. As Mr. Howe pointed out, it was not just the most career-focused generation in history. It was also, he said, the richest.

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Generation z shakes things up. Here is everything you need to know about this new workforce. They see moving up as a way to secure their value at an organization. Why it matters: This group is accustomed to seeing their peers blabbing on social media about their accomplishments on a daily basis. Recognition is going to need to come frequently from management, and definitely more than once per year. They also may spark competition at work, which can be a positive, if handled appropriately. Generation Z Prefers Their Own Private Workstation. Those activity-based workstations you just approved plans for? They're not a complete waste. In fact, they're going to serve both generations quite well. Generational study being more art than science, there is considerable dispute about the definition of Generation Z. Demographers place its beginning anywhere from the early 1990s to the mid-2000s. Marketers and trend forecasters, however, who tend to slice generations into bite-size units, often characterize this group as a roughly 15-year bloc starting around 1996, making them five to 19 years old now. (By that definition, millennials were born between about 1980 and 1995, and are roughly 20 to 35 now.) But once that's sorted, you have a great life here. 7 Move over, Millennials, here comes Generation Z. 8 Dublin whitewater rafting plan a scapegoat for all the State's ills. 9 Judge refuses Fingleton's bid to stop case over alleged INBS mismanagement. Generational study being more art than science, there is considerable dispute about the definition of Generation Z. Demographers place its beginning anywhere from the early 1990s to the mid-2000s. Marketers and trend forecasters, however, who tend to slice generations into bite-size units, often characterize this group as a roughly 15-year bloc starting around 1996, making them 5 to 19 years old now. (By that definition, millennials were born between about 1980 and 1995, and are roughly 20 to 35 now.) Image. Even accepting those rather narrow boundaries, Generation Z still commands attention though. But Generation Z is the first generation to be raised in the era of smartphones. Many do not remember a time before social media. Image.

Millennials are out and Generation Z is in. Massive and influential, this cohort has the power to buy what it wants. And they're attracting a whole lot of attention. Share this Story: Move over millennials - Gen Z has arrived. Copy Link. Email. Read more about cookies here . By continuing to use our site, you agree to our Terms of Service and Privacy Policy . OK. Generation Z, comparing this cohort to the Millennials. Members of Gen Z were born between 1997 and 2012 and are now between 6 and 21 years old. As financial institutions consider ways to capture this generation's attention and market share, having a digital Innovation strategy needs to be foremost. In a recent podcast on payments journal.com Aaron McPherson from Mercator Advisory Group and Ashley Alpine and Amanda Acheson from Co-op Financial Services discussed key strategies for financial institutions to begin their digital transformation and execute it successfully. The generation that made a collective career out of brazen entrepreneurialism and brattiness (They're brash, they're narcissistic, they're entitled, says the Times, Or so the cliché goes) has new competition in the workplace: Generation Z. In the coming decade, they'll dictate how we advertise, how we evolve the workforce and society, how we progress. And here's the thing: they stand in complete opposition to the Millennial mindset. These are the kids who grew up post-911 in the height of a recession. What this means for the Millennials. Members of Generation Z still take their cues from their Millennial forerunners—they join the workforce fully-equipped with an entrepreneurial mindset. But they've also witnessed their predecessors' mistakes. Here, data can once again be your friend. There are many great ad types and objectives out there, whether you're advertising on Facebook, Instagram, Google, or another online publisher. Are you getting the number of app installs you want? Would you be better served by switching to a cost-per-click goal of link clicks? Or, are you looking to add Instagram as a placement to an already-stellar Facebook lead generation initiative? Like most generations, Gen Z differs from its predecessors. As technologies and business models shift to keep pace, so must brands change course to evolve, too. The main message to advertisers is know your customers, or prepare to lose them to someone who does it better. To sum it all up, advertisers should keep a few best practices in mind to reach Gen Z