

Meet the  
Future



MEET YOUR GEN Z  
COMMUNITY

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GENERATION Z





This year, people under 25 will make up 41% of the world's population.<sup>1</sup>

This means members of Generation Z are not only too big to ignore, they are literally the future. For Gen Zers, the COVID-19 pandemic has struck at a particularly formative time, disrupting educational journeys, career opportunities and more. Yet, many seem to be emerging from it transformed, stronger, energised around who they are, what they stand for and what drives them.

In this report, we explore their evolution through the lenses of identity, community, commerce, resilience and activism, uncovering how this generation is actively shaping the future for all of us.





# Jeremiah

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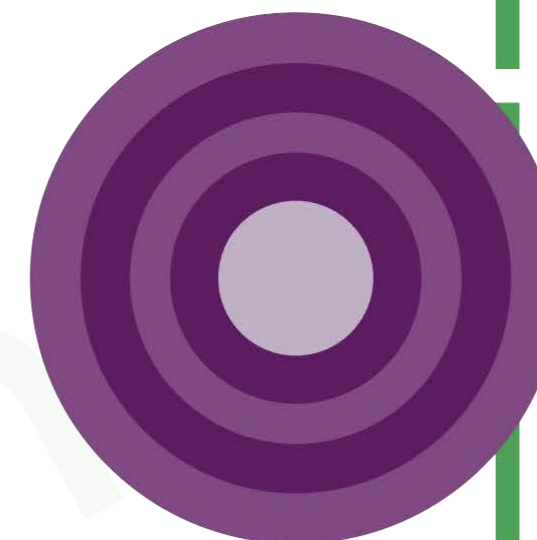
@je1b  
Meet

“OUR IMPACT ISN'T JUST FROM PERSONAL GROWTH OR DIRECT ACTION, WE SHOW OUR POWER THROUGH EVERYDAY ACTIONS.”

By my teenage years, I knew I wanted to change the world. However, my environment told me I could not. Growing up, I was surrounded by poverty, crime, and violence, which I thought would define me. In fact, it changed me. I began to engage in youth politics from the age of 11, campaigning for an improved education system, criminal justice reform and the prevention of serious violence.

I'm Jeremiah, a 21-year-old activist, social entrepreneur and Gen Z expert to a number of different brands, including Rolls-Royce and Nike. In 2017, I was recognised by the Queen in the New Year's Honours List, awarded a British Empire Medal for my contribution to young people in the United Kingdom. My debut book 'Dreaming in a Nightmare' has just been published by Penguin Random House. I was born into a revolutionary generation, one that is poised to bring new levels of innovation and change on a global scale.

Generation Z is a term used by marketers to understand a new generation of consumers. Similar to Gen X and Millennials, it helps



▲ In North America, people under 25 will make up nearly **one third** of the population in 2020<sup>1</sup>

marketers to segment people by age, so they can better sell their products to the right people. However, my experiences and research paint a much broader and richer picture of Gen Z; we cannot be seen as a marketing segment, but as the leaders/thinkers/writers of tomorrow. Having this outlook can help brands delve into what really matters to young people and, in turn, enable them to channel this in their own communications.

What has become blindingly clear to me is that Gen Z is uniquely positioned in a place no other generation has been before. As the first generation of “digital natives”, we are far more capable of using the

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tools and innovations available to us and more inspired to do so in a way that makes a real difference to our surroundings.

Think I'm exaggerating?

In Europe, Generation Z list 'driven' and 'fast learners' among their top attributes, which is why 58% have focused on learning a new skill or educating themselves on a new topic of interest since the COVID-19 outbreak.<sup>2</sup> This desire to better ourselves gives us a level of ambition and understanding that is, overall, much higher than any previous generation. We're adept – powerful even – in using these skills to develop as individuals.





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When it comes to the issues today's young people care about and want to tackle, I could write entire handbooks about mental health, social care issues, leadership in the workplace, climate change, financial decision making and so much more. Their perspective of the world has given rise to a natural empowerment and instinct to stand up and take action.

As someone who has personally worked with young people for the last ten years, I've lost count of the amount of times someone has surprised me with their passion and ideas for making a positive impact. Never has this been more transparent than right now. The turbulent times we're currently living in have catalysed our personal understanding, personal growth and personal leadership at a rate faster than ever before. And on a scale unmatched by any then-young people of the eras gone by.

Last year, myself and my business partner, Seven Jacobs, led two insight sessions, 'Exploring Ways to Use Social Media to Bring Social Change'. We were determined to discover how technology and the digital world could be used as a force for good, especially as 87% of European Gen Zers are using Instagram on a daily basis.<sup>2</sup> Leading

this diverse group of young creatives through a social action project showcased their ingenuity, to the point where it wasn't their lack of ideas getting in the way, but the fact they had too many to choose from.

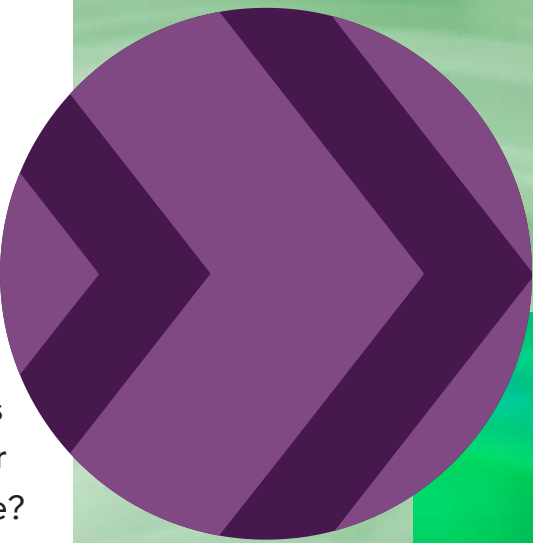
This proved two things; firstly, the passion that Gen Z has to make the world a better place transcends traditional boundaries, like political or cultural beliefs. Secondly, they dived straight into the problem; learning about the things they didn't know, asking each other questions and figuring out each other's strengths. These incentives were all second nature to them; they didn't seem like lessons previously learned.

Groups like these are truly an inspiration for young people around the world and prove the influence they can have over businesses – their strategies and their successes. As a brand, it's important to see Gen Zers as people, before a consumer base, and show them it's not just about the product, but the bigger picture. With the majority of Gen Zers across Europe saying brands should make their stance on social/political issues known publicly,<sup>2</sup> your marketing needs to extend beyond creative boundaries towards meaningful content. How are you going to add value to young lives? How are you

doing your bit for the world they've inherited? How does this fit in with your brand purpose?

It's also worth noting that our impact isn't just from personal growth or direct action, we show our power through everyday actions. As the 'stand-up' generation with conceived social and political views, you can bet that we'll be using our spending power as our votes, deciphering what brands actually deserve our attention. This can't go unobserved as, by the end of 2020, we will account for 40% of the spending power in the USA, Europe, and BRIC countries.<sup>3</sup>

Our perception of young people needs to shift from blanket statements, describing how much time we spend in front of screens, towards a deeper understanding of the personal power we have in our daily lives and in the online space. We have formed it naturally and we are using it to – quite literally – change the world. **"This is a generation that will unapologetically put humanity at the top of the agenda."** – Zamzam Ibrahim, President of the UK National Union of Students 2019. ■



◀ From Feb–May, Gen Zers' online education conversions on Facebook grew **+70%** in Canada and **+10%** in the US<sup>4</sup>



“AS A BRAND, IT'S IMPORTANT TO SEE GEN ZERS AS PEOPLE, BEFORE A CONSUMER BASE.”

@je1bc



## INTERVIEW

@iconicakes

# Meet Sara and Avni



**Sisters, Sara 18 and Avni 16, are the London duo behind @iconicakes, the Instagram account dedicated to kooky vlogs and how-to videos. With 611K followers, they're proof that, when it comes to younger generations, organised chaos is a winning formula. Here, we learn more about the method to their wonderful madness and the people who keep coming back for more.**

**Tell us how you came about starting your Instagram account.**

When we moved to the UK 8 years ago from India, social media helped us get over the culture shock and understand the world better. With this increased world view, we were inspired to jump into Instagram and create a fan account to study concepts around content

creation and community building. Our practise ended when we reached 100,000 followers, which is when we applied our knowledge to our current profile, @iconicakes.

**How would you describe your Instagram community?**

It's made up of mainly women, aged between 13-24. Surprisingly, 41% of our audience is from the US, even though we're based in the UK.

**What do they come to your Instagram account for?**

Our audience comes to us for messy, chaotic videos. We consider ourselves their online best friends, so we like to share vlogs, DIY and Agony-Aunt-type videos about skincare, dating, friendships and growing up.

**What makes you different from other Instagram creators?**

We realise there's a huge market for imperfection, so we show off our flaws and really push the idea that it's okay to not be perfect and use editing tools.

**Do you have an online aesthetic?**

Our online aesthetic is to not have one! Our profile is about creating an environment where our audience is a part of the account as much as we are. We do this by engaging with our audience through Stories and encouraging interactivity. Our

strength is our relatability and it shows in our tight-knit community.

**For you, what makes a successful post?**

One where the audience is most engaged. Obviously, views and likes are a big indicator of this, but we don't create content for this purpose.

**“WE REALISE THERE'S A HUGE MARKET FOR IMPERFECTION, SO WE SHOW OFF OUR FLAWS AND REAL LY PUSH THE IDEA THAT IT'S OKAY TO NOT BE PERFECT AND USE EDITING TOOLS.”**

We want to cater to our community and have fun while doing it.

**Are there specific tools you love to use?**

We have a content series called 'Let's talk', which is centred around topics, like friendships and self-confidence. For this, we love to use Stories and spark conversations through question stickers. When we receive answers from our audience, we often reply with our own opinion and then start a poll to get our viewers'.

**Is there a pattern to how you approach content?**

We like to clump our audiences into communities. For example, 13-17-year-old girls are entering young adulthood, so are interested

in topics about friendships, relationships and school problems. Whereas, our 18-24-year-old audience are usually university students who need to be careful with money, so like to talk about DIYs, up-cycling clothing and homemade skincare.

**What can brands learn from the way you create content?**

Big brands should learn that relatability and imperfection can get them just as far as presenting a perfect image of their brand. For example, brands who sell hair removal products should show hair on the person's body to normalise body hair and illustrate that it's the consumer's choice to get rid of it. Working with Gen Z is about engaging in meaningful dialogue; they may not have a large amount of disposable income right now, but brands need to follow them on their consumer journey. ■

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TICK THE DIVERSITY BOX.”**

@sahraisha





## COMMUNITY



▲ **37%** of US Gen Zers say they've used a messaging app to contact a business, with **15%** completing a purchase via messaging<sup>5</sup>

@sahraisha

# Meet Sahara-Isha

I started a running and fitness club called ASRA, which came from a place of not feeling accepted in the running community. At 18, I wanted to find a group to run with that shared the sense of community that I had felt when I was a young athlete. However, the ignorance and misogyny I faced made it hard for me to feel welcomed. The struggle of finding a space made me take to social media to see if other women felt the same way. After hundreds of responses, it became apparent that many like me needed a space to run with others without judgement or expectations to be "breaking the norm". Since starting ASRA, we have been able to form a community and sisterhood, one that is a safe space for women to join and has one common goal and interest – running. All while uplifting younger women to get into sports and feel supported.

With COVID-19 impacting all aspects of life, social media has been a tool to help connect with one another. In fact, since the outbreak, 60% of young people in Europe have used social media more to stay in touch with family and friends.<sup>2</sup> It has also changed the way many produce content. My print magazine Sai Noir, for example, has had to change its launching strategy to a more effective one that will engage with our audience in a unique way. While social media has been a great hub to stay updated, it has now become a place that can be overly bombarded. During this period, I have needed to switch off from social media due to the amount of content being consumed. The lines have blurred on platforms like Instagram and Facebook as they are now a space to talk, view content, gain information, shop and build your brand or business, all at the same time!

This means that, when I see content, it has to stand out or meet the needs in light of the climate we are in.

As a multidimensional space, Instagram is presenting an increasing number of opportunities for young people to share their interests with a wider network – with food and travel topping the list.<sup>2</sup> I have multiple communities that I feel a part of on Instagram, from running to baking. Such online spaces have allowed me to explore my passions in a motivating environment. We are in a time where we find solace in spaces that accept us without judgement or need to explain ourselves. As young people that come from a multitude of different cultures and backgrounds, it is important to feel connected, accepted and seen; something which communities facilitate. People easily identify with those who share common interests or are willing to learn and understand them in a way that does not alienate them. Communities become a space where people can be themselves while supporting others in an organic way.

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# COMMUNITY

This is the same on Facebook where I have found many groups that fit my interests; one being the freelancing community, in which we share job opportunities, give advice and tips, while celebrating each other's achievements.

When deciding on whether to work with a brand, I look at their framework and whether it is reflective of what they are trying to portray. Trust is needed in order for a partnership to work, that means building a relationship that benefits

the community. Brand partnerships can be exciting but challenging as myself and many others fall victim to the possibility of becoming tokenized. Being labelled as "smashing stereotypes" can be damaging for communities and groups that have been doing the groundwork to ensure that such a narrative is not upheld. I like to know that I am being valued as an individual with the freedom to express my ideas and knowledge, that I am chosen for my work and not to tick the diversity box.

Brands have a responsibility to understand that no community, race, religion is monolithic. There are many intersections that make us different which should be embraced. It is important that assumptions aren't made when approaching young people. I have had to correct companies based on the narrative pushed on me or rhetoric that works against what I am fighting for. As a freelancer in advertising, I have had to push back against ideas on many occasions as they were not inclusive enough or reflective of society as we know it. This is where trust comes in, allowing young people to be a part of the process when creating campaigns about them. This also goes for brands that create work around a community. Include them from the beginning to ensure that steps are being coordinated in the efforts being made for change.

It is great when a brand recognises your talent, work and passion without having to add a narrative to it. Through this, we see successful partnerships work as their values align with the young person/community they choose to work with. I want to see brands rally behind change in an

authentic way and this is true for my generation as a whole, with 33% of Gen Zers in Europe believing a commitment to community can help a brand communicate more effectively with its Instagram base.<sup>2</sup> Young people are now demanding for ideas and campaigns to be led by us, not vice versa. It is nice to see a brand stand behind a young person in a way that uplifts their work rather than trying to shape or mould it into something else.

If a brand wants to authentically create something that will not only benefit themselves but those within a community, there needs to be transparency. Performative work can be easily spotted out. I like brands that include young people in campaigns AND in boardrooms. It is time we demystify roles available in industries and working with our generation means exactly that – a structure and framework that allows us to be in front of and behind the screen, and to build an inclusive environment. Brands that do the groundwork, listen and are actively progressing are those in which we want to align ourselves with. ■



▲ **Nearly 1 in 2**  
**US Gen Zers say**  
**that as a result of the**  
**pandemic, it's become**  
**more important for**  
**brands to act in a**  
**sustainable way<sup>6</sup>**

@sahraisha

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Future

# The new shopper

As the economic landscape shifts gear, the attention is now on the next generation of shoppers to make their mark on the consumer journey and prove their spending power... All eyes are on Generation Z.

Born roughly between 1995-2010, Gen Z is set to become one of the fastest growing consumer markets, presenting a huge – and unmissable – opportunity to brands. By gearing their marketing strategies towards this new audience base, they can gain a head start in the race for their attention and loyalty. But, it’s not a simple case of rewording; to create a successful strategy, brands need to understand their audience through

and through. So, who are these young people, born into Gen Z?

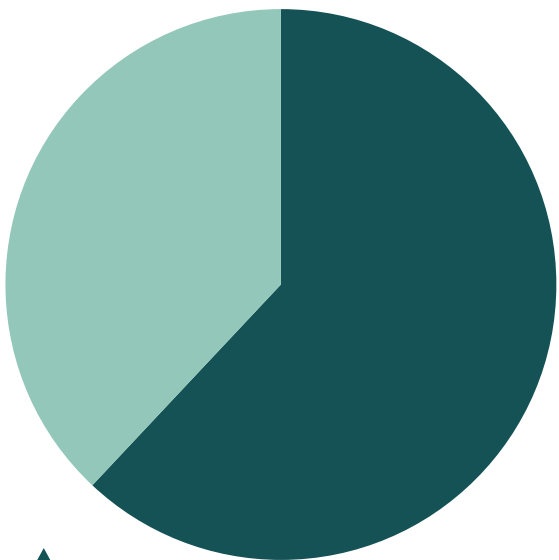
Constant technological innovations and sociocultural movements have had a significant influence on the shopping behaviors and brand expectations of Gen Z. Despite their youth, they are already showcasing a heightened independence and practicality, putting them in a calibre different to any other generation before them.

As digital natives, they have never known a world without the internet or smartphones, but rather, one in which the line between their online and offline lives is blurred.

As a result, they are the “always on” generation, where looking at their WhatsApp chats or Instagram feed every few minutes has become second nature.

This shouldn’t be mistaken for a sign of detachment; in fact, it is a sign of their desire to engage with their immediate and wider networks. To Gen Z, social media isn’t just a window into the personal lives of family and friends, but a chance to interact with like-minded creators and communities who can entertain, educate and inspire.

If they’re already online, then it makes sense for brands to meet



62% of US Gen Zers say they’re in favor of ads that show how brands are responding to the pandemic or helping customers<sup>6</sup>

“IN A WORLD RULED BY THE ATTENTION ECONOMY AND WHERE YOUR BRAND CAN BE OUT OF MIND IN JUST 8 SECONDS,<sup>7</sup> GEN Z CONSUMERS WANT THE HARD WORK TAKEN CARE OF.”



## COMMERCE

them where they are. This means optimising the digital experience for social platforms and forming virtual connections with these tech virtuosos. For instance, many brands are taking advantage of Instagram Shopping to add a level of convenience to the consumer journey. It works by creating an immersive shopfront on people's Feed and Stories, allowing them to discover, explore and fall in love with products there and then.

Where Gen Zers are, their next purchase should be too. They've always put in the hard work, conducting research to make their shopping experience as informed as possible and making sure the brands they buy from are those they're proud to put their name to. But, in a world ruled by the attention

economy and where your brand can be out of mind in just 8 seconds,<sup>7</sup> Gen Z consumers want the hard work taken care of. They want the right product and they want it now.

Because of this demand, we're seeing more and more of their purchasing decisions being influenced by family and friends. Going to their personal network for product recommendations means they can cut out the consideration phase and jump straight into action, safe in the knowledge they have been guided by a trustworthy and dependable voice.

But, Gen Zers are not impulsive decision-makers; in fact, only 19% describe themselves as such in Europe.<sup>2</sup> This means, the days of relying solely on creative excellence

or on big names to carry the weight of your marketing strategy are gone. Instead, it's all about building trust to engage this audience and using this as a platform from which to win their votes. So, when it comes to replicating the trust they have for their nearest and dearest, where do you even begin?

The answer lies in seeing this generation as a community of young individuals with a diverse set of characteristics, not as a consumer base with predetermined shopping habits. As they embrace the diversity of their authentic selves, brands need to follow suit and ditch the one-size-fits-all business model for one that Gen Z can identify with on multiple levels.

According to a Facebook-

commissioned study, Europe's young people are 2.05x more likely to self-identify as introverts than extroverts. Which may explain why 76% use Instagram to view other people's Stories, while only 35% use it to create them.<sup>2</sup> This insight doesn't just direct brands towards the tools they should be using, but how they should be using them. With Gen Z taking on the more passive role of "listener", brands need to adopt the role of "creator" and consider using Stories – or newly introduced Reels – to make the noise.

This is true for the creative a brand delivers and the values it upholds; young people want the latter to influence the former and expect there to be a natural affinity with their own set of values. Whether they're supporting mental health,

fighting for social justice or building greener communities, Gen Zers live their values—which means they shop them too.

Going forward, 38% of this generation are planning to prioritise sustainability (above price) when making a purchase in Europe.<sup>2</sup> With this in mind, brands should be focusing less on promotional messaging and more on purposeful content i.e. how they're doing their bit for the planet. After all, the actions they take now will have a direct impact on the future of Gen Z and generations to come. If our youth is willing to do better, brands should be set to do the same. One company leading by example is Gymshark. In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the gym wear brand began to post at-home workouts on Instagram to keep its young audience fit, motivated and entertained. It also created the "Sweat for NHS" social campaign, which raised money for its local hospitals through the 35,000 #NHSSweatySelfies received across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.<sup>8</sup>

If Gymshark proves anything, it's the power of perception. By understanding the needs and values of its audience, it was able to react to the changing landscape in a way that



Even before the pandemic, **2 in 3** Gen Zers in the US said they were using **BOPIS** (buy online, pick up in store) to shop more conveniently<sup>9</sup>

met expectations and in a location that got its efforts noticed. This moral standard is also upheld through the brand's commitment to diversity, championing athletes of all abilities. And, through its commitment to digital innovation, utilising the latest platform features like Instagram Stories, Reels and Filters.

When it comes to imitating Gymshark's success and winning over Gen Zers, brands just need to show they "get" them. After all, with knowledge comes clarity, and with clarity comes direction – a way of reaching the new shopper. ■

“AS THEY EMBRACE THE DIVERSITY OF THEIR AUTHENTIC SELVES, BRANDS NEED TO FOLLOW SUIT AND DITCH THE ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL BUSINESS MODEL FOR ONE THAT GEN Z CAN IDENTIFY WITH ON MULTIPLE LEVELS.”





# Meet Gymshark

With a recent valuation of over \$1.3 billion<sup>10</sup> and an Instagram following of 4.7 million (and counting), Gymshark’s Chief Brand Officer, Noel Mack, and Head of Social Content, Ellfried Samba, talk about the role of social media in helping the brand find its online identity and core community.

**How would you describe Gymshark’s audience?**  
**NM:** We don’t like to call them an “audience”; that makes it sound like we’re performing in front of them. We don’t even say “marketing to”, we say “for” and “with”. Our people are a community more than they are an audience, and the only thing you need to be a part of our community is the willingness to be a better version of yourself than you were yesterday.

**What role do Facebook and Instagram play for your brand?**  
**ES:** Facebook enables us to stay in touch with our heritage and engage with our core community on a deeper level. Our Facebook community group is the home of our ‘Super Fans’, where we gain valuable insights that help improve our product offering and services. Whereas, Instagram allows us to further expand our reach, in keeping with the current state of

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culture. It is where the majority of our community exists, so is the most impactful way to convey what we stand for and drive commercial results.

**What role will they play in the future?**  
**ES:** Both platforms will play a huge role in helping us provide the best community experience imaginable. While our Instagram strategy is currently centred around engagement-led content, new platform features (e.g. Reels, Guides and Filters) will enable us to increase our value proposition. Shopping tools, on the other hand, will make it easier for community members to find the products they love. We aim to expand our community offering on Facebook, primarily from a support perspective, for instance, using Facebook Messenger to automate customer inquiries.

**Tell us about your approach to building community and inclusivity.**  
**NM:** Gymshark is a brand grown by the community for the

community. Our people are at the heart of everything we do, and we use our platform to represent their aspirations and journeys. We express our values through our athletes, who are the faces of the brand. Being a Gymshark Athlete isn’t about having the largest following or being the most successful sports star; it’s about what you represent and the relationship you have with your audience. A large proportion of our current athletes were avid members of our community before joining our roster, a trend that will increase significantly in the upcoming years.

**Do you have any advice for new brands on Instagram and Facebook?**  
**ES:** Understand the context. Every social platform offers a unique value proposition, so it is essential to establish why your audience is on there in the first place and uncover the best way to add value. You should seek to have an individual strategy for each platform to cater for the user’s individual needs. Test and learn.

## PROFILE STATS

**FOUNDER**  
Ben Francis

**ESTABLISHED**  
2012, aged 20

**LOCATIONS**  
131 countries

**WORTH**  
\$1.3 billion

**IG FOLLOWERS**  
4.7million



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Brands can't be rigid with their approach to social media and should constantly be reviewing their tactics to keep up with algorithm updates and user behavioral changes. 'Evolve or die' is a mantra that we live by at Gymshark. It is vital to not get too attached to the way you do things and not be a victim of self-constraint to continue growing. Impact over effort. Many brands get way too caught up in the creation process and tend to overcomplicate their message. Users are processing more content than ever before and at a faster rate, so it is important to get to the punchline ASAP, especially in an era where authenticity is valued over perfection. You should always be thinking whether the effort being made equates to the impact expected.

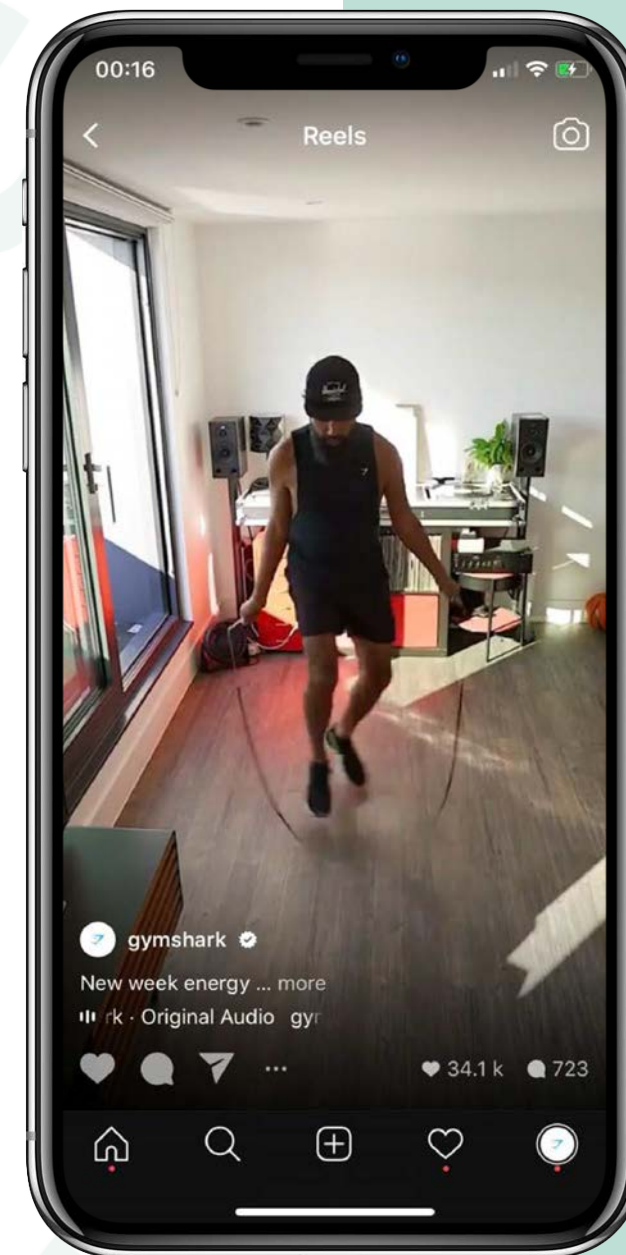
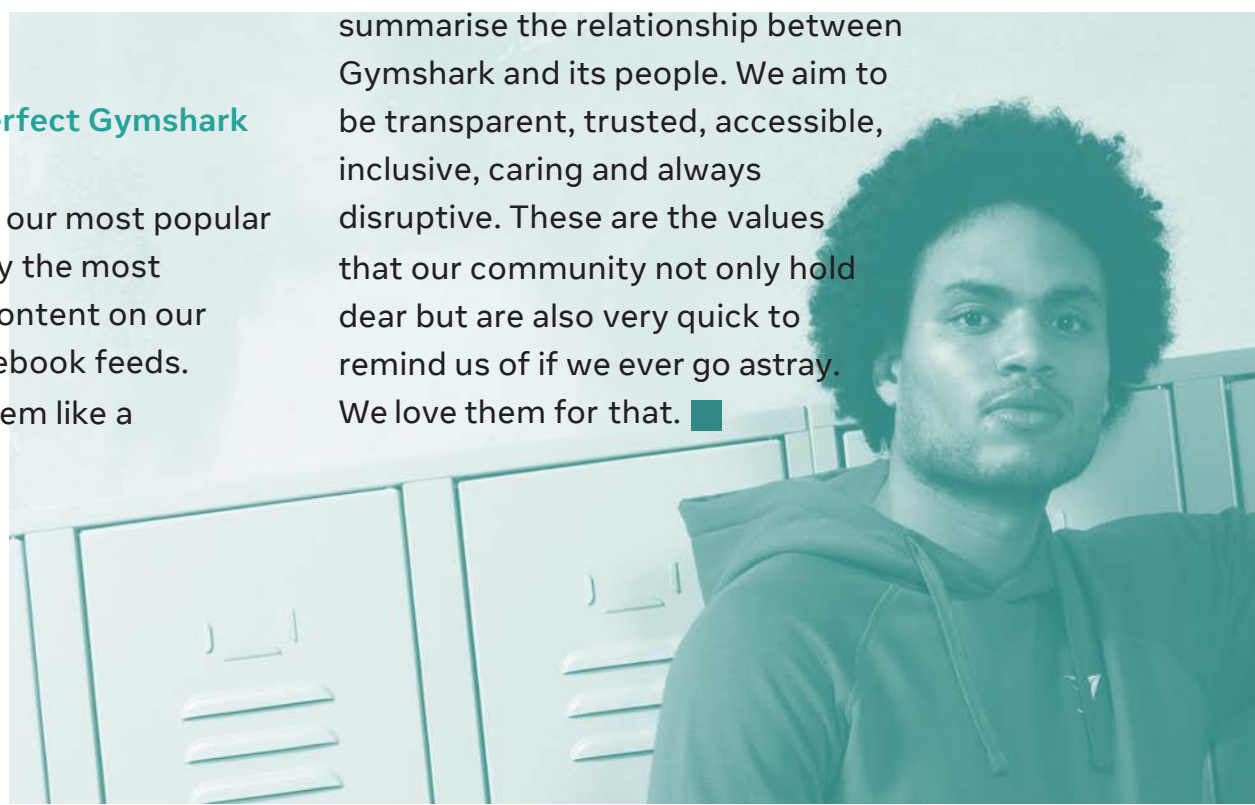
## What makes the perfect Gymshark post?

**ES:** Screenshots of our most popular tweets are ironically the most engaging style of content on our Instagram and Facebook feeds. While this might seem like a

contradiction to my initial suggestion that every platform should have an individual strategy, it actually personifies the 'impact over effort' and 'test and learn' philosophy. Meme culture was on the rise, with screenshots of tweets replacing quotes on popular meme accounts, so we were willing to experiment and go beyond our tried and trusted images, videos and carousels. Tweet posts now drive more on engagement than any other content type. They are simple, impactful and sharable, increasing the likelihood of going viral.

## What are Gymshark's brand values and how does your audience respond to them?

**NM:** 'Family' is the best way to summarise the relationship between Gymshark and its people. We aim to be transparent, trusted, accessible, inclusive, caring and always disruptive. These are the values that our community not only hold dear but are also very quick to remind us of if we ever go astray. We love them for that. ■



## Introducing Instagram Reels

**A new way for people, creators and businesses to create and discover short, entertaining videos on Instagram.**

Whether they're trying out the latest dance trend or spreading a message about something they care about, people can now express themselves and connect with others through Instagram Reels.

Simply record and edit 15-second multi-clip videos with audio and new creative tools, including AR Effects, Timer and Countdown, and Align.

After you share your reel, it will live on a separate Reels tab on your profile, where people can find more

of what you've shared. If you also share to your Feed, your reel will appear on your main profile grid.

You can also share you reel to your Story. If you opt to do so, it will behave like a regular Story – it will not be shared to Reels in Explore, will not appear on your profile and will disappear after 24 hours.

For public accounts, Reels can be shared to a dedicated space in Explore, offering you the chance of being seen and enjoyed by the wider Instagram community.

With Reels, everyone can find – and do – more of what they love on Instagram.



RESILIENCE

“YOUNG PEOPLE  
WANT THEIR  
TIME ON SOCIAL  
MEDIA TO BE  
SOMEWHAT  
CONSTRUCTIVE.”

# Meet Ruby

@\_rubygranger

Before the Millennium, newspaper columns, television interviews and in-person protests gave ordinary people a place to share opinions. However, very few people had access to these resources and their influence. Admittedly, the online space does remain elitist (since not everyone has access to the web); however, most young people today can share opinions and influence others in a way that has never before been possible. In fact, anyone can share an opinion, draw attention to a social issue or post a selfie. Everyone who has an Instagram account has a platform. And everyone who has a platform has influence. And influence is a luxury.

Given my Instagram following (110K+ followers), I am known as an “influencer”. While I do have some qualms with this word, this language essentially recognises that Instagram accounts can influence how people act and think, which is huge. I use Instagram as a supporting platform

for the educational content I make on YouTube. I am known as a “StudyTuber”, which basically means I share study tips, ‘Study With Me’ videos and university vlogs with students. Most of my followers are then, as you can imagine, still in education (age 13–25) and most are curious and dedicated to becoming their best versions of themselves. I love being able to connect with so many young people every day, but it means that I have to be so aware of my influence and make sure that it is positive.

Over the last few years, but especially during lockdown, I have seen a shift in how Generation Z uses social media. While Instagram was once a place for Facetuned mirror selfies and overhead shots of pumpkin spice lattes, young people today are interested in meaningful, positive and realistic content. Back in 2017, Facetune was Apple’s most downloaded app<sup>11</sup> and, in a 2015 survey by Photoion

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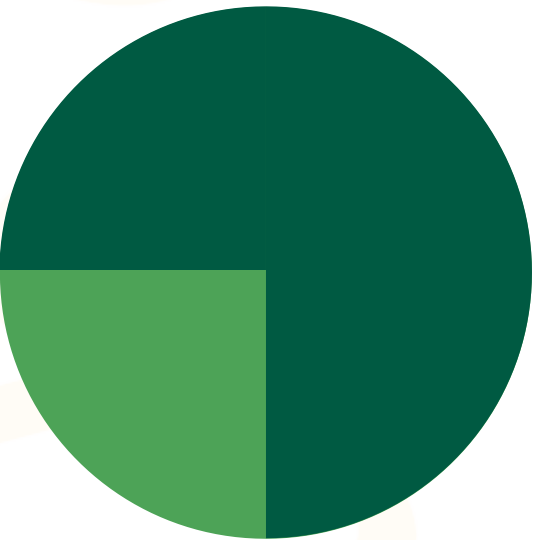


Among US Gen Zers, more than 1 in 2 say they’ve been keeping up with their exercise<sup>5</sup>



# RESILIENCE

Photography School, 68% of adults reported editing photos before sharing them.<sup>12</sup> Just a few years later, however, and this highly edited content is no longer so popular. A more recent study actually found the majority of Europe’s young people don’t even use Instagram filters on their photos.<sup>2</sup> And that’s the beauty of Instagram; unlike YouTube, Pinterest and TikTok, it has become an increasingly realistic space online. Influencers today make a conscious effort to show lowlights, as well as highlights, often documenting bad mental health days and using the #nomakeup hashtag. A couple of years ago, I wouldn’t have thought



More than 1 in 4 US Gen Zers say they’ve participated in an online community in the past month<sup>5</sup>

to mention that I had woken up late or was struggling with my mental health or had done badly on an academic assessment. But today, I speak openly about it so I can show my followers that these things are totally normal.

I think this shift was partly triggered by the introduction of Instagram Stories in 2016. Stories are quick, ad hoc and unedited, which means they feel very raw and genuine. It’s like receiving video messages from a friend (at least that’s how I see it). When building trust and a community on Instagram, Stories are one of the best things to utilise. Brand pages can quite often lack this community- feel, but realistic content can take away the corporate barrier, which a lot of big businesses still have. On a platform, like Instagram, Gen Z isn’t looking for “professional”. This might work on YouTube where the content is more polished but, for the most part, people go to Instagram for unfiltered content.

What young people see on Instagram will affect how they act in real life. We hear a lot about the unconscious ways that social media can impact young people (for example, unrealistic models may lead to body image issues). However, young people also use social media to consciously change the way they act in real life. As I said, I predominately have a student audience, with many people coming to my Instagram page for productivity motivation. Unsurprisingly, I’ve found

that more people bookmark posts where I’ve shared something meaningful or helpful (i.e. study tips, recipes or self-care tips). In other words, people save content which they feel might help them later. It seems that young people want their time on social media to be somewhat constructive, which may be why 52% of European Gen Zers have become more interested in health and wellbeing since the outbreak of COVID-19.<sup>2</sup> I actually started a vegan food Instagram account at the beginning of lockdown where I occasionally post recipes. The fact that the page already has 10K+ followers demonstrates there is a market for content which will help people be healthier.

This is so important to bear in mind when sharing content. Brand pages don’t have to be product-based. All products and services are introduced for a reason and social media is a wonderful space to explore this reason further. For example, if you sell deodorant, you might be committed to helping people feel more confident when they exercise. To reflect this on your Instagram account, you might share workouts and self-confidence tips. In other words, you offer services beyond those you typically would; services, which actively help your followers with their health and wellbeing. It is these brand accounts that I personally choose to follow. Coconut Bowls (@coconutbowls) is

a great example. They share recipes, yoga flows and self-care tips, reflecting the core principles of their business and only occasionally talk directly about their products. This makes their page feel less branded and more personal. It helps followers build a stronger communicative bond with the page and the brand, as a result.

The way Gen Zers are using Instagram definitely represents a shift in social media behavior. I see more and more young people recognising that having a platform is a luxury and that it can be used as a force for good. And more and more personal accounts using Instagram to share petitions, educational content and lowlights. In other words, Instagram has become a place from which to share meaningful content. I say to my followers that they should unfollow me if they feel like my content is having a negative effect on their mental health. To grow on Instagram, I think we (ironically) need to focus less on numbers and more on how meaningful our content is.

“A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, I WOULDN’T HAVE THOUGHT TO MENTION THAT I HAD WOKEN UP LATE OR WAS STRUGGLING WITH MY MENTAL HEALTH.”



38% of US Gen Zers say they’ve been engaging in self-care activities like meditation<sup>5</sup>



@\_rubygranger



ACTIVISM

# Meet [@jamie\\_windust](#)



“IT’S NOT AN ACTIVE THOUGHT TO BE AN ACTIVIST. YOU ARE JUST AWARE OF THE WORLD AROUND YOU OR YOU AREN’T.”

Often questions are posed to generations that feel jarring or hard to explain. For Gen Z, that question often focuses around our experiences as individuals and what that lived experience feels like as we navigate our way through the world. For me, and many of us, our lived experiences and world view impact the ways in which we participate in every single act we make as human beings. It’s not a conscious decision, rather a habitual instinct and natural reflex to use our social politics, education and awareness within all that we do.

For myself, social media has always been a tool that has allowed me to find a community within the palm of my hand. Geography wasn’t on my side during my teenage years. My local queer community was non-existent, and I struggled to find people to connect with in my physical

space. Using Instagram to be able to find my people, and in this case, the LGBTQ+ community, was vital for my survival. It instilled a sense of escapism and harmony through online social contact that I’d never felt before. Whilst everyone around me was using Instagram purely for entertainment, many marginalised bodies were using it as a tool for growth and evolution. It wasn’t merely a casual or flippant activity, but rather an action that allowed us to see our potential: what our futures would look like and what we could achieve outside of our surroundings in that moment.

This year has seen this exemplified through the Black Lives Matter movement, using social media as a tool for communication, tracking, organisation and safety. People were able to check in through social media as to where they were and ensure protestors and activist groups were safe. In 2019, we saw London Trans Pride kick off its inaugural event, using social media to raise the profile of the event. As a grassroots group, they then marched through London with thousands of trans people and allies, all organised through social media. Both exemplify the power of social media in allowing Gen Z to reimagine and reshape spaces, both digitally and physically.

I am very stubborn. When it comes



▲ Among Gen Zers in the US, 62% say they have the potential to impact the world<sup>13</sup>

to the ways in which I self-identify through my job roles as a freelancer and self-employed queer/trans person, that stubbornness is essential to what I do. Stubbornness is about boundaries. Being a marginalised voice on the internet means that boundaries are essential to mental and physical wellbeing. Existing within my social media fields, I am constantly seeing healthy conversations around boundaries, knowledge, power structures, anarchy and redistribution. It’s an environment that allows us to constantly evolve and still has that

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essence of what so many of us used social media for in the first place. Our own corner of the internet that has our people within it.

Honesty entices honesty. I have always been very forthright and proud of the ways in which I feel comfortable enough to share my stories and my experiences online. Social media started as a diary for me and I used it at times when I felt most isolated and alone. Now, it’s a tool of catharsis and release. For my generation, in particular, it’s a space to feel comforted and accepted,





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surrounded by people that know just how you're feeling.

The environment that many LGBTQ+ create within their social media networks is all about seeing things that extend beyond the outside world. Seeing people share personal experiences and stories of heartache and pain, but also joy and brilliance, empowers us all to feel like we can begin to share those parts of ourselves in an easier and more inclusive way. Whether that be online or offline, the parts of ourselves that we explore through Instagram can often have a massive impact on the way our behavior and outlook changes in-person. Those images and stories flash into our minds when we are having hardship as a reminder that it's possible to continue through whatever storm has wavered onto us.

But it's not all roses and optimism for LGBTQ+ folk, especially those that speak their truth online through activism. The 'pink pound' – when marketers use Pride as an opportunity to capitalise on LGBTQ+ people's money and spending power – is something many of us within the community are aware of. According to LGBT+ Capital, the queer community has an estimated global spending power of \$3.7 trillion<sup>14</sup> A promising invitation for brands, but nonetheless, that activation needs to come with authenticity and collaboration, not

just a rainbow flag. We understand the complexities of its existence and know that often 'pride' focused products and LGBTQ+ specific content on Instagram don't always reflect what the community is actually about. Content and branded/sponsored 'pride' content very rarely hits the nail on the head because it's coming from a place of tokenism or 'yearly trend'.

The industry can often feel uninspiring because, as LGBTQ+ activists and influencers, our message can feel like it's being used by lots of different brands, all at the same time, for a short period of time. I remember the first Pride where I was handed these opportunities; it felt incredible to be asked to work with such aspirational brands after campaigning and working within LGBTQ+ media for just six months. But then, the crushing feeling of it all leaving once Pride was over was really difficult to deal with. What it did do is make me realise that brand activism is not the way in which most LGBTQ+ activists see the pinnacle of sharing a message. Yes, it's great to expose and portray a campaign or a message through a brand partnership, but often, capitalism and the time frame that Pride offers us can make us feel used for clout. Some of the best content I've produced and have engaged with is from brand activations that hand over the reins to LGBTQ+ folk. When their passion for social change is seen

through a campaign that has been devised, curated and produced by the queer talent for the queer audience, it's a win win. We can create a campaign that genuinely represents our community. The brand can build a campaign around authenticity and reality. The community can see themselves represented and shared in a space they may have not been before.

The audience knows that a good intention is no longer good enough. As social commentators and activists, our platforms and audience's pages are constantly filled with amazing marginalised voices who are writers, editors, speakers, musicians, analysts, designers – all able to do the work if you don't know how to do it authentically.

I personally am not a fan of the word activist. I never titled myself as an activist and often those that speak out about social inequality are seen as such. I am a writer, a model, a public speaker, all which involve talking about social issues. But this doesn't necessarily make me an 'activist'. It's not an active thought to be an activist. You are just aware of the world around you or you aren't. It's something that more and more young people on social media are becoming aware of and engaging in because we know that it's more than just social media. It's our future.

We are seeing the ways in which it actually has the ability to bring down institutions that are not fit for purpose anymore and the environment around us.

Our power as a generation is no longer just concealed within digital means. It has the ability to foster change in realms that we exist within physically. We can use our social media networks to build and support infrastructures that provide marginalised communities with safe, fun and informative spaces. We are, in essence, becoming the digital architects of our own resistance. ■

## JAMIE'S CHECKLIST:

### How to engage with social activist work as a brand

Do you know enough about the social cause you want to promote?

Why now are you deciding to promote it? Is it knee jerk or for clout?

Are there people from that community at the table right now?



▲ Among Gen Zers in the US, **61%** say they'd like to see more diversity in advertising<sup>15</sup>

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# SUMMARY SUMMARY SUMMARY SUMMARY

GENERATION Z DOESN'T JUST REPRESENT A SHIFT IN CONSUMER MARKETING I.E. A NEW AUDIENCE FOR BRANDS TO "CRACK"; MEMBERS OF THIS AGE GROUP ARE, IN FACT, HAVING AN IMPACT ON A SCALE MUCH BIGGER THAN THIS. THEY ALSO REPRESENT A SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE – A NEW WAY OF VIEWING THE WORLD AROUND US. WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC DISRUPTING OUR WAY OF LIVING, OUR ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STANDING IS REACHING A TURNING POINT; ONE THAT GEN ZERS ARE WELL POSITIONED TO NAVIGATE AS THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW.

WITH SO MUCH AHEAD OF THEM, THERE'S A HUGE OPPORTUNITY FOR BRANDS TO TAP INTO GEN ZERS YOUTH AND FREE-SPIRITED NATURE. AFTER ALL, THEY ARE AT THE PRIME AGE OF DISCOVERY, WHERE THE DECISIONS THEY MAKE NOW WILL DETERMINE WHERE THEIR LOYALTIES LIE IN LATER LIFE. IN ORDER TO BUILD THIS LASTING RELATIONSHIP WITH GEN Z, BRANDS NEED TO:

#### Create Meaningful Connections

As much as Gen Zers prize their individuality, everybody needs to feel like they are understood and that they belong. As they seek out communities that are safe, inspiring, understanding and helpful, brands need to step up and be the one

Gen Zers single out. They need to connect with them individually, for example through Direct Messaging or collectively, through Groups.

#### Inspire Purchase Through Values

To engage Gen Zers, brands should be championing their values – whether it's their dedication to the planet or their pursuit to self-improve. This should be done in a way that's true to the brand's message and not just jumping on the latest movement to empower Gen Z. Authenticity has a way of resonating more powerfully with this young audience.

#### Partner for Success

Brands need to reflect Gen Z's worldview by unleashing the power of partnerships. This could be with an organisation that Gen Zers respect and identify with or with Gen Zers themselves. Taking either approach is more likely to result in a campaign that is centred around relatability and a success that is built from collaboration. ■



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