Defining Generation Y

Today’s youth are getting the most out of their lives. Youngsters do recognize that they are raised in an affluent world flooded with choices. For most of them, the question is not how to get something but rather what to choose. In this highly competitive society, brands realized that they had to increase marketing investments to be heard above the noise of the advertising clutter. Generation Y is not only aware of being marketed to but has grown up in an environment full of brands and commercial media; it’s all they have ever known. The rise of digital media allowed youth to create their own personalized world. They are able to live their lives through new online and mobile communities. Today’s 19- to 35-year-olds grew up in a world where mobile phones for children and teens became commonplace and the internet was being used at school. They are so conditioned to use these internet, streaming and mobile technologies that deprivation of one of them would feel like having a limb removed. The way youth socialize, build relationships, shop and make career choices is heavily affected by the era they have been raised in. There is an ancient saying that bears much truth: ‘people resemble their times more than they resemble their parents’. Gen Yers are children of the cyber revolution. Just like the industrial revolution changed lifestyle and culture by the end of the 19th century, the omnipresent connectivity and digital advancement has reshaped the social DNA of our current and future youth generations.

The oldest members of Generation Y are already entering the job market, getting married and becoming the heads of households. If you haven’t already targeted this cohort, now is an important time to introduce them to your brand. A better understanding of what makes young consumers tick will improve your brand positioning and marketing to the target group. Whatever business you are in, this generation will make or break your market success. The long-term flourishing of your company depends on how well your brand strategy responds to the demands of this new consumer generation. Clelia Morales, Head of Social Media and PR at eBay Europe, phrases it as follows in an interview with us:

The challenge with this generation is that your organization must be ready to act fast enough as a response to their feedback and input. Social media help you to detect their thoughts and feelings right away, but Gen Yers will expect you
to react immediately and come up with improved products or campaigns much faster than ever before.3

In this chapter, we will dive into the characteristics of Generation Yers. More than half of the world’s population is under the age of 30. Gen Y is currently one of the largest demographic groups and will soon outnumber the Baby Boomer generation. In the United States alone, there are over 70 million Gen Yers with over $200 billion in purchasing power. Their generational impact on society, culture, business, politics and economics in the next three decades will be similar in magnitude to that of the Baby Boomer generation. ‘Gen Yers are by default smart and self-aware of media and marketing’, says Hubert Grealish, Global Head of Brand Communications at Diageo. ‘They know how to manipulate media and play with brands. Many marketers still believe this is a threat to their profession but in fact it creates large opportunities for brands to engage with their fans. Gen Y is capable of moving an idea forward and co-creating value.’4

We will indicate how the arrival of this new consumer group affects branding and marketing. Of course, there are as many differences within generations as there are among generations. It’s never a good idea to generalize too much, especially with a youth generation that has never been so ethnically and lifestyle diverse as today. Still, certain aspects of society and parenting will influence the way your marketing and branding campaigns are perceived by young consumers.

X, Y, Z: what’s next?

Generational labels are usually the result of popular culture. Some are linked to a historic event, others are derived from drastic social or demographic changes or from a big turn in the calendar.

Millennials

Millennials belong to the third category. The term refers to those born between 1980 and 1996, although different authors use different data. It is the first generation to come of age in the new millennium. ‘Y’ was chosen as a popular label as they are the successors of the Generation X, but there are many synonyms such as Generation Why, Generation Search, Generation Next, the Net generation, the digital natives, the dot.com generation, the Einstein generation, Echo Boomers, etc. They are the children of the throngs of Baby Boomer parents, which explains why there are so many in spite of the declining fertility rates. Baby Boomers gave birth at a later age (average mum aged 30) and were consequently more mature in their roles as parents and tutors. They have raised their children as coaches might, with one central notion: individual empowerment. Gen Y children have been taught that
all opinions are equally important. Boomers included the view of their children in every discussion or decision. Parents gave their Gen Y children the chance to learn and experience a lot of different things (in travel, sports, art, music...). The result of this upbringing is that Gen Yers are more critical and cynical and generally difficult to wow. As ‘stimulus junkies’ they have a shorter attention span and an irrepressible need for instant gratification. ‘They use their smartphones and social media to find the information they want straight at their fingertips’, says Jean-Jacques Maartense, CMO of Cartamundi, in an interview with us. ‘They are very well connected and networked and value the realness, honesty and authenticity of things in life. They are looking for a more meaningful existence.’5 If they have an idea, they will immediately want to execute it. Their parents have served them hand and foot, and that is what they will expect in life, work and relationships too.

**Generation X**

Generation X consists of people who were born from 1965 to 1979. Other labels for this generation include: the Baby Busters, Post-Boomers, Slacker Generation, indifferent, shadow or invisible generation, and Lost Generation. Ironically, the Generation X label was popularized by Douglas Coupland’s book *Generation X: tales for an accelerated culture*, describing a generation that actually defied labels – ‘just call us X’. Not only did the label stick, it has also produced labels for the next two generations – Y and Z. Xers began their career in the early 1990s when there was a recession and much downsizing of the workforce. They adopted the work ethic and focus of the Boomers but were more individualistic and pessimistic. As Gen X is trying to combine a demanding job with raising Gen Z kids, they have the highest stress levels of all generations. In their parental values they embrace laissez-faire principles allowing their Gen Z children to learn from their mistakes. Compared to the Baby Boomers, Generation X sticks more to self-reliance and personal achievement.

**Baby Boomers**

The Baby Boomers’ label is drawn from the post-Second World War spike in fertility that began in 1946 and ended in 1964 as a result of the commercial launch of birth control pills. They grew up in an era of economic growth and full employment. The austerity of the Silent Generation was replaced by technological advancement and increasing freedom and leisure time. Boomers have lived through years of incredible change and are therefore very adaptive and flexible. They are the most confident generation. Their altruistic and open-minded thinking and never ending optimism is reflecting in the values of their Millennial children.6
The Silent Generation

The Silent Generation covers adults born from 1928 to 1945. They are the children of the Second World War and the Great Depression. Their ‘silent’ label refers to conformist instincts and contrasts with the noisy anti-establishment Boomers.

Differences between generations

Pew Research Center found that the majority of generation members believe they own a unique and distinctive identity. In Table 1.1 you will find the spontaneously uttered reasons of each generation for feeling distinctive. Although the previous youth of Generation X also cite technology as their generation’s source of distinctiveness, just 12 per cent (half the amount of Gen Yers) say this. For Generation Y, technology is more than just their gadgets; they have fused their social lives into it. In InSites Consulting’s NextGeneration study 2015, 75 per cent of global Millennials are regular users of Facebook, 55 per cent visits YouTube and 48 per cent uses the Whatsapp messenger. When looking at Generation Z, Facebook usage is lower (42 per cent) but 65 per cent visits YouTube. It is clear that the youngest generation is more into visual and video communication. Already more than six out of ten 4- to 6-year-olds frequently goes to YouTube. The success of

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1.1</th>
<th>What makes particular generations unique?</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Generation Y</strong></td>
<td><strong>Generation X</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Technology use (24%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Music culture (11%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Liberal/tolerant (7%)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Smarter (6%)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Clothes (5%)</td>
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SOURCE: Pew Research Center, January 2010
Defining Generation Y

Tablets in families with kids and teens affects the nextgen’s media behaviour.\(^8\) Technology makes life easier for Millennials and is bringing family and friends closer together. McCann Worldwide did a global study in 17 countries combining 7,000 interviews with youngsters. The report named *The Truth about Youth* states that Millennials live in a ‘new social economy’ in which recommending and sharing brands is front and centre in their daily lives. Laura Simpson, Global IQ Director at McCann Worldwide, said about the study: ‘What we saw is that technology is the great global unifier. It is the glue that binds this generation together and fuels the motivations that define them. Young people utilize technology as a kind of ‘supersense’ which connects them to infinite knowledge, friends and entertainment opportunities.’

Given a list of things (including cosmetics, car, passport, phone and sense of smell) and told they could only save two, 53 per cent of those aged 16–22 and 48 per cent of the 23- to 30-year-olds would give up their own sense of smell if it meant they could keep an item of technology (their phone or laptop).\(^9\)

On the other hand, if parents join Facebook and invite their son or daughter to become friends, this might lead to uncomfortable situations. Online confrontations between generations happen, especially because older generations are often unaware of the implicit social rules (tagging, wall postings, etc). For Boomers, work ethic is the most prominent identity claim; for the Silent Generation it is the Second World War and the Depression that makes them stand apart.\(^10\)

In an interview with Francisco Bethencourt, VP Global Marketing at Yildiz Holding, he explains that Gen Yers live in a multichannel, multimedia world with many more ways of engaging interactions with peers, companies and brands. ‘They want to share their thoughts in a more active way and this has a tremendous impact on brands, advertising and companies’, Bethencourt says:

‘The Millennials’ as a generation is much larger in number than Gen X, and is becoming the new mainstream in many developed countries. It is a much more diverse generation, with Hispanics now leading and shaping the way. Before, Hispanics, African-Americans and Asian-Americans were minorities; today they are reaching majority status in many cities and states around the United States and are profoundly influencing people’s habits and traditions. In the developing world, we are seeing the rise of the middle class, which is younger and better connected to the outside world than before with much more disposable income. The new consumer is multitasking and checking stuff on his or her Facebook page and sending text messages while watching television.\(^11\)

It’s not just technology that is shaping the personality of our youth, it’s actually also the other way around. If you reverse the direction of causality, it’s a perspective that helps in explaining technological evolutions. The Boomers were a generation that was very much concerned with self-sufficiency and they took the mainframe computers from their parents and turned them into
personal computers in the 1980s, supporting individual work on everyone’s desk. Generation X took that individualism to the next level. They were interested in making money by buying low and selling high. Gen Xers introduced online auction sites such as eBay in the 1990s and they have boosted e-commerce in general. Today it is because of the social needs and the peer tethering of Generation Y as well as their high need for me-marketing that the web has turned into a network of social communities. ‘The ease and agility with which Gen Y absorbs content is amazing’, says Ishita Roy, former Marketing Head South Asia at BBC Worldwide:

Technology is clearly a big difference with the other generations but they’re also more engaged and active and very vocal. Their ability to voice their opinion and act upon their ideas is far higher than with previous generations. One of the biggest lessons when I was working for Discovery Channel was to be very conscious about the tone of voice of anchors and on-air communication. They don’t like people, channels or brands to talk down to them. So if you don’t want to alienate them, you have to keep your messages very friendly and inviting. They are used to eye level communication with their parents and teachers and expect the same style from everyone.

**Generation Z and Gen Alpha: the new kids on the block**

And what about the generations following Gen Y? Some have called these children Generation Z as the normal alphabet successors of the Y and X Generations. Generation Z was born after 1996. They are the children of Generation X and most of them are still in primary and secondary school.

You can be pretty sure we will see a bunch of new names popping up over the next years. Some simply call them post-millennials; others have dubbed the current kids and teens as ‘plurals’. The latter is short for ‘pluralists’ and reflects the ethnic and religious diversity of the youngest as well as their openness to mix different backgrounds in their social circles. Larry Rosen of California State University, has already coined ‘iGeneration’ in his book *Rewired: Understanding the iGeneration and the way they learn*. The ‘i’ is not only referring to the popular Wii,iPods, iPads and iPhones but also to their need for customization and individualizing. Thanks to digital TV, they can watch whatever they want at any time, stop live television and fully customize their media consumption. They were born in a society in which constant connectivity and individual mobile devices are normal. They started using the computer mouse at the early age of 18 months. According to the NextGeneration InSites report 41 per cent of European Gen Zs and 59 per cent of US Gen Zs own a tablet themselves. They don’t see technology as an instrument, for them it is just a part of life. The way this will affect their thinking and behaviour is not clear yet, but they will certainly adopt new learning styles focusing on how to gain access to every piece of information, synthesize it and integrate it into their life. In a JWT study among Gen Z in the UK and the US, they are dubbed the ‘first true mobile mavens’. They
take high-speed internet, available anytime anywhere, for granted and don’t know what a landline is. Nine out of 10 would be reluctant to give up their mobile phone and value their connection to their friends more than allowance money, material goods or real-world activities such as going to the movies or dining out. Another conclusion from the study is that Gen Z has a high brand awareness and significant impact on household purchases. For instance, 70 per cent of parents report that their teen influences their choice of a mobile phone.16

Gfk MRI data revealed that almost 9 out of 10 13- to 18-year-olds find it important to get good grades and 63 per cent enjoy school for the educational aspect. Teen drinking, smoking and sex along with pregnancies have fallen 44 per cent since 1991 according to the CDC’s National Centre for Health. Generation Z seems to be more responsible, smart, tolerant and inclusive than the Millennial generation. Perhaps they will be dubbed ‘Generation Nice’? Marketing to teens and Gen Z will have to be more informative and meaningful with much attention paid to the responsibility and especially inclusiveness of brands.17 Gen Z makes up a quarter of the population and their spending power has been estimated to $200 billion per year when taking their influence on household purchases into account.18 As they are entering the workforce and will become a large consumer cohort by 2020, we have dedicated an extra separate chapter to Generation Z.

After 2010 new-borns belong to another new generation named Gen Alpha. Scientists of different disciplines, such as meteorologists, tend to move to the Greek alphabet after exhausting the Latin one. Gen Alphas are the kindergarten and pre-school children of Millennials. About 2.5 million of them are born around the globe each week. As the first iPad was launched in 2010 and the word of the year back then was ‘app’, Gen Alpha’s are raised with a tablet and touch screen in their small hands. It is clear they will be even more influenced by visual and video communication. There are now 100 hours of YouTube videos uploaded every minute. Generation Alpha will be the most formally educated generation in history. They will live in a world where India and China are no longer emerging markets but dominating the world’s economy.19 Some sociologists expect this new generation to be more materialistic as they are the children of older and wealthier parents with fewer siblings. Others believe Millennial parents will react against consumerism and rather go back to basics in the hope their children will hold on to their youth for a longer time.20

**How permanent are generational characteristics?**

A question often heard during speeches on Generation Y is: aren’t those youngsters just in a life stage, a mindset that they will outgrow when they age? Well, the answer is: NO! Experience with previous generations such as Gen X has shown that the mindset of youngsters won’t change when they reach the age of 40. Generations do not change over time to look identical
to their parents at the same adult age. A generation is a product of current times and obviously the technologies, media, social markers and events that uniquely shaped them. Values, attitudes and priorities set during youth will remain identical for the rest of their life.21

The Millennial consumer in the United States

The Boston Consulting Group released a report titled The Millennial Consumer. Debunking Stereotypes.* It was based on research comparing the views, behaviour and attitudes of 4,000 Millennials (aged 18 to 34) with 1,000 non-Millennials (aged 35 to 74) in the United States. BCG concluded that the Millennial generation is actively engaged in consuming and influencing. Their influence will only increase as they mature into their peak earning and spending years.

* The original report ‘American Millennials: Deciphering the Enigma Generation’ can be accessed for free at www.barkleyus.com or contact jfromm@millennialmarketing.com for more information.

Some of the key findings of the study were:

● Millennials and non-Millennials spend roughly the same amount of time online, but Millennials are more likely to use the internet as a platform to broadcast their thoughts and experiences and to contribute user-generated content.

● Millennials are far more engaged in activities such as rating products and services (60 per cent vs 46 per cent of non-Millennials) and uploading videos, images and blog entries to the web (60 per cent vs 29 per cent).

● Millennials put a premium on speed, ease, efficiency and convenience in all their transactions. For example, they shop for groceries at convenience stores twice as often as non-Millennials.

● They are receptive to cause marketing and are more likely to choose products whose purchase supports a cause (37 per cent vs 30 per cent).

● Of Millennials who make direct donations (34 per cent), almost half donate through their mobile devices (15 per cent), compared with only 5 per cent of non-Millennials.

● When it comes to making purchases, Millennials are far more likely to favour brands that have Facebook pages and mobile websites (33 per cent vs 17 per cent). They overwhelmingly agree (47 per cent vs 28 per cent) that their lives feel richer when they’re connected to people through social media.
• Millennials are far more likely than non-Millennials to be the very first or among the first to try a new technology, and they tend to own multiple devices such as smartphones, tablets, and gaming systems.

• More US Millennials than non-Millennials reported using MP3 players (72 per cent vs 44 per cent), gaming platforms (67 per cent vs 41 per cent), and smartphones (59 per cent vs 33 per cent), while more non-Millennials reported using desktop computers at home (80 per cent vs 63 per cent) and basic cellphones (66 per cent vs 46 per cent).

• As a result, US Millennials are also much more likely to multitask while online, constantly moving across platforms – mobile, social, PC and gaming.

• More Millennials than non-Millennials reported using a mobile device to read user reviews and to research products while shopping (50 per cent vs 21 per cent).

• So-called ‘crowd-sourcing’ – tapping into the collective intelligence of the public or one’s peer group – has become particularly popular among Millennials.

• Millennials are much more likely than non-Millennials to explore brands on social networks (53 per cent vs 37 per cent).22

A cause without rebels: the new parent–child paradigm

Surprisingly, Pew Research Center’s survey revealed that 79 per cent of the US population believes there is a ‘generation gap’ in society. This is 5 per cent higher than the 74 per cent that saw this gap in the roaring year 1969. But the modern gap is mostly about the different ways in which old and young are using technology. Only about a quarter of those surveyed saw conflicts between young and old in the United States. Among today’s Generation Y, 52 per cent say becoming a good parent is one of the most important things in their life. That’s 10 per cent higher than youth in 1997 (Generation X). Eight out of 10 youngsters applaud the classic ideal of getting married and starting a family.23 Gen Y get along well with their parents. They report fewer fights with mum or dad than older adults say they had with their own parents when they were growing up.24 Six out of 10 US teens say their family eats dinner together at least four nights a week. Eighty-five per cent identify a parent – rather than a peer – as their best friend. Of these, 53 per cent call Mum their best friend vs 32 per cent who say it’s Dad.25

Little Emperor Syndrome

For many parents of Gen Yers, getting their teens’ approval is the most important thing in their lives. They treat their children as friends rather than
subordinates. A major explanation for this is that the average number of children per female has drastically dropped, while the divorce rates have gone up. Gen Y children get far more attention than previous latchkey-youth generations. It’s the Western variant of China’s ‘Little Emperor Syndrome’. Parents project high hopes for a better future on their only child and turn him or her into the major focus of the family. As the family tree increasingly gets smaller (with fewer branches of brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles), the bonds between parent and child are strengthening. Moreover, Baby Boomer parents have shifted away from the traditional disciplinarian role as a reaction to their own relationship with their parents. Today’s parental environment is one of open democratic dialogue and negotiation, rather than conflict, rebellion and resistance. Two-thirds of parents claim to ask the opinion of their children before making big decisions such as choosing holidays. According to parents, this openness is the glue to keep the family together and an investment in the future. Three-quarters of parents claim their relationship with their children is more open than the one their own parents had with them. Discipline has been replaced by tolerance. Today’s young people simply don’t need to be rebellious and difficult anymore.\textsuperscript{26} Dove’s ‘campaign for real beauty’ successfully connected Millennials with their mums.

**Helicopter parenting**

About 52 per cent of Gen Yers have daily or almost daily contact with their parents via text, e-mail, phone or in person. One third claims: ‘my parents are more involved in my life than I really want them to be’.\textsuperscript{27} According to the Q3 2014 report of Ypulse, 86% of 18- to 32-year-olds don’t want to become ‘helicopter parents’ themselves.\textsuperscript{28} Youngsters are often shielded from the realities of life. ‘Helicopter parents’ increasingly try to protect their Gen Y children from growing up too quickly. They are called ‘helicopters’ because they are always hovering to have a permanent view on what their children (even if they are older than 20) are doing and to manage their lives as a coach or manager. The mobile phone has become a new and indispensable body part of youth. A substantial 83 per cent of them sleep with their mobile phone turned on in their bed. The device has also received the function of an umbilical cord for their worried parents. Through texting and voice calls they are able to contact their children at any time and check on their safety. Unfortunately, in our discussion groups, the youngsters often admit they don’t pick up their phones if they see it’s their old folks.

The opposite of helicopter parenting is called ‘free-range’ parenting. Generation X parents tend to give their Gen Z children more responsibilities and more space to develop. Reflecting on the way they were raised, many Millennials in our research state that they would only change one thing in the education of their own children: give them more freedom.
Parents are increasingly replacing monthly or weekly allowances with need-based money handouts. This change resulted in a ‘want it now’ generation that is not learning the real-world value of money and will take longer to live independently. The trend of young people delaying departure from the family home (‘Hotel Mum and Dad’) has been boosted by the economic recession. It has also led to an increase in ‘boomerang children’, returning to parental homes after a period of independent living. In 1980 in the United States, 11 per cent of the 25- to 34-year-olds were living with their parents. By 2008, this figure had risen to 20 per cent and according to the Pew survey, 10 per cent of young adults, aged 18 to 34, have moved back with their parents during 2009 because of the recession. The US Census Bureau reported that 5.9 million young adults (aged 25 to 34) were living in their parents’ household in 2011, up from 4.7 million before the recession. For her book *The Accordion Family: Boomerang Kids, Anxious Parents, and the Private Toll of Global Competition* Johns Hopkins University sociologist Katherine Newman interviewed college students and found out that 85 per cent will return to live with their parents after they graduate. According to her, the return to the nest is not just benefiting the cost-conscious young adults. It keeps parents young because they are not moving in the empty-nest life cycle themselves. They are enjoying the nice parts of parenting without the difficult aspects related to supervising teenagers.

A consequence of Gen Y’s closeness with their parents and the boomerang trend is the increasing and enduring influence of youngsters on the family purchases. In Figure 1.1 you will find the results of an InSites Consulting study on Gen Y’s influence in household purchases. We interviewed 4,065 respondents, aged 15 to 25, in 16 countries around the world. The biggest influence that global Millennials report is found in the technologies that their parents are adopting (52 per cent) and the products that they are buying (44 per cent). But they also affect the programmes that Baby Boomers watch and even the holiday destinations and shops they visit. The 15- to 25-year-olds did report they only have a limited impact on their parents’ music choice (37 per cent no influence at all) and political preferences (39 per cent no influence). Although the latter was different in Brazil, India and China where at least 30 per cent of Gen Yers reported they did have influence on political choices of their parents.

By staying at home, Gen Yers are getting a lot of perks. Parents are covering their bills, food, toiletries, rent and travel and acting as chauffeurs, cleaners, cooks and laundry services for them. Where young adults used to leave home in search of independence, today they are quite comfortable in bedrooms that are mini-flats stuffed with their own TV, DVD and game consoles. For many important decisions in life such as a job, housing, banking or a car, Gen Y will automatically turn their heads towards their parents. HR managers and university selection committees have even reported an increased presence of parents during the interviews. It is the new paradox in
youth sociology. Kids are confronted with the adult world at an earlier age because parents want them to be stimulated to explore the world. This phenomenon is called ‘KGOY’ (Kids Getting Older Younger). On the other hand, they are much slower in taking independent decisions. More than 8 out of 10 youngsters report that their parents are always available for them 24 hours a day. For parents, being an adult has become dull and unattractive. Youth is everything. They want to remain youthful as long as they can. Many Gen Yers admit their parents want to wear what they are wearing, adore co-shopping and they even regularly swap clothes. The line between parents and children is increasingly blurring.

**Insane in the brain: teenage neurology**

Teen brains are still under construction. Their hardware is to blame for the unpredictable behaviour that is led far more often by their emotions than by their logic. Neuroscience is slowly discovering the secrets of teenage brains. Scientific studies indicate that adolescence is the period in which habits and behaviour are shaped. Two processes are responsible for this blueprint. On the one hand, we see an explosion in the creation of grey matter. This boost in thinking power gives teenagers the opportunity to excel in all kinds of areas. The more they engage in certain behaviour, the better they will become at it and the more skills will be anchored in their brains. At the same time, cells that are never used are eliminated. The ‘use it or lose it’ theory dictates that if teenagers do not engage in certain activities during their adolescence, they will never do them at all simply because the neural connections will be absent for these activities. For example, if teenagers are not
exposed to a healthy lifestyle, their brains will be built up around the famous sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll mindset.\(^{33}\) Because teenage brains are still very flexible in this period, it is an important moment for brands and products to communicate to this target group. If people are consuming a certain product or brand in their young years, their brain will be programmed for similar behaviour when they are adults.

**Emotional roller coasters**

However, not all communication will have an equal effect on the adolescent brain. Neuroscientists have revealed that some strategies work better to connect with teenagers. Teenage brains function like an emotional roller coaster. Brain researchers have uncovered that this is a direct consequence of the brain growth. Unlike adults, their frontal lobes are still in full development. This brain area is responsible for taming the wild beast reflexes in us. It suppresses emotional and primitive reactions and makes us behave like good citizens. Frontal lobes also help us with logical reasoning. They are directly related to another brain structure called the ‘amygdale’, the source for emotional processing. In the adult brain, the frontal lobe is in control and triggers coming from the amygdale are largely ignored. It is only in cases of dominant emotional stimuli or when we sedate the frontal lobe, by drinking too much alcohol for instance, that emotions take the upper hand. With teenagers the amygdale is in the driving seat. Because the frontal lobes are still immature, they will show more emotional and impulsive behaviour. Research has also shown that adolescents are more eager to respond to emotional stimuli.\(^{34}\) Emotional information is more likely to be noticed, processed and remembered. In terms of consumption, they are looking for stimulation of their positive emotions.\(^{35}\)

**Identity construction and brands**

Although the amygdale and frontal lobes play different roles in teenage brains, it is exactly the interplay between them that is responsible for their most important development: the creation of an own identity. Adolescence is typically the stage in life where you start reflecting about the self. Youngsters spend a great deal of their time trying out different roles. By engaging in different activities, they try to shape their identity. Their self-concept is shaped by past experiences. Positive life experiences such as getting positive reactions to a new outfit, good grades at school or positive feedback on your guitar playing, help in building a positive self-concept. Failure or negative feedback leads to a more negative self-concept. All these experiences cause emotional reactions in the amygdale. The amygdale reinforces the positive experiences by sending a signal to the frontal lobes that will give it more importance within the self-construct. For marketers it is important to realize that consumption can play a powerful role in shaping
one’s identity. If young people get positive feedback when consuming your brand, it will be more likely to find an emotional connection with them. This will lead to a stronger place for your brand in a youth’s self-identity.

**Idealism and activism**

The frontal brain lobes are also capable of going from the concrete to the abstract world. A consequence of the abstract mind is idealistic behaviour. Because abstract thinking capacities are growing, teenagers at a certain age will finally be able to understand how the world works. By reflecting on the world, they will be capable of envisioning a perfect ideal world. During that phase, youngsters can become very critical about the actions of past generations. At first, this idealism is often reflected in endless discussions with their parents and teachers. When growing up this idealism is often transferred into activism. Youngsters join animal rights movements, become members of political parties or organize social actions with their youth movements. Brands and products are not spared from their critical judgements. Company processes, origin of goods and advertising are studied and can be used as a symbol of protest. Other brands embrace this idealism by explicitly supporting good causes.36

TOMS is a popular brand among young people. They appreciate that the brand makes a difference by using material from responsible sources, employs fair-wage labour and gives back to communities. TOMS sells shoes, eyewear, coffee and bags. Every time a client buys a product, TOMS helps a person in need through the so-called One for One model (buy one, donate one). TOMS Giving Team works with different partners to provide products or to support the partners contributing societal services. The brand currently has more than 100 collaborators in more than 70 countries around the world. They have to fulfil different qualities. All partners are sustainable, local, neutral, and they need to have long-term goals.

Every year TOMS launches the One Day Without Shoes campaign. The non-profit Soles 4 Soles revealed that over 300 million children don’t have shoes to wear which leads to discomfort, decreased access to education and diseases. For two weeks people can post their bare feet on Instagram with the hashtag #WITHOUTSHOES at @TOMS and for every picture they receive, the brand donates a pair of shoes. During the eighth edition in 2015 TOMS helped no less than 296,243 children.37

**Risk-taking behaviour**

During puberty, teenagers often involve themselves in risk-taking behaviour. Many parents can verify that they have caught their son or daughter taking drugs or secretly drinking alcohol. Boys and girls who were known as quiet kids decide to sneak out in the middle of the night, hitch a ride to a party and terrify their parents who notice their absence in the morning. Teachers
are confronted with youngsters who decide to hang around in pubs rather than attend classes and principals wonder why they decide to make a small fire in the school bin. It seems that at a certain age, teenagers lose their senses and have an irresistible urge to indulge in stupid and dangerous behaviour. Again... their brains are to blame. Risk-taking behaviour is something we all indulge in on a daily basis. To be successful we need to engage in new and unknown behaviour: if adults do not dare to take up responsibility for a certain job at work, they will never feel the resultant gratification. If you never start talking to unfamiliar people, you will be stuck in your small network forever. There needs to be a first time to drive a car or ride a bike. Both adults and youngsters need to take risks in order to achieve something in life.

There is, however, more than achievement alone as a reason to engage in risk-taking behaviour. We seek danger also for the thrill of it. Surviving risky behaviour leads to pleasure. Think of the feeling when you exit a rollercoaster or the kick you experience when you have successfully addressed a large crowd. There is one specific substance in the brain called dopamine that has been associated with pleasure seeking. Experiments on rats have shown that taking away the dopamine systems leads to passive and lazy behaviour. The test animals showed no intention to explore their environment. Dopamine stimulates adults as well as youngsters to take action that leads to pleasure. The more it is activated, the more you will seek out pleasure and the more you will take decisive action to find new thrills.

So far, it is clear that risk taking and pleasure seeking are human proclivities. How can neuroscience explain why youngsters seem particularly eager to undertake stupid things? Research has shown that dopamine regulation in the developing young brain is out of balance. Some studies have found evidence for an overproduction of dopamine that turns youngsters into mega pleasure seekers. Other research claims rather that the risk behaviour would be caused by a sudden decrease in dopamine production in comparison with childhood output. In order to reach the same levels of reward, adolescents are condemned to undertake more risky behaviour. Again there is an important relationship with the premature development of the frontal lobes. The adult brain suppresses dangerous behaviour because its frontal lobes can make an estimation of the consequences of their actions. However, youngsters live in a physiological situation where their brains tell them to take risks but cannot stop their urge for pleasure. Risk-taking is a theme that many successful youth brands are using. In 2015, Pepsi launched the Challenge campaign (see the following box).
During 2015 the new Pepsi Challenge campaign ‘Live for Now’ ran for a whole year. Instead of doing the usual blind test between Coke and Pepsi (which marked its 40th anniversary), Pepsi released a new campaign for the younger generations. With these campaigns, Pepsi wanted to create an emotional connection larger than just the taste of their product because sugary items aren’t that appealing anymore. Celebrities like Usher, Serena Williams and Usain Bolt signed up with the brand to help motivate consumers to take on a series of challenges. Every month the influencers communicated a new task on social media. The challenges were always a combination of popular culture and social responsibility which appeals to the Millennials generation. They wanted to turn everyday activities into something more exciting, full of adrenaline. ‘Game of drone football’ was one of them, a soccer game with a drone that suddenly descends from the sky and throws a football at a group of friends. With thirty thousand reactive LED lights, the field had illusion lines, goalposts and a scoreboard, and applauding people were projected on the surrounding walls. Pepsi also changed up its tagline ‘Maximum Game. No Sugar’ to ‘Maximum Game. No Daylight’.

Social media platforms were being used and the popular Jerome Jarre, known from Snapchat and Vine, was also included. With this campaign Pepsi wanted to change the global perspective to a local one by creating individual campaigns per region so customers feel related. As a challenge Indian residents could design their own Pepsi ads that were shown during the Indian Premier League cricket games. There was a food-challenge in Thailand and a music challenge in Latin America. This way Pepsi could regard cultural differences and behaviours. The customers could give back while attempting something challenging.

Another way to give back as a brand was by asking consumers to share the hashtag #PepsiChallenge on social media. For every hashtag Pepsi donated $1 to the Liter of Light organization that offered ecologically sustainable lighting to over 18 developing countries like Kenya.

Stimulation junkies

Today, anything is media. Everything and everyone is constantly spitting out messages whether it is on Twitter, Snapchat, Whatsapp, SMS or Facebook.
Young people were raised in a cocoon with their anxious parents often being afraid to let them go out. It is no surprise this generation has embraced technologies to build new communities through tweeting, texting and friending. Equipped with a bunch of portable media, Gen Yers are never alone or out of touch with their friends. Youngsters get addicted to this constant entertainment and distraction. They can’t think of a life without stimulation and variation. If they are for some reason disconnected, they feel boredom more than any generation before. Constant connection and compelling content are no luxury; they are fundamental everyday life expectations. iPhones are affecting the daily routines of youngsters, telling them when to get up, what to do, what their friends are doing, etc. The first thing many youngsters do when they get up is to switch on their computer, if they still switch it off to begin with. Their mobile is always on, unless the batteries have run down.

The triumph generation

Ask a Gen Yer when adulthood begins, and chances are high he or she will answer 30. For this generation your early twenties are a time to move around, try different things and date different people. This need for stimulation and instant gratification is also translated into consumer behaviour. Generation Y shows a relaxed attitude towards consumer purchasing and debts. In Gen BuY. How tweens, teens and twenty-somethings are revolutionizing retail, Yarrow and O’Donnell state that shopping is ‘the new weather’. Talking about clothes, music, cars and the latest techno-gadgets brings Gen Yers together and keeps them engaged. Buying fashion and entertainment items are vital to leading a happy and hedonistic life and shopping is just another form of exciting entertainment to them. Shopping provides a ‘mental vacation’. To de-stress from their busy lives, they will search for pure indulgence. Shopping plays an important emotional role and helps youth to calm anxiety during the many life transitions they have to cope with. The large amounts of non-essential purchases are justified as ‘deserved’ or a ‘reward’. Sometimes, buying a gift for someone else is a good reason for a ‘treat’ of their own.

For this reason, Gen Y is sometimes also dubbed the ‘triumph’ generation. It is spoiled with parental attention and expect a lot of feedback and attention at work too. This perception of ‘entitlement’ has changed the perception of credit card usage and lending services with this generation. After all, finances are of secondary importance to the pursuit of happiness through consumption. Although Gen Yers have also suffered from the global economic downturn – the youth unemployment rates are the highest since the Second World War – they don’t seem to panic. In a report of PricewaterhouseCoopers only 25 per cent of Gen Y consumers say the economy has significantly changed their spending behaviour, while 36 per cent of Generation Xers and 37 per cent of Boomers say it has changed their shopping habits. Viacom’s international youth culture newsletter Sticky reported on a study on what Gen Y in six European markets thinks about jobs, money and the economy.
Sixty-seven per cent of young people say that they never use the word ‘failure’ to describe how they feel and 70 per cent are positive they will get their dream career and simply ignore the crisis. In an InSites Consulting study two-thirds of British and US youth expect the next year to become a better year than the previous one. In the BRIC markets of Brazil, Russia and China more than 75 per cent felt the same. Gen Yers across the globe also think the future is more important than the past.

A fragmented world

Through online technology, youth get what they want without having to look too hard. They live in a culture of convenience, consuming snippets, devoid of ever seeing the entirety. There’s no need to research a topic when you can just Google it to find the answer. This short-cut way of life is something they have been brought up with. Instead of knowing a few topics in depth, they have a little knowledge about everything. This affects the society more than you might think. The length of a *Time* cover story has dropped from 4,500 to 2,800 words in the past 20 years. Average news sound-bites have slipped from 42 seconds in 1965 to a present-day low of 8 seconds. We want more entertainment better and faster.

Bite-size commitment

Youngsters pick and mix individual parts of media to create their own personalized products and services that fit their individual needs. There’s no need to buy a whole album on iTunes, you can create your own. Bite-size formats in a much wider variety have replaced mass and uniform media formats. Gen Yers are only bite-size committed. The good side of this is that they are much more open to hop between different styles. They listen to different music styles and festivals offer 6 to 10 different performance stages to fill in the needs of variety and style switching. RSS feeds on the internet allow you to make your own personalized multimedia news medium. But this doesn’t mean that traditional media have lost their meaning to Gen Yers. When chilling out, a newspaper or TV programme caters much better for their need to de-stress and relax. In one of our studies on the use of newspapers among youngsters, we have found that a traditional daily is linked with ‘pyjama moments’.

A friend’s focus

Now that online tools enable youth to achieve social interactions, the broader offline community has eroded. Students listen to lectures without having to attend the sessions together with fellow students. They are less and less interested in connecting with those around them who are outside
their immediate inner circle of friends, family and relatives. New forms of online communities, MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games such as Runescape and World of Warcraft) and belonging to groups such as those on social networks have filled the void created by this hyper-fragmented environment.

This generation has different technologies, media, brands and a number of different core friendship groups from which they select the right ones according to situation, event, time and mood. Friends are fun to be with, more understanding than anyone else and can be tribally differentiated for different needs and moments.

Various studies have illustrated how Millennials are much more likely to discover new brands or products through a friend mentioning it on his or her online profile or status update. They are also more eager to post a status update when they see products they are excited about. In a JWT study about social shopping and e-commerce, half of Millennials claim to do so compared to one out of three Gen Xers and 19 per cent of Boomers. Fifty-five per cent say they are more likely to purchase something if a friend recommended it on Facebook and 53 per cent will ask Facebook friends’ opinions about planned purchases. Again, this is much lower for the Gen X and Baby Boomers’ generations.

**Implications for brands**

Brands targeting Gen Y should offer the same degree of choice and allow young people to interact with the brand elements they like. Gen Yers are creating their own personal brands by combining competitors with personality traits that reflect their own identity. Youngsters are more fickle today but they tend to be selectively loyal to those elements of brands that touch their hearts and that keep their promise. It is up to brands to fit into the complex identity of youngsters today rather than the other way around. Brands aren’t dictating styles or image any more.

Another result of the fragmentation is that competition for brands has surpassed the traditional category borders. Brands need to tap into the need for new cohesion and group belonging by bringing youngsters with shared passions together. In 2006, Nike launched Nike+: technology that tracks data of every run and connects runners from all around the world at the Nikeplus.com website. They log on and sign up to register their running programmes and goals. The key development to bring runners together on the web was the Sport Kit sensor that synchronizes with an Apple iPod or iPhone and tracks runners’ speed, distance and calories burned. When runners dock their iPod the data are automatically uploaded on the Nike+ community. On the website different tailor-made training programmes are available and members can check out the most recent activity of runners in their own neighbourhood. They can either try to achieve their own goals or be more competitive and challenge others in the community. The success of the community has also translated into sales results for the company. Before
Nike+, the brand accounted for 48 per cent of all running-shoe sales in the United States. Two years later, in 2008, the share had grown to 61 per cent. Of course, this growth cannot be reduced to the success of Nike+. Although product innovations play an important role, choosing running shoes is very much connected to habit and the Nike+ community and tools stimulate runners either to stick with Nike shoes or to buy a pair when they were used to another brand.\(^5\) At the start of 2012, Nike introduced Nike+ FuelBand. It looks like a cool wristwatch, but at the same time the device tracks everybody’s activity such as walking, running, dancing, sports and other everyday actions. As a FuelBand user, you set your daily goals and the inside accelerometer will keep track of all movements and update you via the watch’s colour (from red to green) as well as a mobile and online app. Again you can compare your results with others via the motivational website.\(^5\)

From living in a fragmented world that is giving them continuously more freedom and opportunities, Gen Y also feel more concerned and insecure. More freedom equals more responsibility and finding out what’s right and what’s wrong. Youngsters feel the need for more meaningful things in life: stability, harmony and authenticity. This search can really feel like a burden to them and that’s why they want to be connected with their friends.\(^5\)

Brands need to acknowledge this search for authenticity. Although Gen Y favours peer-to-peer reporting (Twitter, social networks and blogs) over traditional media, they still see TV and TV commercials as the most trusted medium that is suited for brand building. They know that TV advertising is expensive and it is therefore a sign that a company or brand on TV must be stable and successful.

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**Lose your Facebook account in a Roulette game!**

Russian Standard Vodka is stressing its 100 per cent Russian origin to target consumers in over 70 markets. The top premium vodka is produced using a Russian recipe, only Russian ingredients and it is distilled and bottled in St Petersburg. Completely in line with this DNA the brand launched a Facebook app. The app was developed by students from the Miami Ad School Europe. The video introducing the game on YouTube and Vimeo stated:

*Young people spend more and more time on social networks like Facebook. For some, it’s even like a real, second life. To find out how important this virtual life really is, Russian Standard Vodka created the world’s first social media gaming experience where you can lose your digital life: Russian Facebook Roulette.*

Continued…
Crowd-sourcing and co-creation

Open source is a technique used in the development of computer code. It means that the coding allows other participants to cooperate and build better software and applications. The ‘open source’ idea is very much in line with the expectations of Generation Y. It has evolved much further than just software and computer code and is the backbone of many Web 2.0 applications. Wikipedia for instance is an open source encyclopaedia and dictionary that is not only constantly building better definitions but is also updated amazingly fast. Less than two hours after one of Michael Jackson’s employees called 911 on 25 June 2009, Wikipedia reported Jackson’s cardiac arrest. The open source site had beaten the CNNbrk Twitter stream by 18 minutes and was updated more than one hour before the first mainstream news article appeared on MSNBC.com. Wikipedia servers received 1.24 million requests for the English article about Michael Jackson in the first hour only, 8.7 million in the first 24 hours and 14.4 million in the first seven days.

User-generated content

Generation Yers like the idea of being in full control of everything and don’t passively accept what is given to them. They embrace ownership of content and want to be able to edit and change their environment every minute. Youth marketers should adapt the same ‘open source’ philosophy. A brand is not what a company wants it to be; it’s what Gen Y consumers want it to be.

Online tools have made it possible for youth to create their own unique support structures through interactions with friends. They have a constant open feedback channel with their peers that will help them make decisions, no matter whether they are choosing a movie to watch, a new pair of jeans to buy or a boyfriend to date. These connections are as real to Gen Yers as offline supports. They often claim they have 200 friends on Facebook whom they know personally, which would be quite difficult in the offline world. Although it is hard to understand for older generations, these new ‘passive’
type of friends are very valuable to them. Gen Yers around the world have 140 Facebook friends on average, compared to 91 among Gen Xers and 64 among Baby Boomers.59

**Trusted brands become friends**

Gen Yers are cynical about the way brands behave and are no longer willing to trust anything based solely on faith. They would rather trust unknown peers than brands and have the tools to undercut the authority of brands and advise each other. Word-of-mouth marketing is therefore more effective as they tend to trust their friends’ opinions. Online friends don’t replace traditional real-world friendships. They are an extension of existing friendship groups. An offline friend will call them on their birthday, while an online one may write a message on their online space. The online world is Gen Y’s entertainment, it is not their life. Media that reach them through their peers’ filter are automatically relevant. Facebook is one of the main filters for young people today. It delivers content that is almost always relevant and organizes many aspects of their lives: events, music, photos and communications. It’s Gen Y’s diary.

On average Gen Yers are following 12.4 brands on social networks, compared to 11.7 brands that are followed by Gen Xers and 7.5 brands that are followed by Baby Boomers.60 Brands on social networks should behave like friends connecting with them, not just like distant brands. But they should not try to act as a friend in the traditional offline form; rather as one of the passive friendships that exist and develop in online social networks. Just as with their other passive friendships they will get to know you through watching and gaining an insight into the brand’s online life. Appealing brands do not dictate but engage them by providing involvement and perceived control over the brand. Gen Y wants a less top-down and more equal relationship with brands than Generation X. Brands in social networks should offer them tangible services or sponsored utilities instead of advertising. Youngsters are turned off when a brand is seen as an uninvited intruder into their space.

When a brand’s behaviour is not transparent to them, they will assume it is hiding something from them and is dishonest. The increased marketing savvyness means that they are now demanding something back from brands. Brands need to work harder to build a connection with young target groups and authenticity is key. They are not just seen as product providers but as life and lifestyle supporters. This youth generation has a much greater emotional attachment to brands which display that they really understand their lifestyles and make themselves relevant by supporting their needs. Gen Y puts much more emphasis on brand experience and brand credibility.
Defining Generation Y

A soap called ‘ME’: youth’s new narcissism

Generation Y has also been dubbed ‘the ME generation’. Indeed, Gen Yers sculpt, craft and storyboard their lives in social networks to present campaigns of themselves. Eyes are always on Gen Yers. They are stars of their own soap operas in which all their friends play their parts with comment boxes and status updates as the scripts of the soap. Youngsters increasingly look at their world through a journalist’s lens trying to find an interesting story. With every photo taken, they wonder whether it could be their next profile picture. Youngsters who are still formulating their belief systems are attracted to well-defined and authentic brands that help them to strengthen their values and reinforce the identity they are building. Jean M Twenge, Associate Professor of Psychology at San Diego State University, is convinced that narcissism is much more common in our recent youth generation. According to her studies, the average US college student in 2006 scored higher on narcissism scales than 65 per cent of students in 1987. In other words, in less than 20 years, the number of college students with a high narcissism score has risen by two-thirds. The professor mainly blames our education systems designed to raise the self-esteem of youth. In her 2009 book *The Narcissism Epidemic*, she even suggests treatments for what she deems an epidemic.

In 2011, social psychologist Nathan DeWall, working at the University of Kentucky, published his results of a deep dive into the song lyrics of the *Billboard Hot 100 charts* between 1980 and 2007 while controlling for genre to avoid skew in urban music. He found that the song lyrics in the 1980s were more likely to stress happy togetherness and harmony. Just think of Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder singing *Ebony and Ivory*, Kool & The Gang’s *Let’s all celebrate and have a good time* or Diana Ross and Lionel Ritchie bringing *Two hearts that beat as one*. If you compare that to the linguistic analysis of today’s songs, for instance Fergie dedicating an entire Black Eyed Peas song to her ‘humps’, Justin Timberlake’s *I’m bringing sexy back*, or Lady Gaga’s song *Hair* that is basically about nothing else than her hair, it’s clear that these are more about one person, in most cases the artist him- or herself. DeWall concludes that pop songs are reflecting the growing narcissism in society, specifically among the Gen Yers, also being dubbed the ‘Me Generation’.61

Don’t you wish your girlfriend was hot like me?
Celebrity worship and the 15 Mb of fame

The constant stream of media updates in youngsters’ social networks and on their mobile phones means they are always aware of what their friends are doing and their friends know what they have been doing. Youngsters have never had so many live benchmarks as today. The media celebrate the young and successful whether it’s sportsmen, actors or singers. In 2005, the Kaiser Family Foundation came up with a quite remarkable finding. No fewer than 31 per cent of US teenagers were convinced they would become famous one day. In the same period, UK policemen had to cope with a trend of youngsters taping ‘happy slapping’ movies and posting them on YouTube. More recently, a 19-year-old made the global news headlines by creating a video in which he and his friends are demolishing a brand new iPad with a baseball bat. In an interview with the LA Times, the young videographer said he was a big Apple fan and bought two other iPads that he didn’t pulverize. He just thought the stunt would be funny. Within less than two days, more than 765,000 people had seen the video on YouTube.

Today, there are so many tools for micro-celebrity: being a studio spectator, talk-show guest, reality TV participant, appearing on YouTube or talent-scouting TV shows such as Pop Idol, etc. In his book Hello, I’m special, Hal Niedzviecki states that pop culture is creating the myth of instant stardom. TV shows such as The Osbornes demonstrate the ordinariness of celebs and in a climate where Kate Nash and Lily Allen are discovered on MySpace, everyone can elevate themselves to new heights. Psychologists at the University of Leicester have identified a mental disorder named ‘celebrity worship syndrome’. Their research claims that one in three youngsters in the UK suffer from some derivative of the disease. For most of them this is luckily limited to casually following the careers and lives of certain celebrities. According to Jake Halpern’s theory in Fame Junkies, this interest in celebrities and the tendency to form para-social relationships with them is fuelled by loneliness and the innate desire to belong. The more lonely and under-appreciated an adolescent feels, the more he or she wants to befriend the ultimate popular guy or girl. Proximity to the famous is a way of receiving recognition and status for the self. Nothing’s new. In US high schools there are two main routes for teenage girls to belong to the elite group: either become a cheerleader or become a friend of a cheerleader.

However, these authors may be exaggerating the phenomenon. Recent research found that very few Gen Yers consider becoming famous an important life goal. Just 4 per cent consider it very important and this is not different from older generations. The vast majority (86 per cent) say fame is not important to them. Celebrities have always had a big appeal to the general audience, whether it was Marilyn Monroe in the 1950s or Kim Kardashian today. Nevertheless, we do acknowledge that this generation has a higher self-esteem and a higher need for self-realization and uniqueness than former generations. The continuous media and peer benchmarks, as well as society and parents stimulating Gen Yers to turn their life into a success story affect their thinking and behaviour.
**Status anxiety**

Youth today have unrealistically high expectations of becoming millionaires before they are 30. Media often portray the successful 20-something CEOs of their own companies endorsing the ‘you can be anything you want to be’ mythos. The increased importance of self-esteem and self-importance also shows up in increased materialism. Back in 1967, 45 per cent of Boomer freshmen said it was important to be well off financially. By 2004, 74 per cent of Gen Y freshmen agreed. This is translated into high starting salaries and working life expectations. A mere 31 per cent of employed young people say they earn enough money to lead the life they want. However, they are more optimistic than other generations about their future earning power. Among the ones who say they don’t earn enough money, 88 per cent think they will be capable of earning enough in the future. Being financially secure is also a concern for 7 out of 10 teens aged 13–18 around the world. In the *Generation Y around the World* report, InSites Consulting revealed that 42 per cent of British youngsters want to make enough money to retire or live off their own means as quickly as possible. In France and the US this figure climbs to 50 per cent and in Brazil and China it is even the case for more than 6 out of 10 youngsters. But the negative aspect of this status anxiety is an increased self-imposed pressure and an increase in fear of failure among youth. Youngsters feel ashamed that they can’t live up to their own high expectations. The midlife crisis of the current Generation X is actually already taking place, transformed into a quarter-life crisis, among Gen Yers. In an extensive quantitative European study on health, BBDO came to the conclusion that older people put less pressure on themselves than youth. More than half (53 per cent) of the 18- to 24-year-olds frequently feel stressed compared to 29 per cent of 55+. Fifty-five per cent of the young feel tired and lacking energy compared to 37 per cent among 55+. The social network voyeurism and exhibitionism has also created a more hedonistic culture. Youth problems such as binge drinking are increasingly justified as youngsters feel comforted by the fact that everyone else is doing it too. The more extremes happen in their lives, the more content they have to post on their Facebook walls. Experiences in the offline world provide content (the new social currency) for online life. They know that their behaviour is being recorded and will pose for pictures with the specific intent of uploading these on social networks.

Social networks allow Gen Yers to support many more and much deeper passive friendships than previous generations. They value social relationships and love to work, shop and date collaboratively a lot more than previous youth generations. Gen Y seems to be more loyal to people than to companies. This is not only important for HR programmes but it also urges you to put enough emphasis on the social aspects of your brand. The store personnel and your employees can really make a difference. They are the advocates of your brand’s DNA.
Pinterest is a content curation platform, which allows users to organize and share interesting content that they find on the web, that they upload themselves or that they see with other users. It is a pinboard-style bookmarking site, a social network, a gift-finder and a platform for collaboration all in one. Pinterest was founded in March 2010 and by the end of May 2012 it had become the third most visited social network in the USA after Facebook and Twitter. In September 2015 Pinterest announced it reaches 100 million monthly users.74 The content (such as links, images, videos) is organized on different ‘boards’, created and named by the user himself. Popular categories are travel, cars, film, humour, home design, sports, fashion and art. Users can browse other pinboards for inspiration, they can ‘re-pin’ (over 80% of the pins are ‘re-pins’ of other users) images to their own collections and they can ‘like’ photos and comment on it. Other users or a selection of other users’ boards can be followed. Pinterest allows its users to share ‘pins’ on both Twitter and Facebook. This integration allows users to share and interact with a broad community. More than 20 per cent of the Facebook users are using Pinterest on a daily basis.75

For a retailer Pinterest is interesting as a showcase for their products (and their prices). A user can even browse for gifts by clicking on the homepage on ‘gifts’ and filtering a price range. Pinterest is establishing itself as a huge traffic driver for online retail. Also online publishers are receiving a lot of traffic generated via Pinterest, even more than Twitter did in February 2012. Especially content from magazine websites and blogs that focus on home decor, arts and crafts, style and food are among the most frequently ‘pinned’ subjects on Pinterest. It is no surprise that those sites are reporting significant traffic growth from Pinterest.76

As Pinterest is one of the fastest growing social sites of the moment with a large user base, the site is becoming more and more interesting for brands. It should not take too long before brands are integrating Pinterest in their social media approach. Kotex claims to be the very first although Peugeot did organize a Pinterest Puzzle earlier. The ‘Women’s Inspiration Day’ by Kotex is a sort of influencer campaign. By analysing individual pins, Kotex identified 50 influential women in Israel. Based on their individual interests, Kotex made a gift box full of individual gifts. To receive their gift box, all they needed to do was to ‘re-pin’ the Kotex gift. The women received their gifts and posted comments about the gifts on their social pages, blogs and of course their Pinterest page. The campaign resulted in 2,284 interactions and almost 695,000 impressions.77
Defining Generation Y

Millennial myths: debunking conceptions of Gen Y

Youth behaviour typically sets many tongues wagging; especially older generations, such as Generation X, who have many prejudices against Generation Y. We would like to challenge some of the common misunderstandings.

**Gen Yers only put trust in peers**

Generation Yers are allegedly only capable of trusting their own friends. It is true they do attach a lot of importance to their peers’ opinions and word-of-mouth and have more real-time channels to connect with them. This doesn’t mean that they only listen to peers. In a survey InSites Consulting did for Levi’s Europe, we asked what would be the most trusted source to decide what new pair of jeans to buy. The results are shown in Figure 1.2. Although 74 per cent prefer the opinion of their best friends, shop personnel are trusted too. They even put a higher trust on commercial staff than on their own mum. Still, Mum remains an important source. This confirms the better relationship between Gen Yers and their parents, although Dad doesn’t seem to be the fashion style specialist. Brochures and commercial websites of the jeans brands are as important as reviews and objective forums on the internet. So although they are marketing savvy, this doesn’t automatically imply that they don’t trust commercial media anymore.78

**FIGURE 1.2** Most trusted opinion when buying jeans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My best friends</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of shop staff</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mum</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People like me (offline)</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My sister(s)</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other members of my family</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brochures, brand websites</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review sites, forums on the internet</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People in the street who look like me!</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My brother(s)</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My dad</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
They reject global brands and mass marketing

After four years of researching ‘cool brands’ among Gen Yers, it is safe to conclude that they are not the ‘No Logo’ generation at all. Global mass advertising brands such as Coca-Cola, Nike and Nokia are still among their most beloved brands. The advertising and marketing strategies of these brands changed to appeal to the new consumer though. Coke’s ‘happiness’ campaign, for instance, is much more emotional and on an equal level with the consumer than the ‘real thing’ or ‘always Coca-Cola’ campaigns of the past.

The global presence of brands radiates a sense of power with which Gen Y is happy to affiliate. Because they seek reassurance for what they perceive to be a chaotic world, they are looking for security. Global brands are a safe haven because they have proven to be able to survive. If they had not been delivering high quality and reliable offers then they would surely not be around today. Great brands are always one step ahead of the rest and are continually innovating and updating their products. Although some of the brands in youth’s preferred list such as Levi’s, Apple, Nike and Coca-Cola have a US origin, this is no longer the ultimate rule. Scandinavian brands such as H&M and Nokia, German brands such as Adidas, and Italian fashion brands such as DIESEL were able to conquer global youth’s trust. As children of a media-dominated society, Gen Yers love excellent visual communication from their beloved brands. They tend to adore ads that:

- portray openness;
- express closeness, warmth, caring and harmony;
- show that a brand is natural and stays true to itself (authenticity);
- support the simplicity of the brand;
- have witty humour;
- provoke controversy.\(^79\)

More than 7 out of 10 youngsters say they are critical towards advertising in general. In Figure 1.4 you will see some interesting results from our brand authenticity work for Levi’s Europe. Most youngsters like humour and irony in advertising and they want to hear the unvarnished truth. Although Gen Yers are stimulation junkies, it remains important for brands to stay consistent in their messages. Youngsters today generally reject image-oriented advertising.\(^80\)

They are ethical consumers

‘In Japan there is a term called ‘kuruma banare’ (demotorization), which indicates that youngsters fall out of love with cars’, says Wim Verbeurgt, Marketing Manager MINI in an interview with us.

They prefer public transport, bikes or even skateboards to go from A to B in big congested cities. Cars are no longer relevant to them. Although this could be a reasonable threat, I think this trend is less alive in the Western world. However,
Ethical, green and charity issues are of growing importance for this generation. Concepts like ‘voluntourism’, or travel including volunteering for a charitable cause would never have grown in popularity without the caring and social Generation Y. The need to ‘do something good’ while at the same time discovering new places and challenges (like providing medical aid in a foreign country) is so close to the values of this generation. However, the media have made Gen Yers feel numb for many of these messages. Footage from the developing world, wars, and nature disaster zones are projected on the same screens they watch movies and play games on. They have become another fiction, far away from their own real words. They only take these issues into account when they are directly affecting their immediate social circle or local world. Gen Yers transfer all ethical responsibilities to organizations. Although they will try to avoid buying unethical brands, they will rarely deliberately choose a brand because of its charity programmes. Being ethical is important to them as a principle, but it is not their utmost concern when choosing favourite brands and they will rarely compromise the convenience of their own lives to make a difference. A brand’s socially responsible image will never make up for poor quality or other basic issues.

Because eco-claims became just another advertising strategy in the first decade of the 2000s, Gen Yers are cautious in really believing what a brand is saying about protecting the environment. In April 2010, sports fashion brand PUMA worked together with Yves Behar’s Fuse project to design a shoebox that would reduce its environmental impact. Many Gen Yers reacted rather sceptically on blogs. PUMA claimed in a movie that using a
bag instead of a box reduced the use of cardboard by 65 per cent, eventually resulting in lowered usage of paper (trees), energy, water and emission of carbon dioxides. Youngsters called it propaganda, questioned the positive impact of the design, uttering that 77 per cent of the carbon footprint in shoes comes from the raw materials (leather, rubber and cotton) and only a mere 5 per cent from packaging.83

Protecting the planet is not a typical Gen Yers thing, it is the result of the zeitgeist. They recycle as much as the other generations and they will buy environmentally-friendly and organic products as much as other generations.84 More important to Gen Yers is that they don’t just get bombarded with traditional charity programmes but that they can make a difference by owning the values and choosing how and where charitable contributions will go.85

Earth Hour, a subsidiary charity of WWF, invented a beverage that recreates beer in the future if we don’t take action against global warming. The initiative was a part of the #SafeTheAles campaign that released during Earth Hour 2015. People could win different prizes if they posted a #NoBeerSelfie on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. A report by the University of Queensland revealed that the quality and quantity of hops in Australia would negatively develop in the future. The beer, designed with GPY&R and beer experts (Willie the Boatman and Young Henrys), was called the Drought Draught and contained dried-out malts, stale hops and a lot of salt. This way, people could taste the change of climate, a poor quality beer.

Earth Hour created awareness with a different approach than other environmental campaigns. The tone of voice was more fun and engaging but the core message remained strong. Beer is a component of people’s every day life so they feel personally related. It’s also a social product where people talk about in a comforting setting. Earth Hour planned more tasting sessions across Australia and launched an online beer petition that gave people a chance to send a message to political leaders. The campaign led up to the UN Paris Climate Conference in November 2015.86

InSites Consulting conducted a research community study connecting 100 urban Millennials from 15 different cities around the world to learn about the dimensions and drivers behind cool brands, shops and places. One of the topics discussed was the social and ecological responsibility of global brands. Various aspects like green claims, fair trade, animal welfare and climate change were tackled in an online on-going discussion among 18- to 29-year-olds. One of the striking conclusions was that Gen Y seems to be more worried about people than about the rest of the environment. 

Generation Y cares

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Defining Generation Y

To them, fair trade is a normal part of society and people deserve right treatment wherever they are working on earth. Since they want to be paid a fair amount of money for their own work, Millennials feel that if Western people need products from developing countries, the wages should be fair too. Safe working places and ‘not exploiting people’ are synonyms for social responsibility to them, while Gen Y’s interpretation of environmental responsibility was much vaguer. To Gen Yers, eco-care means keeping the impact on the environment as low as possible and both global and local actions are much appreciated, although the more local equals the more relevant to them. Although youth root for Body Shop’s policy against testing cosmetics on animals and think rare species should be protected, in the end humans are more important to most of them than animals. ‘You support what you put your money in’, was one of the literal quotes of the research community. This actually means that if a company like Apple has their stuff produced in China in unsafe working circumstances, Gen Y feels it is Apple’s responsibility, even if it’s a third-party producer.

Millennials generally don’t like companies to brag about their CSR (corporate social responsibility) programmes. They appreciate those corporations that define clear company goals without big PR campaigns. When a company advocates these responsible actions and tries to push other players in the industry to follow the same path, it earns extra Gen Y respect. A brand like PUMA for instance is praised for making their eco-footprint a shareholder KPI (key performance indicator), improving working standards within the industry and sponsoring sports in emerging countries. Persistence in pursuing social and environmental goals is much appreciated. Even though Fair Trade, as a brand, went through difficult times, the consistent belief in its philosophy and core values is what matters to this generation. Cadbury and Sainsbury’s, which both went down the Fair Trade route, are seen as great examples of social brands. Gen Y is frequently confronted in media with natural disasters that are often linked to the changing climate. Gen Yers do believe the concept of global warming, it’s not a myth and is high on their agenda. They think we should act in the very near future to stop climate change before it’s too late. Although youngsters say it’s clearly an urgent matter, they feel incapable of solving the problem themselves because of the huge global proportion of the climate problem. When asked for personal efforts they mention recycling and re-using packaging. German youth especially seemed quite proud of the results of their national recycling efforts.87
They are lazy

Gen Yers are believed to be lazy because they mostly take the shortest way to get what’s needed. But that’s simply the way they were educated, attaining the objectives with the least possible effort in a smart way. Most youngsters will express a strong work/reward ethic. Nine out of 10 believe you will get your rewards in life when you work hard enough. They do know they have been spoiled by their Baby Boomer parents and realize that when they move out as adults they will have to work hard. Failure is assumed to stem from laziness. Most teenagers will only select role models and celebrities that have worked hard and really earned their success.88 Barack Obama and Britney Spears are both often quoted as people who are admired for their work ethic and for achieving great things from humble beginnings by overcoming adversity to maintain their success.89

About 56 per cent of US youngsters aged 15 to 25 are considering becoming self-employed. This percentage is slightly higher than in the UK (52 per cent). People seem deeply convinced of a career as self-employed entrepreneur in the BRIC countries. More than 7 Millennials out of 10 consider making the move: Danish (39 per cent) and German (40 per cent) youngsters are less keen on being self-employed. Only 1 out of 10 USA youngsters who are currently employed consider the possibility of staying with that same employer for their entire career. This percentage is comparable to the UK. In the BRIC countries the loyalty ‘for life’ towards employers is as good as non-existent.90

‘Today I am what I create’, explains Tom Palmaerts, Youthwatcher at Trendwolves.

After sharing text, pictures, video and audio found online through social networks, we are now more interested in creating something ourselves, because it is per definition more shareable. It is comparable to baking your own cake rather than buying one and then sharing it with your friends or colleagues. Creativity is a status symbol. Creative entrepreneurs are the new superstars. Their work is featured on T-shirts and bedroom walls of teenagers. Design and creation, whether it is digital, visual, video or architecture, is the new rock ‘n’ roll. Young people like to associate themselves with people, brands and visual formats with a creative image. It’s the reason why Facebook picture trends like owling, planking, leisure diving and tilting are picked up globally. They are easy to copy formats that still give young people the idea that they belong to a creative group of people.91

It is also the reason why an easy-to-use photo app like Instagram is so successful. It turns every smartphone snapshot into a work of art and you can immediately share it with your friends and receive ‘likes’ and comments. Social networks that not only connect young people with each other but also facilitate and endorse creativity will be the winners of the next years.

Gen Y clearly has a fusion lifestyle. ‘There’s no clear separation between work and life, not just in terms of time management but also in motivations,’
Defining Generation Y

says Christopher Fellinger, talent relationship manager of Beiersdorf in an interview with us.

They get gratifications from work and seek a way to enjoy life through their job too. Organizations need to become more flexible in their structures and processes to deal with the individualized needs of this generation of employees and spend more time to explain and sell regulations when they are in place. Gen Yers do not just accept what is said to them; they have to believe the policies and see the relevance themselves.92

A study by Cisco Systems among college students and young professionals between 18 and 29 years old revealed that 40 per cent of them ask their future employers about the social media policy and use of personal devices (like smartphones and tablets) in the workplace. For one quarter this policy is a key factor to decide whether or not to accept a job offer. One out of six Gen Y respondents would rather decline a job than not have access to social media at work.93

Gen Y’s different view on the work–life balance and other expectations on flexibility, management and feedback leads to many critical questions during our presentations and in-company workshops. Gradually, companies will have to re-think their structure, motivational systems and leadership style to make their business Gen Y-proof. Nearly 10,000 Millennials turn 21 every day in the USA and by 2025, three out of every four workers globally will be Gen Y. ‘Where leadership used to be direct, in command and in control, quite hierarchical, today it must be more focused on individual and group accomplishments’, says Todd Corley, SVP and Global Chief Diversity Officer at Abercrombie & Fitch in an interview with us. ‘They also want to push the envelope to make it better for everyone involved and around them. They didn’t grow up with hierarchies and want inspiring, transparent and innovative leaders with a vision. For this generation, everything is on the table, there is no limit or taboo.’94

Millennials are used to immediate responses on every Facebook status update or Tweet. They expect the same degree of responsiveness in the workplace. They want to be able to ask questions and get career advice and feedback all the time. They want mentors rather than managers, because they grew up with this type of relationship with their own parents. An impressive 93 per cent of Millennials say they want a job where they can be themselves at work. That includes making their own hours at work, remote working, plenty of ‘me time’ on the job and dressing in a comfortable way. The vast majority (83 per cent) want a job where their creativity is valued and their opinion and insights are heard. They feel their boss can learn a lot from them.95
The current generation of youth seems to be born to perform. They are ambitious, enterprising and self-conscious and their main ambition is becoming famous. When you look around you, there are plenty of examples. Career kids... the name says it all. We see an increase in the number of children and youths who start up an adult career or activity at a younger age. The number of young (and they are really young!) entrepreneurs is growing, both nationally and internationally. Here are some examples: Lars Duursma, aged 24, appeared in *Business Week* with his training company Debatrix, and Fleur Kriegsman started her successful Hipvoordeheeb.nl (an online fashion shop) when she was only 14. But it’s not just about entrepreneurship. We have all heard about Laura Dekker, the 13-year-old sail girl. The new LAKS president (Action Committee of Scholars), Steven de Jong, is aged 18 and during his presidency he is working for a solid education for all youngsters. These examples are not the only ones. Data show that the number of young entrepreneurs in the Netherlands is increasing exponentially. In 2007 there were 13,421 registrations of entrepreneurs aged up to 24, in 2008 the figure rose to 28,730 and in 2009 the number of young entrepreneurs soared again to 43,095. There is a strong increase in ambition among youth. How can one explain this trend?

In the past decades, households changed into ‘negotiation’ modus. Youngsters are getting more and more room for discussion, and obtaining authority from hierarchy is continuing to be less acceptable. This generation of parents wants an equally matched relationship with their children. They push children to do what they like and to discover their own passions. A good relationship between parent and child is key. These changing household ratios are at the basis of the ambitious performance generation. Parents continue to push their children to excel in something. Being average is insufficient. Parents see their children as the centre of the universe, and children internalize this. The consequence is that children also think they are unique and fabulous. Recent research organized by TNS Nipo into narcissism among Dutch youngsters showed that almost half the children aged 16 to 24 think that they are ‘very special’, whereas this is only the case for a quarter of the 55+ group. People with a narcissistic personality show more sense for initiative, have more perseverance and often have a more positive mind. Those are the characteristics of ambitious career children. Furthermore, there are unlimited options these days to show your
They are multi-tasking wizards

A common misunderstanding about Generation Yers is that they are multi-taskers. With the rise of new technologies and social media they are showered with information. The ease with which youngsters follow people on Twitter, answer text messages or communicate via MSN or Facebook astonishes adults and might lead to the false conclusion that Generation Y is particularly good at processing multiple streams of conversation and information. Research, however, has evidence for the opposite: until the age of 22, youngsters are less good at multitasking. They have more difficulties than adults in distinguishing relevant from irrelevant information and have fewer abilities to park a certain chunk of information for later usage. Although they are exposed to more information channels than before, this does not lead to an increased absorption of this information. Only strong and short messages are able to pass through the stream of information. There is a limit to what our brains can actually process simultaneously. While we are able to perceive multiple stimuli in parallel, we cannot process
them simultaneously. This is especially the case when the different messages are non-related. Young people are actually not attempting to process non-complementary messages simultaneously but rather switching back and forth between different activities.97

Steve Johnson, author of *Everything Bad Is Good For You*, calls this strategy to cope with information overload ‘telescoping’.98 Johnson claims that younger generations have got smarter in using these strategies by evolutions in popular culture: not only gaming but also soaps on television. The latter increasingly have complex narratives with, instead of one main plot, several separate alternating storylines. TV series used to have ‘pointing arrows’, clues in the plot that clarify what will happen next. Recent popular youth TV series such as *24*, *Heroes* or *Lost* lack these pointing arrows and there isn’t even a clear distinction between good and bad characters anymore. There’s a bit of the dark and white side in everyone. Leading actors unexpectedly die in the midst of the series. Youngsters have learned to analyse these series as puzzles. They don’t need to study medicine to understand the rather medical scripts of *Grey’s Anatomy* or *House MD*. They simply deduce the meaning of the difficult terms from the context. This is exactly what they do when they learn to master new technologies or tools. They don’t read manuals, they just ‘probe’. Youth master the skills of deduction, probing and telescoping. They don’t multitask.99 In April 2010, only a few days after Apple launched its iPad, MTV Networks released interactive iPad apps for *Beavis and Butt-head*, *MTV News* and *VH1 To GO*. MTV is also investing in co-browsing apps, meant to be used while youngsters are watching TV, to run on the iPhone or Android devices. The goal of these apps is to make chatting with friends more user-friendly by facilitating conversation without your eyes abandoning the on-screen action. The idea is that mobile devices are easier to use while watching TV than laptops or desktop computers, and the iPad tablet is the perfect in-between.100

**Conclusion**

Of course a number of elements of Gen Yers’ behaviour are more linked to their young life stage than to their generation. The fact that their brains are still under development is one of these universal features. This explains why generation after generation of youngsters adore freedom, push their limits and are involved in risk-taking behaviour. They want to explore the world around them and discover novelties. Identity construction and the need for self-expression are also universal adolescent themes. Madonna sang: ‘Music makes the people come together.’ This is specifically true for youngsters. And although every lifestyle group and every generation has different genres, festivals and music carriers, music will always remain one of their main preoccupations.

You can also see Generation Y as the ultimate products of our post-modern society. Gen Yers are both individualistic and very sociable. They have traditional family values but are very tolerant and open as well. For instance, they are more sexually and ethnically permissive than former
generations. They do have a strong work ethic but want a balanced life and lots of leisure time as well. They don’t want to make the same mistakes as their Baby Boomer parents who traded in a fair amount of their spare time to succeed in life. They have seen the downside of their parents’ success in terms of broken marriages, absentee parenting and stress-related illnesses. Many youngsters take a sabbatical year after they have only been working for one or two years. They want to get rich and believe they will earn a lot, but at the same time enriching experiences are even more important. They cherish their local roots and love brands with local anchors but at the same time they think very globally, in career terms as well as in friendships and travel. Generation Y is a more positive generation than Generation X with a stronger belief in a better future and a better world.

The specific characteristics of Gen Y we have discussed in this chapter will affect the way you should conceive your marketing and branding targeted at this group. Gen Yers will only stay interested in your brand if it succeeds in whetting their curiosity. Keeping your brand cool by incremental innovations is the key to winning their loyalty. Gen Yers want it right here, right now. Their need for instant gratification must be satisfied by immediate advantages. They are five times more likely to open promotional text messages on their mobile (if they did subscribe to them of course) than an e-mail. Brands like Vans and Charlotte Russe encourage their young clients to sign up for texts containing special offers and goodies.

While constantly renewing your brands and products, staying real and true to your own brand DNA and unique identity is essential. Gen Y is more marketing savvy and will immediately see through fake marketing strategies. Honesty and transparency are important aspects of successful youth brands. Again, both the uniqueness and honesty Gen Yers look for in brands are nothing more than a reflection of the times they were raised in. They were born in a society that celebrated individual success and were stimulated to become unique and special. Twenge has also highlighted that the younger generation has a compulsive honesty. If you’re not true to yourself and you conform to someone else’s rules, you might be seen as dishonest. Gen Y appreciate directness. Instead of making image claims in advertising, brands should demonstrate what they stand for by their deeds. For Generation Xers, brands were communicating status and had to express that they were winners. For Generation Yers, brands are tools for communicating who they are.

Baby Boomers gave their children many choices and taught them to make their own choices from early childhood on. Think of pre-schoolers choosing their own clothes in the morning. Even if they ended up wearing terrible combinations, that was okay because they were expressing themselves. Brands and products are seen by this generation as important in creating their own personal and unique narrative. Your brand needs to mirror the values and identity of the youngsters you are targeting. Brands that communicate a similar view of life will be more appealing.

Brands provide them with a way to stand out from the mass. Brands stimulate discerning usage. At the same time, successful brands have to bring social acceptance for youngsters in their reference groups. A youth brand
will only be a youth brand if Gen Y can participate, co-create and co-shape the brand identity while it receives the most important youth currency: content for offline as well as online conversations. To experience brands in exciting environments contributes to arousal. Positive emotions are one of the most important reasons why this generation of stimulation junkies will be loyal to your offer.

Those companies and marketers that adjust their branding strategies to address the needs of this emerging segment will find themselves better connected with them and thus more successful.106

HOT TAKEAWAYS FOR COOL BRAND BUILDERS

- Gen Yers are stimulus junkies who look for individual empowerment (control) and instant gratification in the hot brands they choose.
- Gen Yers fuse their social lives in technology, not the other way around.
- Content is the number one social currency for them.
- Hot brands continuously bring new cool content.
- Friends are the relevancy filter through which Gen Yers process brand messages. Hot brands embrace social media and peer-to-peer strategies in which they don’t dictate but engage youth by offering them control.
- Gen Yers put more trust in people and social connections. Hot brands value the role of employees, shop personnel and ambassador clients to defend and spread their DNA.
- Gen Yers have a bigger influence on family purchases as a consequence of the ‘hotel mum and dad’ and boomerang trend.
- Gen Yers select and mix the right snippets for the right moment and need. Brands should cater for this variety of moments and needs and offer choice.
- Hot brands don’t just offer products, they are the supporters of Gen Yers’ lifestyles.
- Brand affection and self-identification with the brand is built during adolescence as a result of brain development.
- This consumer generation is searching for anchor brands that provide them with stability, harmony and authenticity. Brands need to have a well-defined, transparent and consistent meaning and a clear vision.