



Gen Z Personas

A Technical Report by Infegy



Introduction

Generation Z (people born between 1997-2012) overtook Millennials and Baby Boomers as the largest generation on Earth in April 2020.¹ The oldest members of Gen Z are just emerging from college to join the workforce in their first jobs, while its younger members are still in middle school.

This generation's influence on society will only grow. Whether you're a strategist, researcher, starting a new business or managing your brand's reputation, an understanding of Gen Z's behaviors, motivations, and stressors will equip you to communicate and message to this up-and-coming generation. Additionally, understanding how this generation spends and invests will ensure you stay competitive and relevant in the current and near-future market landscape.

As Gen Z grows into productive citizens, they capture a larger share of the global conversation and thus, have already begun to influence modern-day education, political activism, financial participation, and consumption. In this report, we distill five personas based on the behaviors, longings, and motivations of Gen Z members.

Gen Z Personas

1. **The Student**
2. **The Career-Starter**
3. **The Activist**
4. **The Consumer**
5. **The Investor**

1. The Student

The Gen Z Student approaches decisions about higher education with a focus on future career opportunities. Their educational decisions are shaped by the growing digital democratization of information, the growing cost of college, and more recently COVID-19. With the increased cost of college, and stress associated with college admissions, The Student opts for alternative forms of education rather than a traditional four-year college degree.

Gen Z considering alternatives to college

Until recently, college enrollment had been on a steady increase since The Greatest Generation returned from World War II. Gen Z, not COVID-19, disrupted this trend. According to enrollment research published by CollegeBoard, the leading nonprofit charged with administering the college admissions process, college enrollment rates have dropped from 59.4% to 53.2% of graduating seniors.²

Infegy Atlas data mirrors this trend, where conversations around college by Gen Z authors have dropped 34% during that same timeframe (**Figure 1**).³ Moreover, Infegy Atlas sentiment shows that Gen Z authors tend to be quite negative in conversations around college, where only 39% of authors had a positive message when discussing college.⁴

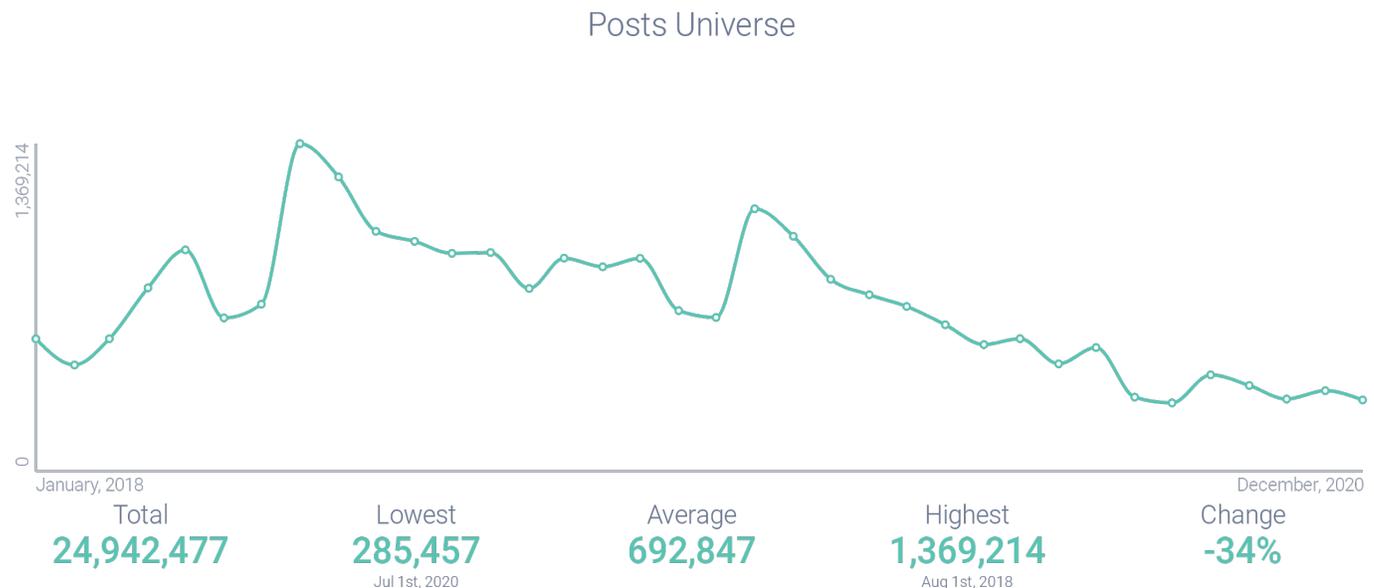


Figure 1: Post volume on Gen Z conversation on college, January 2018 - December 2020; Infegy Atlas data.

Reasons for alternatives to traditional degrees

Much of this negative sentiment can be attributed to the rising cost of college and the stress attached to the college admissions process. The National Center for Education Statistics explains that college tuition has increased, on average, by 19% in the last decade.⁵ Infegy Atlas reflects the concerns this raises: Gen Z students' discussions around "tuition" and "student loans" influence much of the negative aggregate conversation (**Figure 2**).⁶

Posts Universe

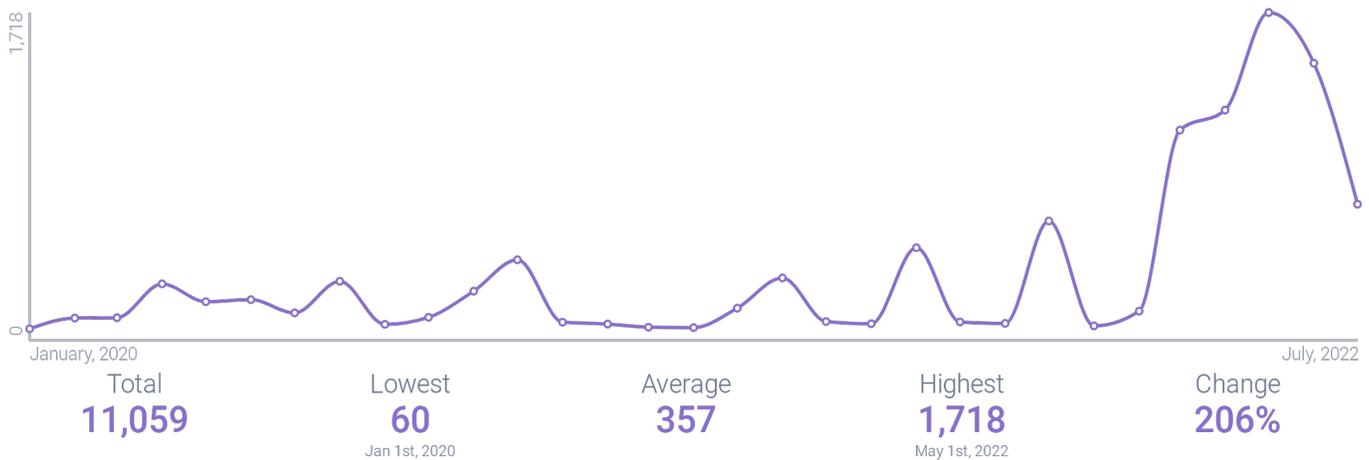


Figure 3: Post volumes on technical bootcamps trending up 206%; Infegy Atlas data.

Alternative #2: Non-academic career certifications

A huge portion of Gen Z's learning shifted from established universities to decentralized learning on large, well-known tech platforms. Google expanded its career certifications program in 2022, offering up to \$100,000 in free training to any American business that uses its platform.¹⁰ Infegy Atlas records over 1000% growth for digital certification providers like CompTIA, Salesforce, and CodeAcademy (**Figure 4**). Coursera was the best-known entity on Infegy Atlas.¹¹

Entity	Trend	Change	Sentiment
Coursera		-7%	48%
Udemy		-63%	62%
SQL		-38%	13%
CompTIA		>1000%	35%
LinkedIn		-30%	58%

Figure 4: Top entities related to online vocational training, Infegy Atlas data.

Traditional first-job industries

Similar to their predecessors in the workforce, Gen Z workers have joined traditional “first-job industries,” namely food service.¹⁶ Infegy Atlas data and analysis around Gen Z “first jobs” confirms that half of the top 10 entities have a food-service component (**Figure 6**).¹⁷ Starbucks, a brand that has invested heavily in college tuition reimbursement and worker healthcare for new employees, has dominated the discussion in social listening data.¹⁸

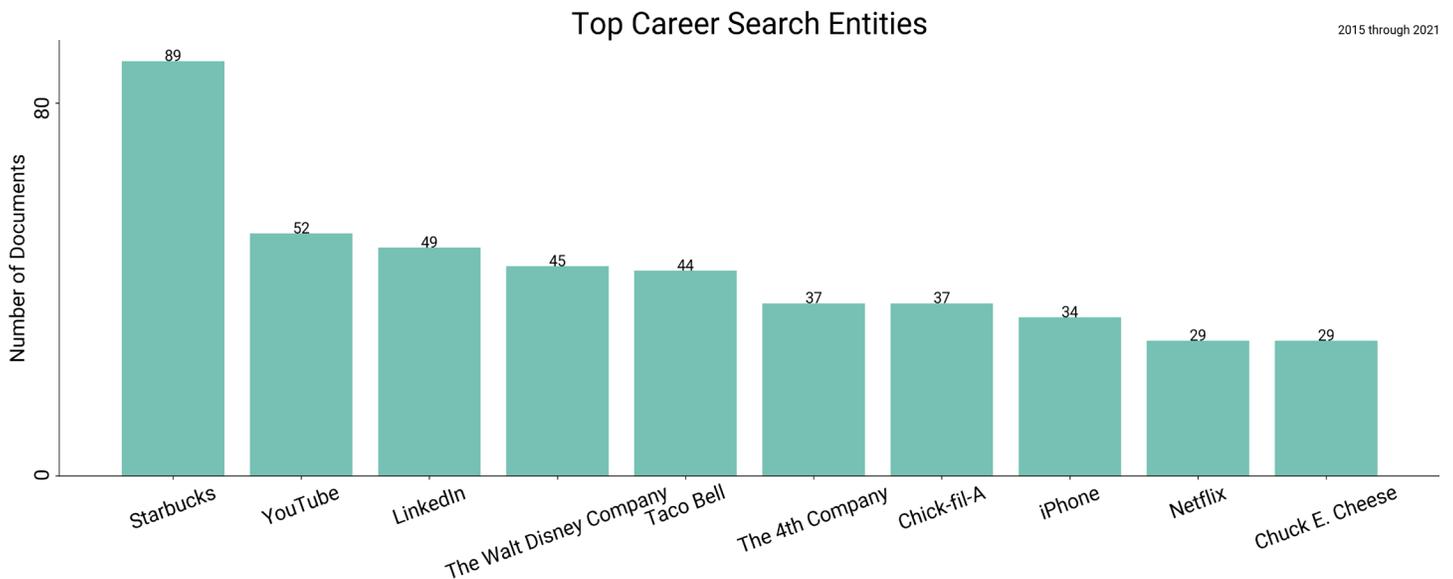


Figure 6: Top entities mentioned in conversations related to finding jobs ; Infegy Atlas data.

Gen Z values and politics at work

While Gen Z might, and does, work in traditional work environments, their attitudes towards discussing politics and values on the job have changed drastically. Gen Z’s strong opinions and disdain for political neutrality have caused strains when working with Millennial and Gen X supervisors. A New York Times article noted this tension between new Gen Z employees and their managers, suggesting that some managers are “struggling to balance the demands of their employees for political engagement with their sense of what’s appropriate for their brands.”¹⁹ Social listening data supports this assertion: Gen Z workers were likely to mention social causes in their profile bios, with “Black Lives Matter” being a prominent topic cluster identified in searches filtered by source bios. Infegy Atlas also identified “Any opinions are my own” as an additional topic cluster, suggesting that Gen Z Career-Starters vocalized independence of political thought and speech rather than claim affiliation to an institution (**Figure 7**).²⁰

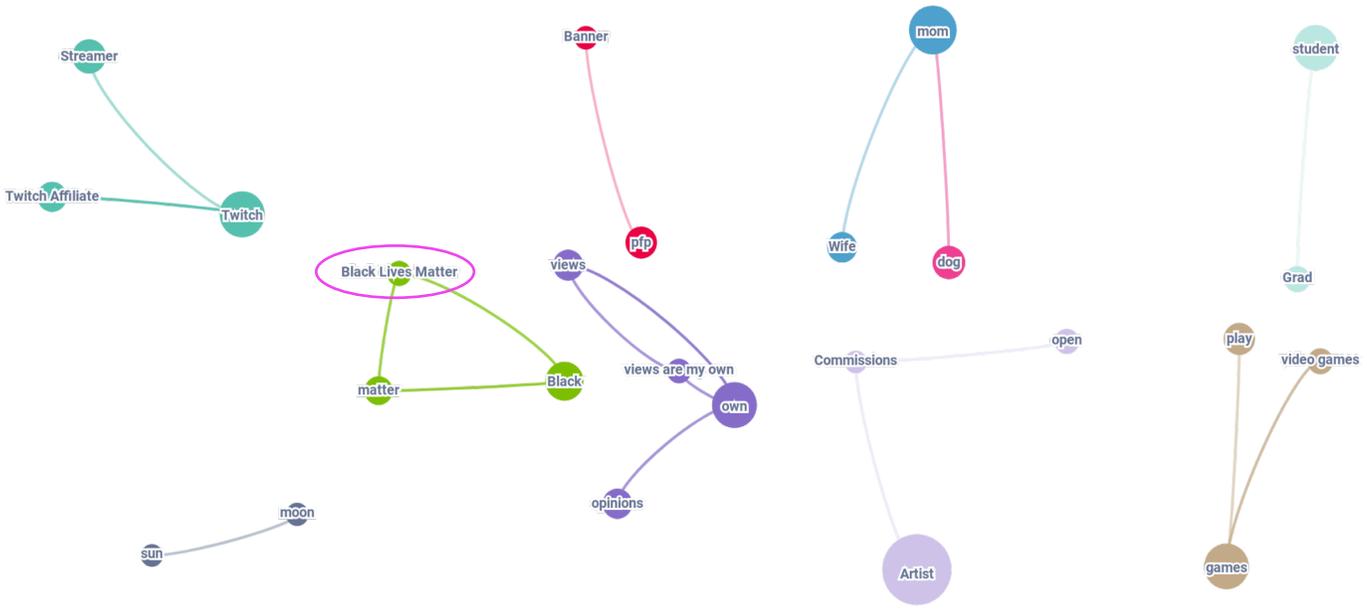


Figure 7: Graph depicting clusters of related topics within source bios. Indicates that “Black Lives Matter” appears frequently in the bios of Gen Z Career-Starters; Infegy Atlas data.

Gen Z women overtake men in workplace participation

For Baby Boomers – and to a lesser extent, Gen Xers – male voices dominated the discourse around professional spaces in America. However, Gen Z’s move to the workplace represents a dramatic gender shift, especially in the last two years. The Richmond Federal Reserve notes that the male workforce participation rate has dropped over 10% in the last fifty years. The COVID-19 Pandemic has accelerated this trend, where women joined the workforce twice as often as men.²¹ Most of these gains came from women of color. Infegy Atlas data corroborated this: female conversations around joining the workforce were 63% higher than males (**Figure 8**).²²

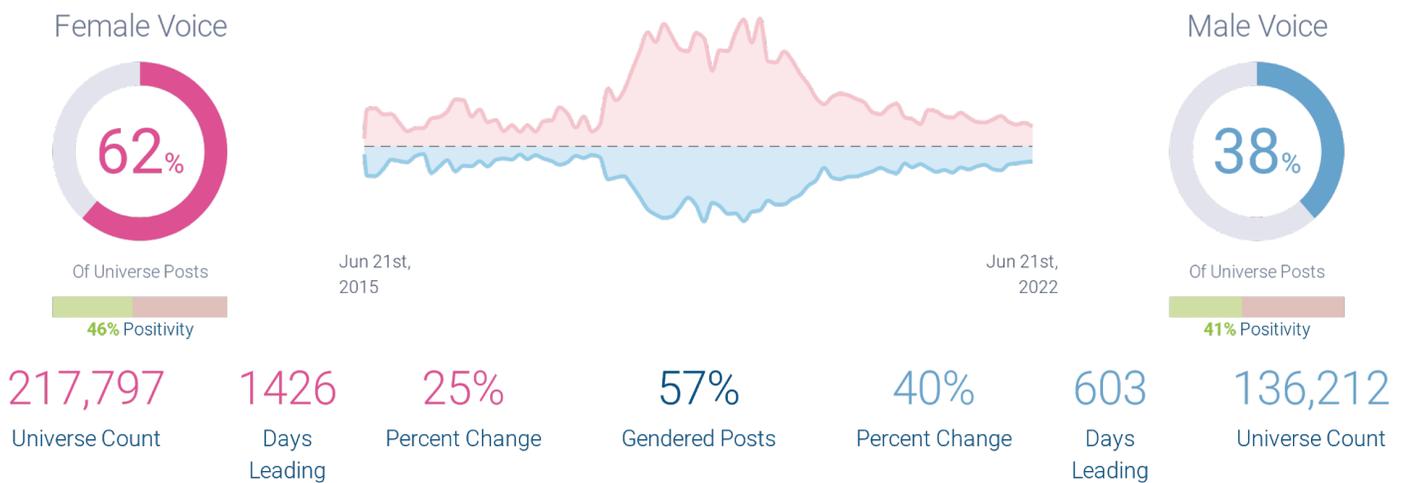


Figure 8: Gender distribution in posts related to starting new jobs indicates a higher post volume from females; Infegy Atlas data.

3. The Activist

As Gen Z ages into political participation, they influence complicated policy issues with their votes and activism. In fact, analysts predict that their participation will trickle down to often-overlooked local elections.²³ Gen Z channels this activism around trending hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter (Civil Rights), #MeToo (Sexual Assault), #MarchForOurLives (Gun Violence), and #ClimateStrike (Climate Change). This has impacted domestic US political movements, international political movements, and climate activism.

Gen Z drives US political conversation

Gen Z has played an uncharacteristically large role in shaping domestic political activism over the last five years. Florida high school students coined the hashtag “#MarchForOurLives” after the deadly mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. According to Infegy Atlas data, youths aged 13-18 led the conversation around the response to the shootings (Figure 9).²⁴

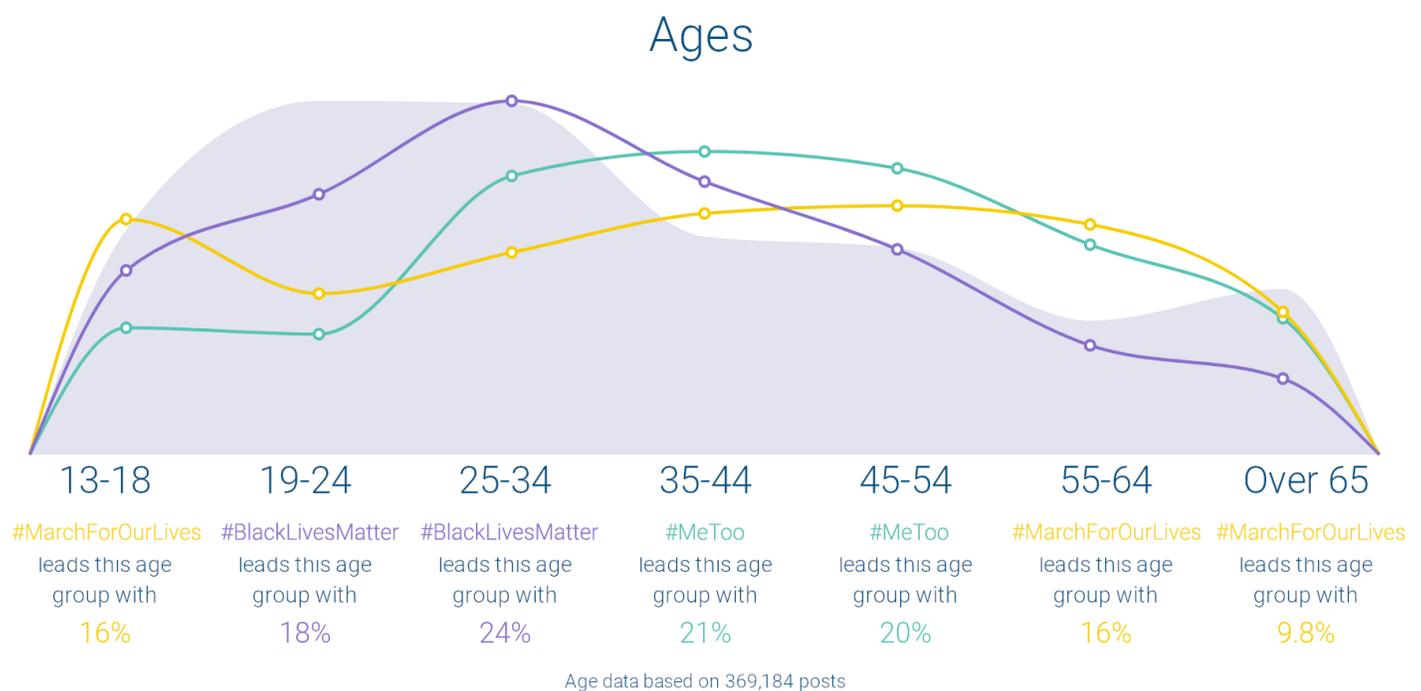


Figure 9: Age demographics show that conversants aged 13-18 were most likely to mention #MarchForOurLives; Infegy Atlas data.

That discussion share expanded to #BlackLivesMatter around 2016 with the deaths of Philando Castile and, in 2020, George Floyd. Tufts University’s Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement analyzed exit polls around the 2020 elections and found that the drive for civil rights and equality contributed to a 10% increase in youth turnout.²⁵ Infegy Atlas data corroborates this surge in youth participation, where Gen Z voices on social media were the largest demographic around election day-related conversations.²⁶

Belarussian Gen Z women using #MeToo

Often overlooked by U.S. media coverage, international Gen Z activists are applying US-originating hashtags to domestic conflicts within their countries. For example, Belarussian Gen Z activists used the #MeToo hashtag in connection with government-sponsored violence against women (Figure 10).²⁷ In this situation, #MeToo acted as a central hashtag that activists used to affiliate more hashtags.²⁸ Using conventional hashtags in connection with region-specific ones allowed Gen-Z Belarussian activists to draw international attention to governmental abuses from human rights groups like Amnesty International.²⁹

Gen Z climate activism via hashtags

Gen Z and Millennials are much more likely to rate climate-centered issues as their policy priority. A Pew Research report notes that 69% of Gen Z feels acute anxiety around climate issues and 32% of Gen Z has either given money, contacted a representative, volunteered, or attended a climate rally in the last year.³² Infegy Atlas underscores this involvement: #ClimateStrike trended in 2019 when tens of thousands of Gen Z high schoolers walked out of school in March to protest climate inaction. Furthermore, geographic mapping of the climate change conversations shows a high concentration of activity originating in Sweden, home of famous Gen Z climate activist, Greta Thunberg (**Figure 12**).³³

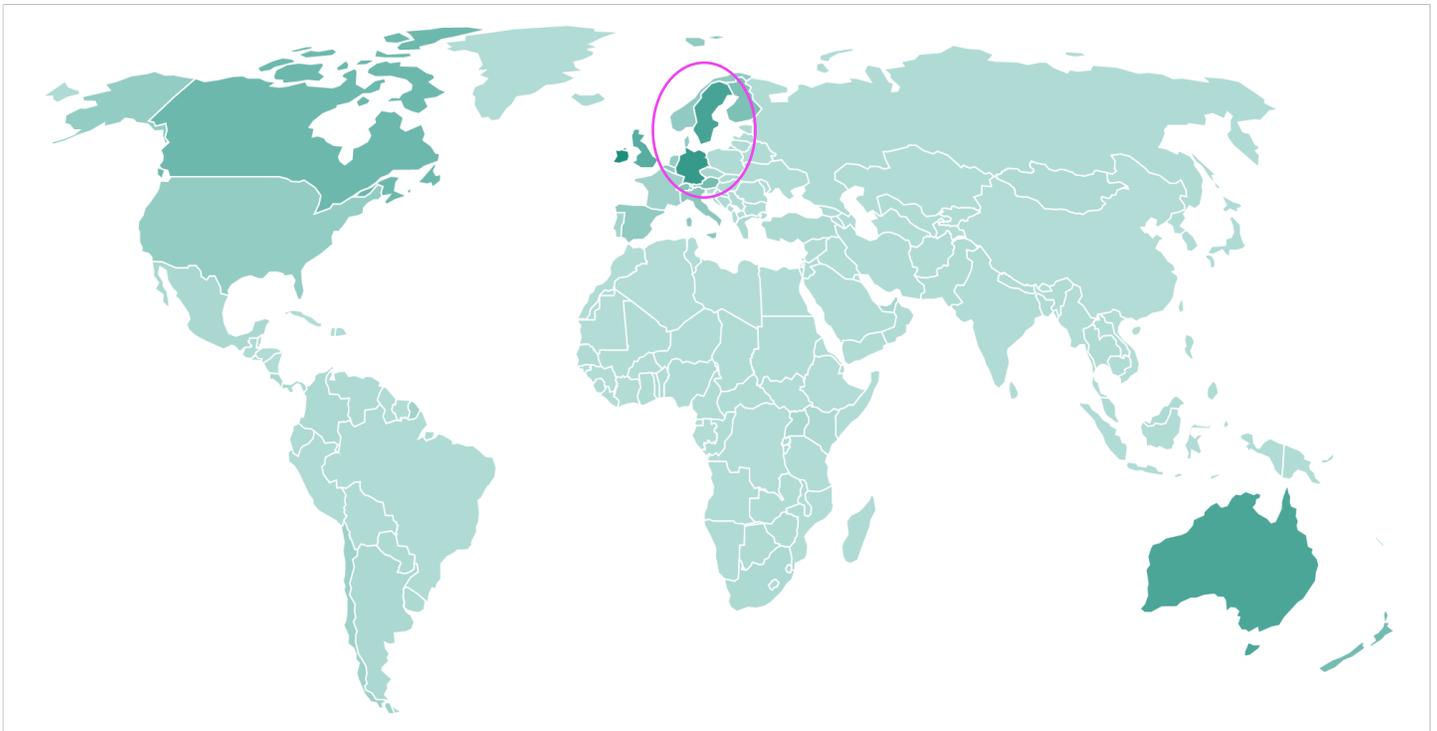


Figure 12: Chloropleth mapping of climate activism hashtags (darker indicates greater concentration of posts relative to population); Infegy Atlas data.

4. The Consumer

Gen Z has arrived as consumers, and their spending patterns differ greatly from past generations like Millennials and Gen X. Gen Z's spending has been shaped by the COVID-19 Pandemic and demonstrates a pronounced value of experiences over goods purchased through retail.³⁴

Gen Z spending shaped by COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 Pandemic temporarily suspended Gen Z's spending on experiences. For example, when the US issued shelter-in-place orders, virtually all flights were grounded. Infegy Atlas data reflects that Gen Z's conversational volume around flights or air travel dropped 74% from July 2019 through January 2021.³⁵ The data also shows a similar downtrend with concert tickets and movie tickets – an 85% drop during that same timeframe (**Figure 13**).³⁶

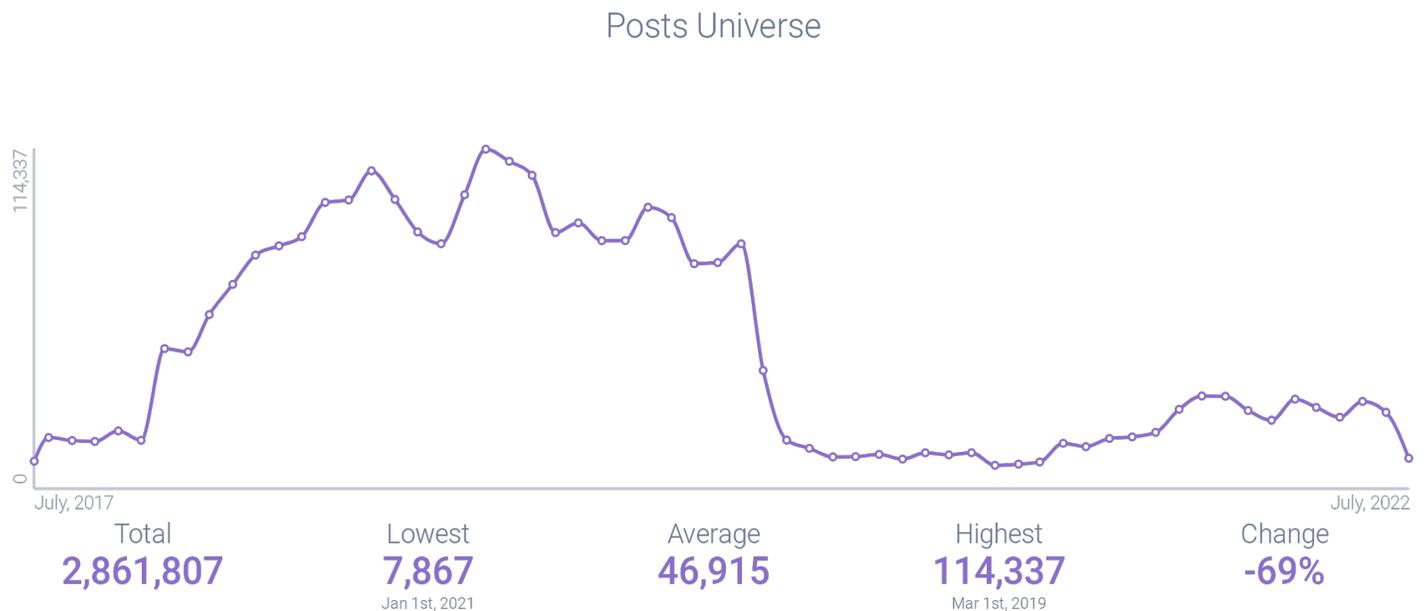


Figure 13: Gen Z post volume on concert and movie tickets reflects a sharp downtrend corresponding to the beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic; Infegy Atlas data.

Throughout the pandemic, Gen Z looked for ways to occupy themselves at home. Trends associated with ecommerce sites like Amazon rose 14%.³⁷ DIY fashion became popular; Vice Magazine's culture blog "i-D" shared that sewing machine sales rose 127% in April 2020, right after the lockdown.³⁸ Infegy Atlas data reflects similar trends where Gen Z's interest in keywords like "sewing" or "crafting" increased 119% in April 2020.³⁹ While some of that growth fizzled out as lockdowns ended, those DIY fashion terms have maintained a 33% growth in volume from 2017 to the present.

Gen Z's return to experiences

As COVID restrictions began to subside, the Gen Z Consumer set out to reclaim lost time, particularly surrounding experiences. Gen Z's conversational volume around flights rebounded 41% from January 2021 through June 2022.⁴⁰ Gen Z's interest in concert tickets bounced even higher with a 67% rise in conversational volume.⁴¹ As the Gen Z Consumer continues to make and spend money, this trend will continue to increase.

Gen Z focuses on small businesses, and vintage fashion

Even though Gen Z prefers spending on experiences versus “stuff,” when Gen Z does purchase material goods, they look for customizable shopping experiences. Vogue writes that Gen Z is more likely than Millennials to visit a physical store to make retail purchases.⁴² When Gen Z does shop online, they demonstrate an interest in bespoke products. According to Infegy Atlas data, Etsy – the online marketplace for artisans and craftspeople – was the top performing entity when it came to Gen Z shopping (**Figure 14**).⁴³ Top hashtags associated with Gen Z shopping included #shopsmall or #smallbusiness.⁴⁴

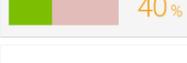
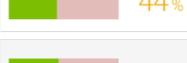
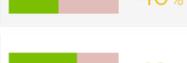
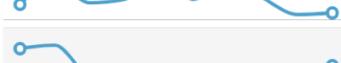
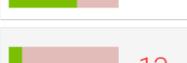
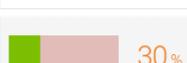
Entity	Trend	Change	Sentiment
Etsy		-26%	 86%
Amazon (company)		27%	 36%
iPhone		-32%	 27%
PlayStation 5		-65%	 28%
Starbucks		-9%	 40%
Xbox		1%	 44%
PayPal		-18%	 46%
Best Buy		-21%	 63%
AirPods		-18%	 13%
The Walt Disney Company		-55%	 54%
iPad		47%	 30%
Twitter		150%	 34%

Figure 14: Top entities affiliated with Gen Z conversations on shopping and spending; Infegy Atlas data.

Growing up with smartphones and devices in their hands, the process and willingness to use apps to facilitate life tasks – including high-stakes monetary and financial ones – is entirely normalized for younger technology users. For them, the rise and popularity of digital investing apps like Robinhood, M1 Finance, or Acorns have eliminated the friction around trading stocks. Infegy Atlas shows that Gen Z mentions apps frequently when talking about investing.⁴⁷ Due to this combined access and willingness to use technology for trading, over half of Gen Z holds some investments.

The potential risks attached to Gen Z investing behavior

Gen Z’s investing power has flowed into speculative tech stocks and cryptocurrencies. Social media analytics reveal that Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) were the top performing Gen Z investing entity, followed by Ethereum and Tesla (**Figure 16**).⁴⁸ However, with apps designed to deal with the technicalities and nuances of investing, Gen Z can – and does – invest without in-depth knowledge of the stock or cryptocurrency markets.

Over half of Gen Z adults are already invested, but only 26% of them claim to understand the underlying fundamentals of investing.⁴⁹ When it comes to buying and selling cryptocurrency, Gen Z makes up 17.4% of crypto buyers, but social media analytics reveal that a sparse .0076% of their cryptocurrency-related conversation references the mathematical fundamentals that underpin the technology.⁵⁰

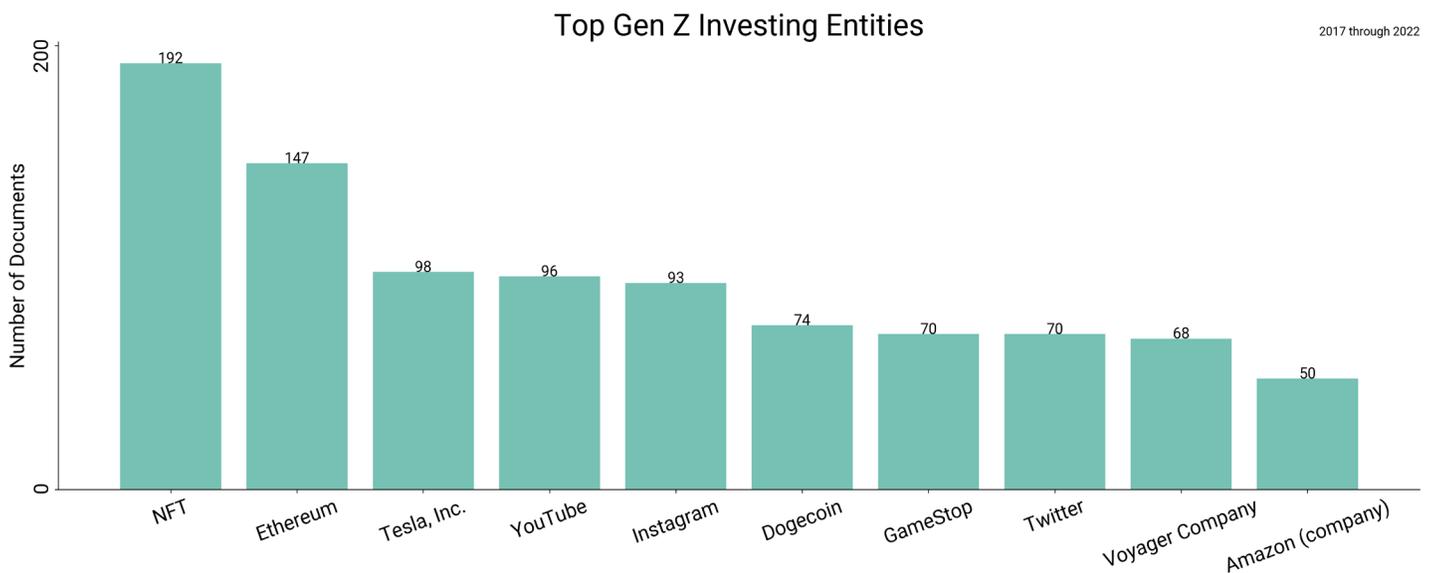


Figure 16: Top entities mentioned in conversations related to Gen Z investing; Infegy Atlas data.

As interest rates and inflation increase, speculative asset classes have dropped substantially. NFT sales declined 92% in 2022.⁵¹ Tesla stock dropped 38% during the same timeframe.⁵² This means many early Gen Z investments have lost substantial value as the bull market comes to an end. Infegy Atlas data mirrors this economic pain, showing a steep decline when it comes to Gen Z investing sentiment.⁵³

Conclusion

As Generation Z occupies a larger and larger percentage of Earth's population, we will continue to see them impact educational, vocational, and financial systems. The lines between "the personal" and "the political" will continue to disappear, and administrative and political leaders need to adapt to this – if they haven't done so already. Finally, while the pandemic did indeed impact this generation, it is their zeal for experiences and ease with technology that will continue to shape them – their desires, needs, pursuits, and motivations – even more.

Methodology and Bibliography

Methodology

Insights in this report were drawn from consumer intelligence data, social listening processes, and proprietary linguistic and textual analysis – all powered by the Infegy Atlas platform. The social listening data includes aggregated content pulled from Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, TikTok, and other major platforms, and was accrued by Infegy from 2007 through July 2022. Our research team used supporting research from scholarly, news and financial data sources; please refer to the bibliography for details.

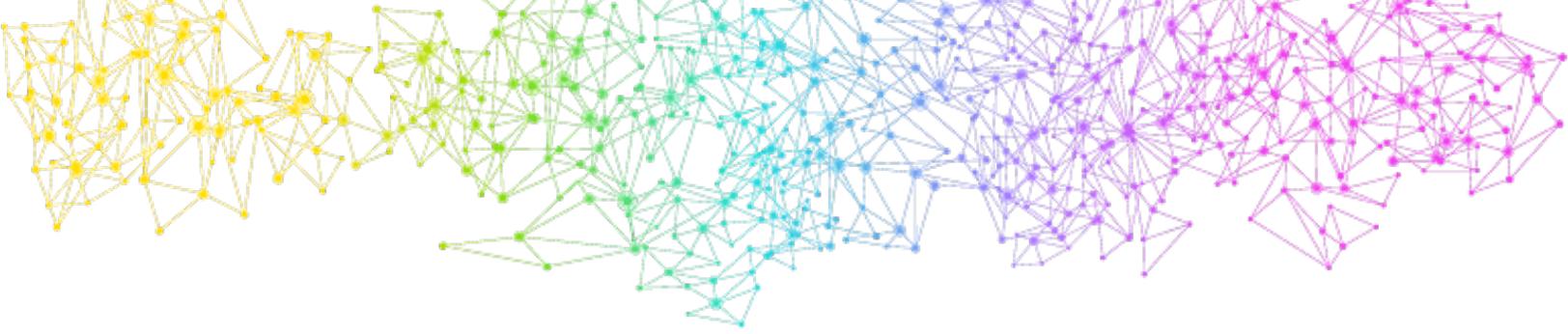
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