
Everything you need to know about Gen Z content for 2019

*Key trends and tactics
for creating content for Gen Z*

Move over Millennials, Gen Z's here

Move over Millennials. Publishers and brands are already trying to pinpoint what catches the attention of a generation that hasn't entirely come of age yet.

At ages 3 to 23, Gen Z will comprise 32 percent of the global population of 7.7 billion in 2019, edging ahead of millennials, who will account for 31.5 percent, based on a Bloomberg analysis.

To add to that, Gen Z is expected to account for 40 percent of all consumers by 2020.

40%

The amount of total consumers that Gen Z will account for by 2020.

There are roughly 60 million teens in the U.S. alone, and they have \$44 billion in annual buying power. That's expected to be \$200 billion with their influence on what their parents buy.

This generation is already distinctly different from Millennials; what they engage with is often a representation of themselves, their values, and their expectations.

We turned to the data to learn more. Using NewsWhip Analytics, we studied a year's worth of social engagement data. We took a sample of outlets that have a large audience of Gen Z consumers.

We studied which stories and content were the most viral, to form an estimation of what energizes Gen Z on social.

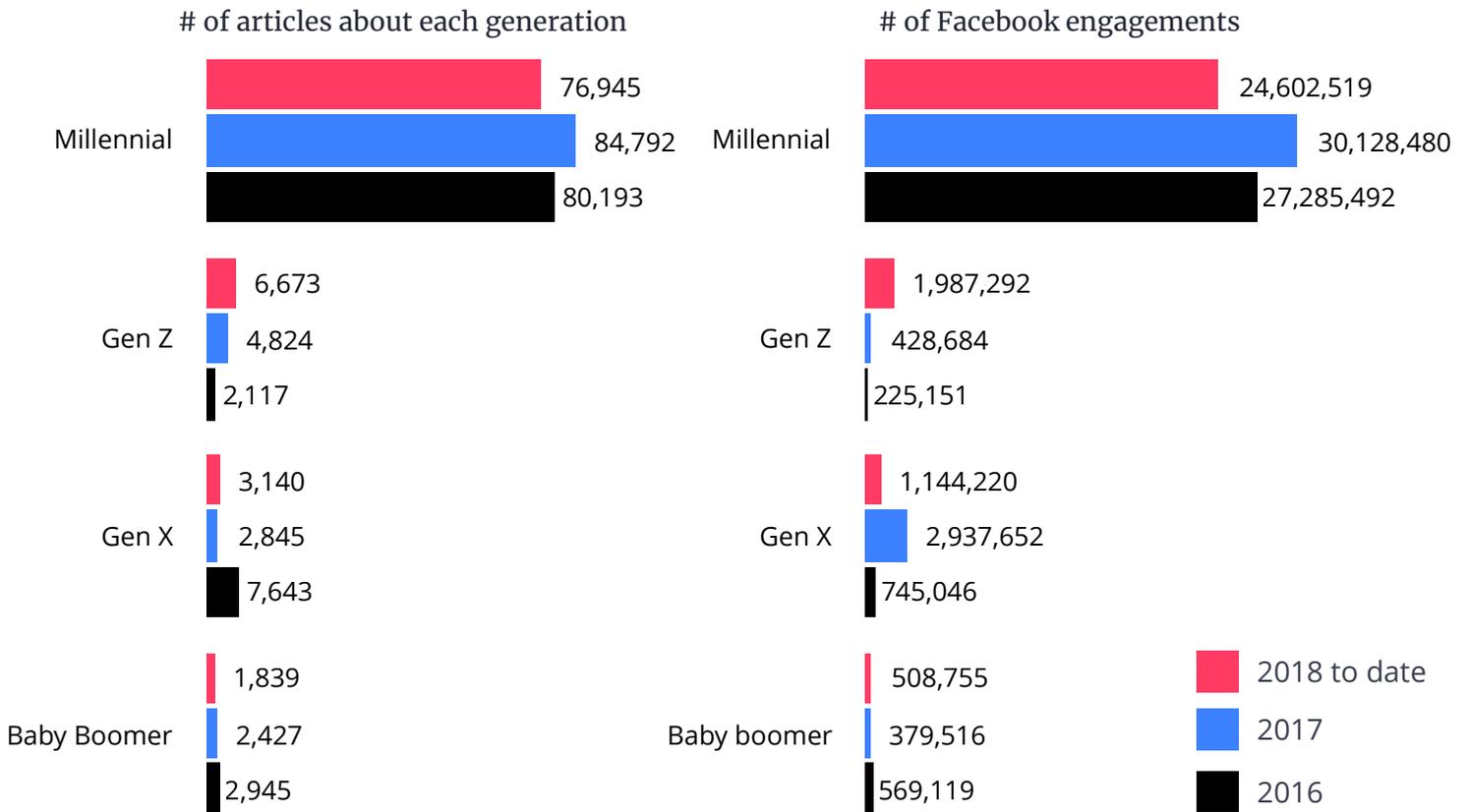
In this report we analyze:

- The top articles about Gen Z and other generations
- The content trends that captivate Gen Z audiences
- Successful tactics for packaging Gen Z content
- How top Gen Z publishers are creating winning content

The generations

*What to know about our
perceptions of each generation*

The generations and the buzz they generate



Despite our hypothesis, Millennials still drive the majority of social media buzz when compared to the other generations.

However, Gen Z is on its way up. The social engagements for articles about Gen Z have increased, as has the number of articles over the past couple of years.

In 2016, we tracked 2.1k articles about Gen Z, 4.8k articles in 2017, and now 6.6k in 2018 up to November 12th.

The increase has mirrored similar declines for the likes of Gen X and Baby Boomers in social engagements.

The generations and the buzz they generate

Top articles about each generation, ranked by Facebook engagements

WEBSITE	HEADLINE	TOTAL
<u>TIME.COM</u>	How Baby Boomers Broke America	55,031
<u>CNBC.COM</u>	Generation X — not millennials — is changing the nature of work	258,556
<u>NYTIMES.COM</u>	Opinion Go Ahead, Millennials, Destroy Us	435,861
<u>HUFFINGTONPOST.COM</u>	The March For Our Lives Is Proof That Generation Z Can't Be Stopped	88,946

There is a considerable amount of competition across the four generations.

When we looked at the top content around these generations, many of the top stories pitted the generations against one another or made comparisons.

Across all four, some of the recurring top themes were quizzes and inside jokes meant for that generation.

There were a lot of derogatory stories for the generations. Baby boomers were depicted as out-of-touch and socially tone-deaf, while Millennials were portrayed as being ignorant and vapid.

Along with these, however, there were plenty of interesting studies on each generation, for a variety of topics.

On the next slide, we compared Millennials and Gen Z even further, with the top ten articles referencing the two generations.

While some of the top articles about Millennials were about their impact on certain industries, Gen Z's top articles have to do with much wider cultural shifts.

Gen Z vs. Millennials: Top articles by Facebook engagements

Top articles about Millennials

SITE	HEADLINE	TOTAL
PLURALIST.COM	Millennial Couple Bikes Through ISIS Territory to Prove 'Humans Are Kind' and Gets Killed	706,474
NYTIMES.COM	Opinion Go Ahead, Millennials, Destroy Us	435,861
STANDARD.CO.UK	Milkmen return to London as millennials bid to cut plastic waste	409,064
CBSNEWS.COM	4 in 10 millennials don't know 6 million Jews were killed in Holocaust, study shows	374,098
MSN.COM	Toys R Us blames bankruptcy on millennials not having kids	311,511

Top articles about Gen Z

SITE	HEADLINE	TOTAL
YOUCANTBREAKME.CO	Generation Z is Snorting Condoms and Pulling them Back Out the Throat	249,187
HUFFINGTONPOST.COM	The March For Our Lives Is Proof That Generation Z Can't Be Stopped	88,946
VICE.COM	Generation Z Is Skipping College for Trade School	81,381
NPR.ORG	Americans Are A Lonely Lot, And Young People Bear The Heaviest Burden	71,609
ABC.NET.AU	American history suggests Centennials could turn the tide on the NRA	54,910

Gen Z content trends

How publishers are captivating Gen Z

The storytelling trends for Gen Z

Gen Z is bombarded with millions of digital objects every day across their various feeds.

According to Pew Research, 95 percent of teens have access to a smartphone, and 45 percent say they are online 'almost constantly'. They're using a wide range of platforms to consume and share content, as shown below.

With so much happening, content must be inherently interesting or offer them something of value to stand out.

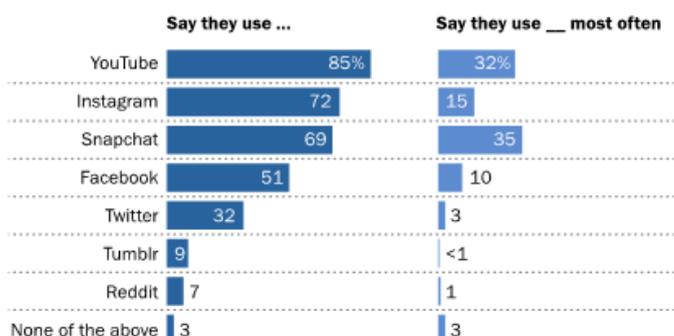
That said, we identified a few key emotions that successful Gen Z content tends to embody.

- **"This delights me"**: content that is funny, relatable, or bizarre
- **"We support you"**: content that advocates for inclusivity or social responsibility
- **"This is me too"**: content that creates a sense of community, lets Gen Z feel connected to influencers or brands
- **"I love this"**: content that speaks to their generational interests/trends in current pop culture

In the next section, we will explore each of these traits.

YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat are the most popular online platforms among teens

% of U.S. teens who ...



Pew Research's 2018 study on just 13- to 17-year-olds revealed where American teens are spending the most time on social media.

YouTube and Instagram, two platforms with a strong influencer base, were cited as being used the most often.

1. Share personal and genuine experiences

Gen Z & “big mood”: Share personal experiences

Anything is fair game to Gen Z. Social media has broken down traditional boundaries. For Gen Z, who has grown up with social media as the norm, these boundaries have never existed.

In our analysis, we found that both personal confessionals and weird or emotional human interest stories tended to drive strong engagements.

For publishers like Smosh and BuzzFeed, simply creating round-ups of funny or relatable tweets and Tumblr posts was a recurring tactic.

These lighthearted lists appeal to common experiences and connect Gen Z users to one another, around a number of given topics.

As mentioned, human interest content that speaks to genuine and sometimes emotional experiences also performed well with Gen Z.

These could be something silly, like taking prom photos at Taco Bell, or something very open like living with an anxiety disorder.

We see this reflected in the content itself, and even in the packaging of content in areas such as the headline.



What does everyone else think?

BuzzFeed and Smosh’s round-ups often focus on pop culture or common experiences.

This could be anything from tweets that sum up college life, uses of a specific meme, or the best reactions to a new movie or t.v. show.

Headlines for Gen Z are more conversational

Elite Daily's top articles of 2018, ranked by Facebook engagements

HEADLINE	TOTAL
The Spice Girls Are Doing A Reunion Tour & '90s Girls Are Losing It	405,931
Get Your Hot Cocoa Ready, Because Peppermint Bark Oreos Are Finally Here	122,810
The Grey's Anatomy' Season 15 Premiere Will Be 2 Hours Long, So Get Ready	62,254
Doc Martens Just Dropped Glittery Boots That Will Literally Give You Twinkle Toes	49,791
Dunkin' Donuts Is Releasing Girl Scout Cookie-Flavored Coffee & You'll Love It	46,440
Netflix Hints That Another 'Gilmore Girls' Revival Season Is A Possibility	35,208
Channing Tatum & Jenna Dewan Announce They're Splitting Up So Love Is Dead	30,786
Disney Just Dropped A 'Little Mermaid' Pool Party Set & I Need Everything	29,890
These Keds x Kate Spade Bridal Sneakers Are For Anyone Who Wants To Be Comfy AF At A Wedding	25,775
Lady Gaga Wants You To #BeKindBeTheDifference For Mental Health Awareness Month	22,842

This year, we noticed a trend around headlines becoming more conversational.

Looking at Elite Daily's top articles of the year, its headlines contain additional context, slang, or advice for the readers.

When we looked at Delish for 2017 vs. 2018, we noticed its recipe headlines went from the simple name of a recipe, to something more similar to Elite Daily's headlines above.

This headline strategy syncs up with the point about sharing genuine experiences.

By being conversational, the narrator is almost like a confidant or friend on the same level as the reader. This can create an "us" mentality, which resonates with Gen Z users.

2. Create stories that delight

Gen Z & delight: Be light-hearted but authentic

In our analysis of top Gen Z publishers, content that provided surprise and delight was a common theme.

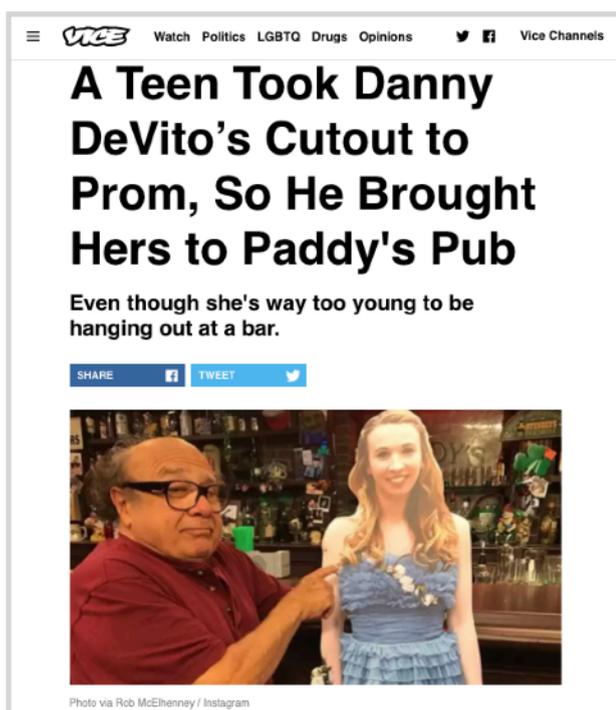
There was a few different ways that this manifested: in lists, in novel product announcements, and in quirky stories.

These articles are inherently shareable: they're often based on an interest or product that Gen Z can tie to their identity, or provide an actionable experience with a friend.

Don't be afraid to give Gen Z's beloved brands or pop culture faves a shoutout; unlike Millennials,

who are said to favor experiences over things, Gen Z are receptive to brands.

Product announcements from favorite brands tended to perform well, especially if they had an air of "specialness" or "exclusivity".



The screenshot shows a VICE article with the following text: **A Teen Took Danny DeVito's Cutout to Prom, So He Brought Hers to Paddy's Pub**. Below the title is a sub-headline: **Even though she's way too young to be hanging out at a bar.** There are social sharing buttons for 'SHARE', 'F' (Facebook), and 'TWEET'. Below the text is a photograph of an older man in a red shirt pointing at a cutout of a young woman in a blue dress. The photo is credited to 'Photo via Rob McElhenny / Instagram'.

Honestly, same

This article from VICE drove 572k engagements on Facebook.

Gen Z can see themselves in these stories around fellow teens. Another story from VICE, "8-Year-Old Girl Pulls Ancient Viking Sword From Lake, Is Our Ruler Now" drove 155k engagements.

Gen Z is far from brand-allergic

Bustle's top articles of 2018, ranked by Facebook engagements

HEADLINE	TOTAL
This Month's Full Moon Is Going To Send All Zodiac Signs Into Emotional Overdrive	597,812
Brace Yourself, 'Grey's Anatomy' Fans — The Season 15 Premiere Is Going To Be 2 Hours Long	382,672
Angry Orchard Just Released A Rosé Hard Cider & It's A Millennial Pink Instagram Daydream	308,549
Panera Has A DOUBLE Bread Bowl Now & It Is Truly A Thing Of Beauty	230,428
You Can Buy Pre-Sliced Frozen Avocados At The Grocery Now	141,566
Jose Cuervo Launched A Rosé Margarita That's Ready To Drink Right From The Bottle	137,745
McDonald's Is Adding CADBURY EGGS To Its McFlurries For A Limited Time	121,532
Disney Just Announced A Haunted Halloween Cruise All '90s Babies Need A Ticket For, Stat	118,671
You Can Get A Car Air Freshener Of Your BFF's Face So They're Always With You	117,921
PSA: You Can Now Get A Temporary Tattoo Of Your BFF's Face	116,607

For Elite Daily and Bustle, their top engaging content was almost entirely around product announcements.

We also can't overemphasize how much the Gen Z audience seems to love Disney. While we did analyze Disney itself, the sheer amount of Disney mentions from other publishers was incredible.

There was everything from Disney champagne to a Disney Princess baking set for grown-ups.

On that note, many of the top stories also had to do with nostalgia, about being a 90s or even a 00s kid.

3. Empower the “woke” generation

Gen Z & being “woke”: Inclusivity and advocacy

While many names have been coined for Gen Z, one of their defining characteristics is how socially conscious they are. Going beyond their own worldview, they are regularly engaging with content around politics, inclusivity, and social responsibility.

Generation Z is also vocal about the problems affecting them on a personal level. Topics like bullying, anxiety, body shaming, and mental health frequently come up in the most engaging stories.

The political and personal challenges are also often championed by their favorite celebrities.

Plenty of celebrities have advocated this year for #MeToo, and others have shared their personal experiences with other issues.

Take Selena Gomez and her public struggle with lupus, or Demi Lovato's challenges with substance abuse, and various others.

This can also come through in light-hearted takes, such as through memes about politics or these societal and personal issues.



Social media is a megaphone

While Gen Z has been notably socially conscious prior to this year, the Parkland shootings and response of the victims propelled Gen Z into the spotlight.

Using social media, Gen Z amplified their voices and turned the Parkland shooting from a moment into a movement.

Teen Vogue: Being socially conscious is *en vogue*

Teen Vogue's top articles of 2018, ranked by Facebook engagements

HEADLINE	TOTAL
ASL Needs to Be Taught in School Like Other Languages	261,002
Black Teens Have Been Calling for Gun Reform for Years	239,920
We Need to Honor MLK's Real Legacy, Not the One That Makes White Americans Comfortable	110,126
Pulse Nightclub Survivors Joined Parkland Students to Rally for Gun Control	104,410
The Gender Neutral Words You Need to Know for Back to School	93,231
Dear Lawmakers, You're Killing Us	70,122
Melania Trump's Jacket DID Have a Hidden Meaning — and It's Worse Than We Thought	69,110
A Group of Hijabi Women Dressed Like the "Avengers" at Comic Con and People Are Loving It	52,234
Nyle DiMarco Opens Up About Having to Leave *Black Panther* Because He's Deaf	49,822
No, White People Aren't Being Attacked at "Black Panther" Screenings	41,326

Teen Vogue once again stands out for its socially conscious reporting.

The top stories this year have run the gauntlet, for everything from ASL inclusivity, gun control, race, and gender identity.

It's notable that the publisher has seen such success in this area, given that years ago Teen Vogue would have only seemed appropriate to fashion and celebrity content.

The strategy is one that Teen Vogue applies across its platforms, whether it's on Twitter, Snapchat, or Instagram Stories.

Pop culture still reigns on its lighter-hearted channels like Facebook, though some advocacy content also performs well.

4. Champion their heroes and interests

Gen Z & what's popular: Shoutouts to their interests

Gen Z is unapologetically enthusiastic about the brands and interests they love. From Disney to Harry Potter to the latest show on Netflix, they're here for content that speaks to these interests.

As we mentioned previously, that also means not having to shy away from mentioning brands directly.

The expectation has changed compared to previous generations, where Gen Z now regularly interacts with brands on social and expects them to act more human than ever.

They also have generational heroes. Beyond the ones that are socially conscious, they're engaging around the usual big names and the stars of Gen Z favorite bands, t.v. shows, and films.

Beyond even those household names, there are influencers that have arisen out of social media-first entities, and hold weight with this audience.



716k Facebook engagements

Netflix

A number of the top stories had to do with Netflix content.

Netflix has become a cultural institution, powering Gen Z-focused content like "To All the Boys I've Loved Before" "13 Reasons Why", and "Riverdale" spin-off, "The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina".

Far from brand-allergic

Seventeen's top articles of 2018, ranked by Facebook engagements

HEADLINE	TOTAL
Get Ready: "Toy Story 4" is Going to Be The Most Emotional Movie from the Series Yet	73,066
Marnie and Kal from "Halloweentown" Confirm They're Dating	57,698
Voldemort's Snake Nagini Was Actually a Witch the Entire Time and I AM NOT WELL	56,112
Every Adorable Picture of Kylie Jenner's Baby Stormi Webster So Far	19,711
BREAKING: Lili Reinhart and Cole Sprouse Walked the Met Gala Red Carpet As a Couple	19,102
Jeffree Star Wore Cornrows and People Have a LOT of Feelings	18,851
Liam Payne Confirms All the Members of One Direction Are Down for a Big Reunion Show!	17,724
The Jonas Brothers Reactivated Their Instagram and Fans Are CONVINCED They're Reuniting!	17,144
"Camp Rock" Star and Disney Channel Fave Alyson Stoner Comes Out as LGBTQ	16,355
"Coco" Is Coming to Netflix in May and I Am Now Booked for the Month	15,769

What does Gen Z care about on a general pop culture level? Seventeen has it covered.

The publishers' top engaging stories feature the celebrities, films, tv shows, and brands that Gen Z is interested in.

Other publishers like High Snobiety and Hypebeast go into Gen Z interests on a more niche level, for fashion and sneaker fashion more specifically.

Keeping a pulse on these changing trends is something we do with NewsWhip data.

Our historical data allows us to understand the lifecycle of past trends, while our predictive data can identify what's going to go viral for any audience or topic.

Check out our guide to using predictive data [here](#).

What to remember about content for Gen Z

What to remember about creating content for Gen Z

Let's recap. Though this generation doesn't yet drive the same buzz as their Millennial predecessors, they are one with a lot of power.

The top stories for Gen Z fills a number of needs that inspire them to react and share. Simplified, these needs can be qualified as **delight, relate, support, and connect.**

From there, it's a matter of understanding platform trends, topics, and formats to best reach target audiences.

Check out the [NewsWhip Research Center](#) to make sure you don't miss out on our upcoming reports, or sign up for our [newsletter](#) here.

In the meantime, here's what you should know about reaching Gen Z in 2019, keeping those four needs in mind:

1. Connect: share personal experiences and human interest stories
2. Relate: Speak to commonly shared feelings or experiences
3. Support: Don't shy away from politics or issues affecting Gen Z personally
4. Delight: Don't be afraid to give their beloved brands or pop culture faves a shoutout
5. Delight: Be light-hearted but authentic; catch attention with eccentric and fun stories
6. All: Incorporate their personal heroes into content in genuine ways

Thank you!

*Questions? Get in touch
at blog@newswhip.com*