

RESEARCH

5 things you might not know about the affluent Generation Z in China

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Zen generation

By [Amrita Banta](#)

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With high-spending millennials a key source of growth for brands in China, some forward-looking brands have started to look at the up-and-coming crop of young people close on the heels of millennials: Generation Z.

The sheer number of nicknames that have been applied to them already Z-lennials, iGen, Gen Tech, Net Gen, Neo-Digital Natives, Plurals, and Screenagers to name just a handful should be a clear sign of the intense interest in this post-millennial cohort.

Agility recently conducted a series of interviews with affluent Gen Zs to gain deeper insights into their values, their priorities, and how they approach and interact with brands.

What we found challenges the stereotypical views of the privileged younger generation as being entitled, self-absorbed phone addicts with gnat-like attention spans.

Here are a few of our key findings crunched by our data science team:

Feel lucky, empowered and free

When asked what phrase they would use to define their generation, our Gen Z respondents replies that stood out included being "independent and brave," "loving freedom" and "living for ourselves."

A key theme of being free to pursue their dreams prevailed.

Some labeled their generation "the lucky ones" they recognize their fortune of having grown up in a far more privileged and comfortable time than their parents and grandparents.

Others identify themselves as the "moonlight clan" a play on the Chinese words *yue guang zu*, meaning that they are free-spenders who empty their wallets each month.

Quite a number describe their age group as being passionate and "Buddha-like," referring to their desire to be detached from the material world.

Over half of our respondents said they do not view luxury as having to be material.

Curiosity is more than skin-deep

A key theme on the affluent Gen Zs is their intense curiosity.

When asked what they used their phones for the most, "news and fresh knowledge" was the top response, leading other popular usage such as following friends' social media posts, celebrity gossip, researching cosmetics and skincare.

Most interviewees said that they look to better themselves and view themselves as on being a path to enlightenment many call themselves "The Woke Generation" (jue xing de yi dai) referring to a search for spiritual awakening among their age group. They are drawn to honesty and realness.

For brands: this translates that creating a physical experience may not be enough for them, but an experience that speaks to them spiritually or intellectually could grab a hold of their attention in this space where they are constantly bombarded with new information.

Globally aware and adventurous

Affluent Gen Zs are far from being self-involved solipsists curious only about themselves and their own identities. Their curiosity extends to the outside world as well.

Also, they are extremely well traveled.

The majority of our sample have traveled overseas at least once in the last two years, hitting not only popular destinations such as Japan, Thailand, the United States, and Western and Southern Europe (France, Italy and the United Kingdom), but also farther-flung locales including the likes of Palau, Sri Lanka, Israel and Belize.

Many are looking to branch out further with their next trip, with planned destinations including Latin America, Scandinavia, the Middle East and the antipodes.

Although shopping is still an expected activity while travelling, compared to their elders it is farther down the list of priorities, while exploration and taking in local culture takes precedence.

This generation expects to not only see the usual sights and culture in museums and art galleries, but experience it more directly, hitting up local cafes, bars and restaurants and booking accommodations through homestay platforms such as Airbnb and Chinese competitors Xiao Zhu and Youtianxia for a more immersive, live-like-a-local experience.

Gen Z vastly prefers to travel with friends on trips that they plan themselves (89 percent) to traveling alone or with their family, and are enchanted with the idea of having authentic experiences, not only to generate brag-posts on their social media accounts, but to satisfy their thirst for knowledge as well.

"There's just a never-ending list of things to discover and learn," said Chen, an 18-year-old female student from Shanghai.

Gen Z also actively follows events overseas, and is not just limiting themselves to official sources.

A larger portion of our interviewees used foreign news applications such as [Google News](#), [BBC](#), [CNN](#) and [Vice Media](#) on their smartphones on a daily basis (28 percent) than domestic news apps including [Toutiao](#) and [The Paper](#) (23 percent) despite the fact that many foreign services are blocked in China.

Many more use foreign social media platforms such as [Instagram](#), [Snapchat](#) and [Pinterest](#) for communication and getting inspiration for travel ideas.

Getting around the Great Firewall, many still actively keep abreast of goings on in the world outside of China in entertainment, fashion and social media via dedicated WeChat and [Weibo](#) accounts that monitor happenings in international social media and provide regular digests.

Popular ones include [InsDaily](#) (which covers Instagram), and country-specific blogs with names like [England News Sister](#), [North America Commentator](#) and [Tokyo New Youth](#).

Research luxury brands and hold them to high standards

Over half of Gen Zs (53 percent) interviewed say that they "grew up surrounded by luxury brands and products" and are well past the getting-to-know-you stage, looking to explore brands in more depth. They do extensive research and appreciate those brands that take the time to craft and develop a product.

A key moment for them when visiting luxury boutiques that came up in our interviews was learning not just about the history of the brand, but getting store assistants to explain all of the little details and backstories behind individual products.

Gen Z likes diving into the details and learning why an item is shaped a certain way, why it is made of lambskin rather than cowhide leather, what were its original functions and how those informed the design.

Brands have to have meaning to them personally, not just be expensive or high quality. They prefer luxury brands to have a solid identity and stay true to themselves and do not "blindly follow trends."

The marques that resonated most with our Gen Z respondents include not just "classic" brands such as **Chanel** and **Dior**, but also **Bottega Veneta** and **Chlo** (valued for being "understated"), **Dolce&Gabbana** ("colorful and passionate") and **Givenchy** (embodying "ladylike elegance").

Gucci stood out as a particularly polarizing brand with our Gen Z respondents, straddling the line between innovating in line with staying true to itself and evolving and setting new trends.

Fans mostly females appreciate how well it has adapted its designs and retained its core essence, while others primarily males feel it has crossed the line with its recent creative directions, releasing too many styles and finding it "pompous and flamboyant."

Like their phones

It is true that Gen Zs are dependent on their smartphones in virtually all aspects of their lives.

However, rather than being tethered to their phones, they feel empowered by them and view them as a means to living more active, engaged lives. They allow not just instant communication, but also quick, efficient purchases, and access to the world at large as part of their life.

For brands: mobile is a must to build brand relevance, and the right platforms need to be used to target Gen Z customers.

In an effective recent campaign in Shanghai, **Michael Kors** used live-streaming platform **Yizhibo** and short-video app Tik Tok (aka **Douyin**), employing the hashtag #korsshanghai.

Customers were invited to interact with a live stream sent out via Yizhibo and asked them to create their own fashion walk videos on Douyin using custom filters, and partnered with key influencers on Douyin as well as Weibo to create content for the campaign.



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