



FLEISHMANHILLARD

**THE VOICE OF THE  
CLIMATE GENERATION:**

*Understanding Gen Z  
& Climate Comms*

AUTUMN 2021





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### *Methodology*

Results for 'The Voice of the Climate Generation' report are based on a 20-question survey among a nationally representative sample of 1,000 16 to 24 year-olds residing in the UK. The online survey was conducted by FleishmanHillard's research and analytics practice, TRUE Global Intelligence in June of 2021. Results are reported at the 95% confidence level with a margin of error of +/- 3.1%.

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## *A note on Gen Z: the prevailing voice*

The statement 'Gen Z is different' is a truism that borders on cliché.

Of course they're different. They grew up in a post-financial crash, austerity-ridden Britain that possessed unprecedented levels of cynicism and distrust in major institutions. A reality that to other generations was a paradigm shift, but to them has just been the status quo. They view 'the post-truth and fake news world' not as a sinister recent development, rather an unavoidable inconvenience to navigate. They haven't experienced life before social media, or even known social media when it was an exotic, innocent, exciting invention used to keep up with friends. Instead, it is an ever-present, unquestioned element of life that is just as much part of someone's personhood as anything else.

However, it is not only the newsfeeds or endemic scepticism that sets this generation apart from their elders. Unavoidable to any analysis of them, their priorities and their character, is the fact that Gen Z has not known a time when they weren't being told their world was under existential threat, and climate change wasn't an indisputable, irrevocable fact.

The result is a generation brimming with zeal on issues relating to the climate and environment; and the ramifications for business are – much like the famously abstinent Gen Z-ers themselves – sobering. Not only does this timely report reveal the business community to be the least trusted voice on the climate, but also that the vast majority of young spenders will alter their purchasing habits to avoid environmentally negligent brands.

So, when you're next thinking about whether Gen Z matters in how your organisation approaches climate communications, remember that overwhelming relationship young people have been forced to have with their climate and natural world.

Remember that they've got great ideas. Remember their voices will soon be the prevailing voice. Remember that the ones with the pens, mics and keyboards are not necessarily the ones who will be most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. And most of all, remember that if you can't hear them, you haven't tried hard enough. So go out and find them. They're ready and waiting.

**Alastair Lyon, Youth and Culture  
and TJ Jordan, Purposeful  
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# A GUIDE TO THIS REPORT

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# GENERATION Z AND THE CLIMATE CONVERSATION: IT STARTS WITH BELIEF

*If a future threatened by climate change wasn't enough, this generation faces a harsh economic reality (whether it be jobs or housing) while having two houses to tend to, their own future, and the planet's.*

*It is therefore not surprising to learn that 93% of Gen Z we spoke to said climate change is 'somewhat' to 'very' important to them. What is perhaps more interesting is to see how this passion translates into action for so many of this generation.*

23%

In the last 6 months, 23% bought or sold shares in a company based on its actions and commitments to climate change – a surprisingly high number for such a young age group. There is a significant financial savviness at play here that may have been previously unnoticed.

61%

A majority (61%) have altered their personal spending habits and behaviours to reduce their environmental impact and just under half (44%) searched for information about a company's climate change policies or commitments. Businesses should take note of how Gen Z's purchasing power combined with their desire for sustainable products and business operations affects them.

30%

A third of 18-24 year olds (30%) campaigned or voted for a political leader with a manifesto that explicitly addressed climate change, whilst 19% contacted a political candidate or government office to express their views on the matter. Businesses, campaigners and political parties should consider how this interest creates opportunities for political engagement.

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But despite their almost universal acknowledgment of the importance of tackling the climate crisis, there is still over a third (35%) of this generation who have not taken any kind of climate action in the last 6 months. In a crisis where we need as many individuals as possible taking collective action, Governments, NGOs and other campaigners must look at how to address this disconnect.



# PRIOR GENERATIONS HAVE BEEN ACCUSED OF BEING **SLACKTIVISTS**, HIDING BEHIND “SENDING THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS” AND FACEBOOK PROFILE IMAGES.

*And while not all Gen Z vote with their feet, we're seeing a much more engaged generation that share their views and opinions with the world on a regular basis. Whether that's on the social platforms they've grown up with - TikTok, Reddit - or by getting out on the streets...*



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**41%**

shared an opinion or offered advice about a company and its climate change activities with others.

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**39%**

did so about a company's products or services based on its policies or commitments.

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**37%**

contributed to a blog or used other social media to share their opinion about a company's actions, policies, or commitments to climate and environmental issues.

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**41%**

shared information and/or news articles about a company's climate change policies or commitments.

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**24%**

attended a climate change rally or protest – fairly high considering this data was collected during a global pandemic.

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**17%**

wrote an article or “letter to the editor” of a newspaper or other publication about climate change (online or in print).

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*This is a generation whose opinions are as strong as any other, but unlike many of their elders, they're willing to put in time to research, commit and take action. Also consider that, notwithstanding the already evident action, they could still be held back by their lack of resources, status and experience.*

*Governments, organisations and businesses have an opportunity to support those already engaged even further and be remembered for persuading the next wave or first followers to join the cause. Businesses should acknowledge this strong desire amongst Gen Z to actively influence their peers and other generations when it comes to the climate crisis and the role they believe companies should play in addressing the issue. So let's get under the skin of this climate generation...*

# DIGGING A LITTLE DEEPER INTO THE CLIMATE GENERATION: A GROWING VOICE

*If others won't speak up, they will. This is a generation growing up using their voice. That is not to say their engagement is a case of quantity over quality. Whether the aim is to drive movements online, contribute thoughts and opinions to the wider debate, or mobilise on the streets, this is a generation that is well-researched on matters to do with the climate. It knows who it trusts and who it's sceptical of. Meaning that it doesn't matter if it's green hashtags reaching over 16 billion views on TikTok or bodies like the Youth Climate Coalition mobilising to make clear demands of corporates, Governments and society; Gen Z consults and devours climate content from a variety of trusted sources to support action.*

## 1.

### How much do they engage with other people's climate conversations outside of their own expressions?

**For an entire generation, a majority (53%) said they read, listen to, or watch something about climate change weekly (this includes, but is not limited to, news, documentaries, podcasts, or social media content). That means over half of Gen Z are regularly, actively engaged with the issue.**

The channels that they are using most for this are digital and social with Instagram (50%), YouTube (48%) and TikTok (40%) the most frequently used channels to consume news or information on climate change. Meanwhile, online news comes in at 41% and print newspapers and blogs only reach 9% of this group.

However, when it comes to trust it's a very different story. While social channels are the ones they use the most, they are certainly not the most trusted.

Of those who consume content around climate change, the most trusted channels were traditional broadcast media and their newer digital arms, with 25% trusting online news and 23% trusting TV news. Meanwhile, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok are only trusted by 20%, 17% and 11%, respectively.

In terms of the experts they trust, there is a huge divide between the top and bottom, highlighting the gap that certain institutions need to close.

At the top, scientific experts & Academic Institutions were trusted by over half of respondents (53%), with documentarians (44%) and teachers & professors (30%) also well trusted. Meanwhile, businesses and, perhaps more surprisingly, NGOs ranked very low, with only 10% and 11% trusting them respectively. In the middle, we have the media trusted by 21%.

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*Unless major changes are made, we can expect Gen Z to make the business community atone for the inaction of many, and the cover-ups committed by some. Mainstream news channels may face a similar fate for neglecting to cover the issue with sufficient rigour or resources, because while they are more trusted than many social media channels – the difference is lower than one might expect.*

*This is an engaged and passionate cohort, and they are doing what they can with the tools they have. They are a growing voice - with a momentum born from feeling they need to do it themselves, because no one else seems to be. This has created a clear mistrust of institutions – be they corporates or media – that needs to be rebuilt. Concrete actions and results will speak loudest for this generation.*

## 2.

### How involved or listened to do Gen Z feel in the national climate debate?

The short answer is not much. A majority (59%) don't believe their voice is heard in the climate change debate, highlighting a generation that, though most-likely to be affected by the climate crisis, is simply not feeling included.

It's worth noting that this figure is slightly lower in London and the South-East (53% and 52% respectively), suggesting a bias towards the traditional decision-making areas of the UK.

Collectively, they gave a wide range of reasons for this, with political disconnect leading the way. 42% said they don't feel involved or listened to in the debate because politicians do not think they understand the issues, whilst 41% agreed that politicians do not consider their opinions or views as much as others.

Other popular reasons were that this generation is seen as being too unrealistic in how they speak out on climate change (35%) and that businesses do not think they understand the issues at hand (24%).

## 3.

### But if their voice was being heard more, what would they want to see action on?

Responses were fairly evenly spread, with a range of only 50-33%, showing both the scale and complexity of the climate crisis, but also the diversity and spread of knowledge across different issues relating to it.

The most important issue to this generation was the ocean plastic crisis, with half of all respondents (50%) saying they wanted to see more action to protect our oceans. It is worth noting that this well-documented environmental issue does not carry the same threat to our climate systems as global warming, but came top when we asked Gen Z about climate action. This response may be reflective of a very successful few years of campaigning that have made this issue highly visible - could organisations take some lessons from the successes of ocean plastic campaigns?

Next came the role of renewable energies (e.g. wind, solar, tidal energy) at 45%, whilst a fairly significant amount (41%) of this generation said they wanted action on protecting the diversity of plants and animals.

The highly digital and urbanised Gen Z is arguably the generation that is least connected to nature in British history, and yet many of them appreciate the value of biodiverse nature in our day-to-day lives and the survival of humanity.



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*The findings here are stark: a whole generation feels disenfranchised. Not just from the decision-making process, but the lack of consideration there is of their voice. The solution to this is both clearly actionable and eminently achievable, and it distills down to respect.*

*Don't just hear them, listen to them. Don't patronize them, platform them. And don't ignore their presence of fledgling, subculture social channels, join them there.*



# 4.

**So, with all this in mind, how do they feel about the future of the climate crisis and the ongoing conversation to address it?**

**Most are anxious/worried (63%) about the world they will live in when they're older because of climate change and don't believe that older generations are tackling the crisis fast enough (65%).**

However, this anxiety and lack of faith seems to have produced motivation to address this issue through more inclusive debate and discussion.



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A majority (61%) think that Gen Z has great ideas on how to address climate change and businesses and Governments need to listen.



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But more than half (53%) are worried that as their generation gets older it will lose its passion for tackling climate change.



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A large majority (71%) feel that we need as many people as possible involved in the climate change debate.



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More than half (56%) are passionate about getting involved in tackling climate change.



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Over a third (38%) believe the current conversation on climate change doesn't engage their generation.

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*Clearly Governments, businesses and NGOs should see Gen Z as a huge resource to be mobilised. We have a generation that is desperate to get involved – not only are they motivated, but they also have huge confidence in their ability to help the cause.*

*All they need is the conversation to be more inclusive before it's too late.*



# 5.

## So, what are Gen Z's thoughts on how best they can be involved?

The long and short of it is that there isn't one single way they'd like to go about it.

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### 38%

The greatest consensus (38%) was around creating more opportunities for young people to be involved in climate change arts & culture to give Gen Z more of a voice in the climate change debate.

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### 36%

There was a reasonable amount of consensus (36%) around ensuring there is a greater focus on climate change and its impact as part of the education curriculum.

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### 33%

A third (33%) of this generation believe that encouraging more of the public to respond to Government consultations on climate change (not just businesses) and lowering the voting age to sixteen could be a route to including Gen Z more effectively, despite data elsewhere suggesting a reasonable level of political disconnect and apathy.

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### 28%

28% of Gen Z believe that the media should cover opinions from a broader range of the public.

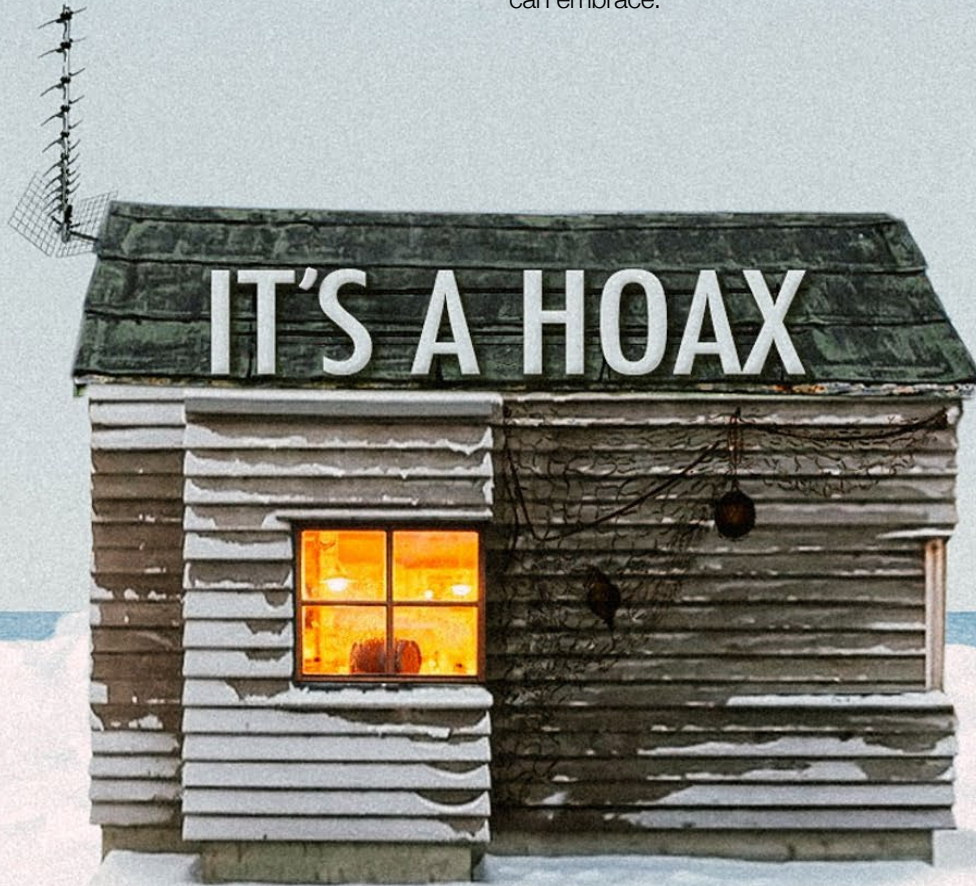


## FIVE KEY NEXT STEPS

We believe this research is a wakeup call to businesses, as well as broader institutions including Government, to embrace the opportunity presented by this engaged generation. It's not just time to change the debate. It's time to change who's involved - and how.

We need to speak in a different way, on different platforms and with different experts to pull in the Climate Generation and drive real change.

Here are 5 key next steps we believe organisations can embrace:



## 1 *Clued up*

Gen Z do their research into climate issues. Patronising this maturing generation is out of the question, and similarly, being out of touch just isn't an option, but being inauthentic is much much worse.

## 2 *Frustrated*

As they grow into – or leave – adolescence, and feel as qualified to speak on the issue of climate as any, they're ready to be heard, but feel like they're being ignored. Policymakers and business communities must open up paths of dialogue, or risk long-term disenfranchisement from the buyers and voters of the future.

## 3 *Impatient*

All their lives they've been told that a tectonic shift in the way we live our lives is necessary if we are to ensure the planet's long-term health. And yet, they don't see the required action being realised. They know they need all stakeholders to apply the zeal and stridency that they themselves – with minimal resources – are showing. Are you up to the challenge?

## 4 *Do-ers*

Gen Z is a generation that not only is prepared to do more; thanks to technological developments, 'more' can be done quicker and in greater numbers. So consider how best you harness that power for change.

## 5 *Content with their media consumption*

In other words, when it comes to reading, watching or listening to content, they are not prepared to 'come to you'. While they will research the brands & organisations that receive their custom, they'll do so on their own terms. Communicate on the media channels they consume, and work with voices and bodies they respect.



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