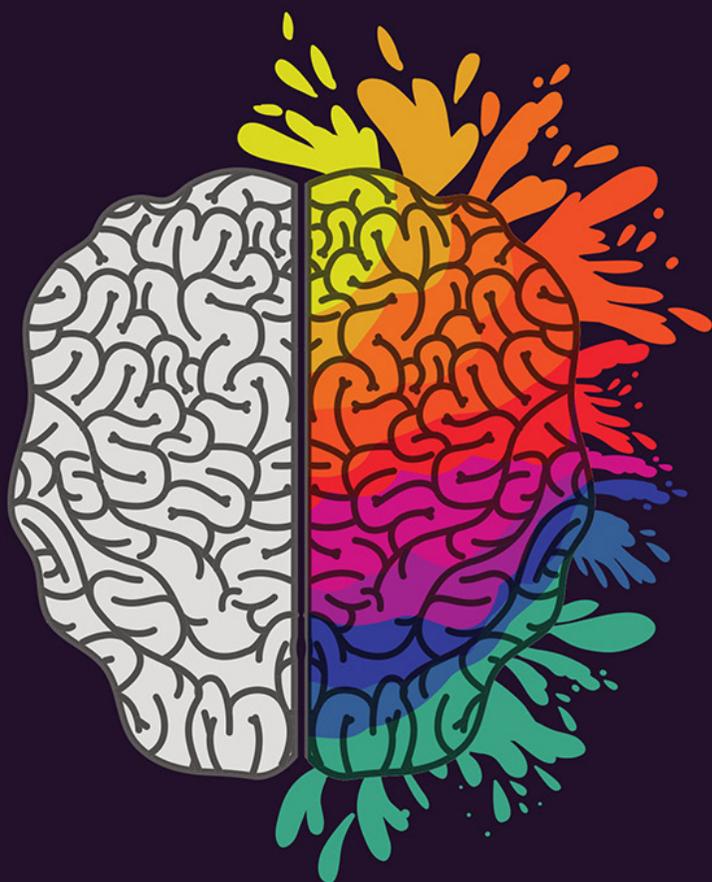


# INSTABRAIN

THE NEW RULES FOR  
MARKETING TO GENERATION Z



SARAH WEISE

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[www.sarahweise.com](http://www.sarahweise.com)

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“A game-changing approach to marketing, sales, and advertising. Sarah Weise writes in clear, jargon-free prose, and the stories and examples from both B2C and B2B were right on point. This new set of rules is the how-to guide your agency needs to create irresistible user experiences that engage and connect with this powerful generation of young consumers.”

- **Michael Salamon**, Partner, Lousy and  
Co-Founder of UX Masters Academy

“Wow. I learned so much new information reading InstaBrain: The New Rules of Marketing to Generation Z! I think I speak for lots of marketers when I say that I didn’t know what I didn’t know. As human beings, we assume that other generations are more or less like our own. But this is so not true with Gen Z. They bring an honest, back-to-basics, can-do, work ethic ethos to all of us and have vastly different habits when they research and interact with a brand. Sarah Weise delivers this important information in a clear, comprehensive way. I couldn’t put the book down! Highly recommended for ALL business people.”

- **Jon Wuebben**, CEO, Content Launch and  
Author, *Future Marketing: Winning in the Prosumer Age*

“Sarah Weise offers easy-to-apply strategies to help make you a better marketer in today’s world. You will learn techniques that will change your strategy, whether you are marketing directly to youth or not. Amazing read and right on target.”

- **Joni Rayos Samilin**, CEO, The Mindset Group



To Nick for your constant love and support.

I'd die of dysentery with you any day.

#OregonTrailGeneration

To Linna and Brianne for your unwavering enthusiasm  
and stunning curiosity about the world around you.

You are my why.

#GenerationAlpha



# INTRODUCTION

At the time I launched my first youth research study, I had been conducting research for nearly 15 years. I had identified customer trends, created psychographic personas, and built strategy for over 100 brands. I had gotten to know audiences ranging from tax dodgers to PBS donors, and after doing so much research, not much surprised me anymore.

Yet an early video that rolled in from a young lady in her early 20s blew my mind.

The task seemed simple: participants were asked to record their phone screens and show us how they keep up with an interest or hobby. With graceful ease, Alexis<sup>1</sup> bounded between no less than 6 apps on her phone to plan a weekend girls trip to Nashville.

She used no search engines.

She toggled between screens so fast it was like watching a symphony conductor unify an orchestra in prestissimo. Within just 10 minutes, she had soaked in extensive research on her trip, and had planned nearly every aspect of it from flights to hotels to activities, even what outfit she would wear while at the zoo! She had found Groupons for activities and had scouted the best food and nightlife. She knew just what hashtags to “search up” and she analyzed photos on Instagram with intuitive precision: “This club looks slow. He snapped a photo after 11 and there’s not even a line.” Setting the

tempo, she was then able to execute clear preparations, sharing itineraries through Airbnb with her travel companions.

All this, in just 10 minutes!

Yet in my mind, the most impressive part was that this was no big deal for Alexis.

For me, finding the ideal combination of departure times and airfare for any trip is a major headache. Alexis flew through this research step, processing times and dates and layovers and airport combinations with ease.

While zooming through pages, she shared her thoughts on brand loyalty, without anyone even asking: “So I am building a better relationship with Google Flights than I am with Skyscanner because I am seeing that... Google Flights has more information.”

In that study alone, we collected over 30,000 data points across two countries, and paired quantitative research indicating scale with deep psychographic interviews and in-home ethnographic research. Basically, I spent six months hanging out with teenagers. The “fam” as it were.

After that, I did many more studies focusing on this intriguing generation. Needless to say, I had a lot of stories to choose from when authoring this work. But I picked Alexis’ story to share here because she is the quintessential representation of Generation Z. From this initial interaction, we as marketers could learn an unbelievable amount about attention, retention, brand awareness, searching, inspiration, researching, converting, transacting, sharing, and so much more!

It is March 2019 at the time of this publication, and in just a few short months, Generation Z will assume the position as the largest generation in the United States, representing 40 percent of American

consumers!<sup>2</sup> Consider that for a moment—this relatively unknown generation (by marketing standards) is about to overtake nearly half of consumers out there. If that is not enough to convince your company to shift your marketing research focus from Millennials to this younger, more influential generation, well, read on. But sit down, because these stats might just make you dizzy.

This group of teens and young 20-somethings represent \$44 billion in *direct* buying power<sup>3</sup>. Just imagine how that number will surge once they get jobs after college!

When you include what parents and caregivers spend on Generation Z today, this purchase power skyrockets to \$255 billion. Additionally, when you add in total household expenditures, the impact of Generation Z's influence on other household spending may be more than \$655 billion.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, this generation is wielding their mighty influence on every other generation, in just about every industry. And yet, the marketing departments of many organizations are still focusing on Millennial research and are missing the gigantic potential of Generation Z.

With this book, I hope to inspire you to shift your focus in a very strategic way. The time to start your research is now. This large and financially-responsible group wields never-before-seen influence on our consumer markets. However, marketing to this group will not be a walk in the park. This generation has high standards for themselves and even higher standards for the brands around them to live up to. Brand loyalty with this group is harder to achieve than with any other generation.

So let's get to work!

In *InstaBrain*, I will:

- Prove to you why marketing to Generation Z is worth your time, even if they are not your direct target audience
- Show you that your past research no longer applies; this generation demands a different approach
- Walk you through key trends about this generation that will matter to you, and provide marketing takeaways within each section
- Offer a set of *new* rules for marketing and brand-building to this critical consumer group

In sharing these trends and tactics with you, it is my hope that you walk away with an actionable plan to not just survive but thrive with this new wave of customers, the influential and mighty Generation Z.

Sarah Weise

[sarah@bixaresearch.com](mailto:sarah@bixaresearch.com)

[www.instabrainbook.com](http://www.instabrainbook.com)

## PART I: THE CHALLENGE

“I love, love, *love* James Charles.”

These were the first words 13-year-old Kira declared as I started to set up for an interview with her. I was there to talk about beauty, and how she engages with this topic on her phone. Over the next few weeks as I continued these interviews, I would hear these same lyrics echoed over and over, reverberating through bedrooms and bouncing off kitchen tables of teens across the country.

I have to admit that before getting to know hundreds of teens and young adults, I did not have the slightest idea who James Charles was. I now know James Charles to be *the* beauty icon of this generation. If you do not know who this is, get to your phone—stat—and then thank the good Lord that you picked up this book, because your business strategy (and possibly your eyebrows) are about to change.

.....

I often speak at conferences, but my favorite part is not actually the speaking. It is that quiet moment before the conference starts, when you arrive early to do an audio check. The seats are empty, but the hum of the floodlights and the warmth emanating from the audio equipment shoots a buzz of excitement into the air. This is the *best* part because of the energy, the promise. In just a short amount of time, I know that the seats will be packed with people who are about

to learn the secrets of marketing to Generation Z. I also know that once they learn it, they will never be able to look at a teen in exactly the same way. And once they start applying it, their business will never be the same.

Many companies are still caught up in the Millennial whirlwind, and they overlook Generation Z. They have no awareness that the next consumer powerhouse is not just coming—it has arrived.

# YOUR PAST RESEARCH NO LONGER APPLIES

*What is the biggest mistake people make in a crisis?  
Not knowing when they're in a crisis.*

*- Olivia Pope, Scandal*

What you know about your customers right now, at this moment, is not enough to keep your business or your product alive. Why? Because your past customer research is no longer valid.

Consider for a moment how much you invest in your customer personas. As the astute marketer that you are, you likely follow best practices and construct personas or profiles for each of your products and services—illustrative representations of your target audiences, grounded in customer research.

Based on these personas, you develop marketing strategies, craft content and pay for advertising based on the assumptions within. When you are basing your company's future success on these types of personas, they *better* be right.

Whether or not you are marketing directly to the youth segment, they are without a doubt changing the game. Never before has a generation's behavior and mindset rippled up through other generations and affected all other demographics. Generation Z is having a big impact on your business today, even if you don't realize it yet.

Need proof? Ask yourself this: when was the last time you texted an emoji or took a selfie? Was it 5 minutes ago? Or 10 minutes ago? Today's teens and young adults are influencing just about every other audience to do things differently.

Take my mother, for example. At almost 70 years old, I never thought she would own a smart phone—much less be FaceTiming my kids every night at dinnertime. A few weeks ago, I was visiting for dinner, and my mother was sitting on the couch. We were chatting and she was distracted by her phone. She was clearly scanning some sort of feed, moving her finger up with habitual precision.

“Are you on Facebook,” I asked, bewildered?

“Oh God, no,” she replied, “That’s not secure at all, fake news and data breaches... I’m on the Weight Watchers app.”

I stared, perplexed, but intrigued.

“It’s my online tribe,” she shrugged in explanation.

So... I want to pause right there. My mother, someone who I’ve actually heard mutter the sentence, “I’ll just pull up The Google on the FoxFire,” used the term “online tribe” to describe a community feed she follows. Woah.

Your future customers have never known a world without search, social, and smart phones—and they are not just influencing future products; they are changing the game for just about every generation and every industry *today*.

B2B readers: pay attention now. This generation will influence your marketing strategy as well. They will be your buyers and your sellers and your partners. You must understand this generation in order to keep doing business in the future. Their mindsets, thought processes, and negotiation strategies are incredibly different than

what you might expect based on your research of young Millennials just a few years older.

Consider this statistic: 51 percent of the world's population is under the age of 25.<sup>5</sup> Over half! And if the stereotype is true: wow, that is a lot of brunch.

More than that, 98 percent of teens in the world own a smartphone (this is slightly lower in the U.S., around 96 percent).<sup>6</sup> Yes, I know... How many more selfies at brunch can we add to the world?? My goodness, that is a game changer. This is a generation that truly prefers their phone to their laptop (except in a few rare cases—like when they're doing homework).

What's more, 85 percent find out about new products through social media. You have probably come across a stat like this before, but the interesting thing here is that most of their discovery is through people: friends and family and influencers, not typically through the sponsored ads that your company has likely been paying for.

In fact, we no longer have merely influencers, those "Internet-famous" few with millions of followers. We now have microinfluencers—those with social media audiences ranging from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands—and even nanoinfluencers.<sup>7</sup> With as few as 1,000 followers, nanoinfluencers are some of the most sought-after by astute marketers today. The *New York Times* says, "Their lack of fame is one of the qualities that make them approachable." Not only are they easy to deal with and seen as more authentic by their followers, they will pretty much will say anything companies ask them to, in exchange for a small commission. It's a win-win.

Your company may be investing heavily in millennial research. But if you are looking more than a year ahead in your strategic plan

(as in, you want your brand to survive long-term), you are at a critical crossroad that demands a shift in focus.

You might be thinking, “How different could these generations be, really? These kids are just a few years apart.”

Ok, I’ll play. Let’s list out all the similarities between Millennials and Generation Z.

Here is your rundown: these two generations, only a few years apart, both embrace technology, and have become accustomed to on-demand services from transportation to food delivery to streaming television. They share an addiction to social media and the sleep deprivation that goes with it. They have few close friends but gratuitous networks of “friends.” They both have instant visibility into the lives of others, acquaintances and influencers alike, and they expect active engagement and co-creation with brands.<sup>8</sup> They both want to do good in the world.

And that is where the similarities end. That’s right, just one paragraph! So glad I wrote a book on *that*.

The point here is simple: Generation Z is radically different than Millennials, and marketers require new, fresh research in order to connect with them, build relationships, and ultimately, count them as customers.