

THE TRUTH ABOUT

YOUTH

McCANN  
TRUTH CENTRAL



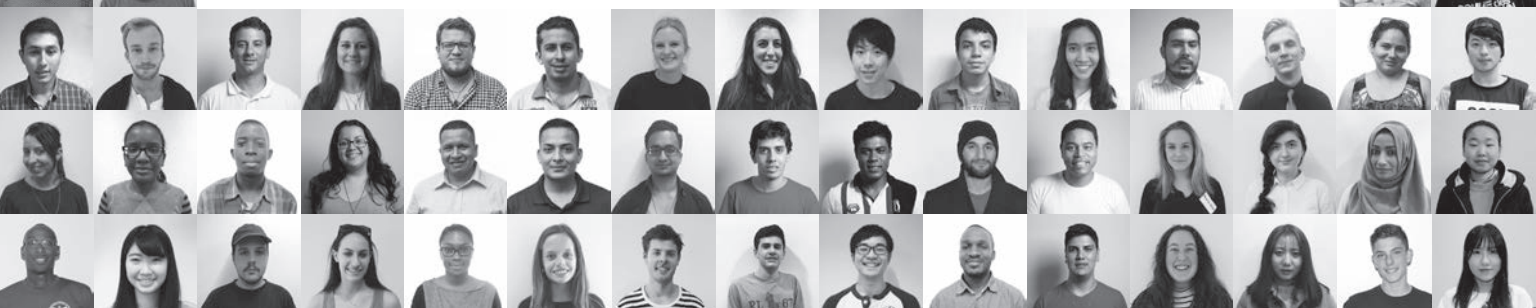
## METHODOLOGY

McCann Truth Central conducted a global research study with quantitative interview of over 33,000 people (11,000 between the ages of 16 and 30) in eighteen countries including: U.S., U.K., China, Brazil, India, Chile, Mexico, Japan, Spain, Hong Kong, France, Germany, Italy, Turkey, South Africa, Philippines, Canada and Russia.

Additionally, we held focus groups with over 500 young people between the ages of 15 and 28 in 29 markets:

U.S., U.K., China, Brazil, India, Chile, Japan, Spain, Hong Kong, Germany, Italy, South Africa, Philippines, Canada, Russia, Australia, Trinidad, Azerbaijan, Cameroon, El Salvador, Peru, Romania, Egypt, Thailand, Ecuador, South Korea, Sweden, Norway, and Cyprus.

This study follows an earlier study from 2011 in which 7,000 people between the ages of 16 and 30 were surveyed from seven countries (U.S., U.K., China, India, Spain, Mexico and Brazil).



## INTRODUCTION

Millennials are perhaps the most scrutinized and labeled generation in marketing history. In many ways, this scramble to understand and categorize them was driven by a fear that Millennials would be the generation that got away, the generation that refused to engage with advertising. If Millennials were often characterized as “digital natives,” it was the thirty-something, forty-something and fifty-something “digital immigrants” who needed snappy shortcuts into understanding this new breed of digitally empowered consumers. So they were grouped together and described variously as “entitled,” “insecure,” “Generation-Me,” “socially-conscious,” “slacktivists,” among many other labels.

Now another generation is on the horizon: Generation Z (aged 2-20). If Millennials were a new breed, Snapchat-wielding Generation Z is surely a new species entirely. The scramble for suitable adjectives has already begun in earnest. Gen Z is apparently “independent,” “pragmatic” and “self-educated.”

We do not intend to provide a new set of labels, or to add noise. In terms of approach, instead of dividing artificially between those aged 2-18 and those aged 19-35, we’re seeing youth culture as a sliding scale based on attitudes and values (although age differences are called out where appropriate). This is the first step in humanizing and globalizing our latest thinking on an important cohort.

## SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE...

Despite the fast-moving world of social media and communication, it's reassuring to find that there are three enduring human truths about being young that are as true today as they ever were.

1. The notion of needing to **"find yourself"** has transcended generations. Being young is still ridden with angst because it is a time in which your identity is being formed. It is a period in which you're desperately trying to "figure things out" and specifically, "figure out" what kind of person you are. The backdrop to being a teenager is a complex tangle of emotions and hormones that you work your way through over time.
2. Friends are everything and **"finding your people"** or a group of people to hang around with is the key to establishing yourself and your happiness. Being seen as effortlessly cool is still the root of much social anxiety for young people.
3. **"Finding your place in the world"** is the third great youth pursuit that remains relevant across eras. By this we mean figuring out your values, your passions, your ideals as well as establishing your sense of personal justice and right and wrong.

If we think about these three truths: finding yourself, finding your people and finding your place in the world, in some ways, you might argue that the fundamentals of being a young person haven't changed. However, the context of how people approach these goals has been completely reimagined!



# 1

FINDING  
YOURSELF



# 2

FINDING  
YOUR PEOPLE



# 3

FINDING YOUR PLACE  
IN THE WORLD



ACCESSIBILITY  
NATIVES

## TRANSFORMATIONAL TIMES...

Of course, the thing that changed everything is technology and the landscape is evolving so rapidly that the all-powerful triumvirate of youth brands—Snapchat, Tinder and Twitch—didn't even exist 5 years ago. Young people today aren't just Digital Natives, they're Accessibility Natives. They expect to get access to people, places, ideas and brands anywhere and at any time.

If we consider this through the lens of our three enduring truths, we see some fascinating shifts:

# 1


## FINDING YOURSELF

While “finding yourself” is still a primary concern of today's youth, we're seeing that the global phenomenon of “adulting” is shaping their experience. Adulthood is no longer an aspirational goal but a fluid state that young people dip in and out of depending on the context.

### **From Milestones to Moments**

We've moved from a series of milestones checked off to a collection of small moments and rituals. It used to be about getting married and getting your first car, whereas now it is a series of small wins that ladder up into the feeling of being an adult. For example:

- A fancy coffee mug
- Having Christmas with your partner's parents
- Getting a morning paper
- Having an unbroken phone screen
- Couples dinners
- Wearing a white shirt all day and not spilling anything on it
- Going to the movies by yourself
- Having a set bedtime
- Going grocery shopping once a week
- Keeping house plants alive



TO ADULT  
IS NOW A VERB



## FIGURING IT OUT ON STEROIDS

### **New Modes of Success**

If older generations prefer a linear and highly structured pathway to success, then young people are hacking this route. There are so many opportunities and choices that they are no longer looking to settle into one career path. Instead, they flirt with various options; one young man described his flexible approach to ambition as “sowing seeds...in the hope that one will bloom.” 87% believe it’s important to experiment, even if it means you make mistakes. Particularly in Russia (92%), China (91%), and Canada (90%).

### **Mom and Dad Are Your New Roommates**

As we all know, economic circumstances often mean that young people are living at home with mom and dad for longer than ever before. What may come as a surprise is that when we asked young people all over the world about the maximum age at which it was still okay to live at home, the average answer was “32!” This was highest in Hong Kong (41), Japan (37) and India (34).

Fundamentally, being young is still about “figuring it out.” What has changed is that the path has become far more complicated (i.e. “on steroids”). Smart brands will find ways of bringing simplicity in this world of insane complexity while allowing youth to access adulthood on their new fluid terms.

# 2

## FINDING YOUR PEOPLE

Unsurprisingly, the notion of “finding your people” has been transformed by social media. With 2/5 youth today believing that their friends are more like their family than their actual family, it is hardly surprising that there is a rigorous selection process for whom you choose to be friends with.

### **Social Me Leads Real Me**

For younger Millennials and Generation Z, their social media presence is beginning to shape and lead their real life interactions. As one respondent described, “sometimes I meet someone in the real world and think I like them, but then I check out their social media and realize I’m not into them after all...” In other ways, social media is a rehearsal space in which young people can try out different facets of their personality.



SOCIAL ME IS MY  
DRESS REHEARSAL



# REAL TIME GOT REAL

## **Honesty and Sincerity Are More Important than Ever**

Perhaps not surprising in a world where not all is as it seems, young people say that above all, honesty, sincerity and loyalty are the values they seek in their friends. Real friends are everything in the brutal environment of social media. Bullying is a dial tone in the background of their lives and 25% of young people admit to having written negative comments about people they know.

## **Real Time Got Real**

When it comes to content, younger Millennials and Generation Z are buying into an immediate, unedited and raw stream of consciousness. There are big implications for brands when we think about connecting with an audience that claims they can respond to 40 snaps in a minute.

Fundamentally, when we think about young people, friends are still everything. Young people are no longer just connecting with their friends, now they have their own audience. In a world where “likes” and “shares” are a genuine currency, brands need to consider how they can make today’s young people look good in front of their own audiences.



# 3

## FINDING YOUR PLACE IN THE WORLD

Lastly, young people have always been motivated to “find their place in the world” and those ideals remain strong today. On one hand, the fast moving digital landscape is driving an explosion of new cultural reference points. Yet on the other, it is facilitating the creation of connected global youth values.

### **Meet the Kaleidoscope Kids**

Once upon a time your world was limited by your geography. Now your world is limited only by the wonderful craziness that is the Internet. We think of young people today as the Kaleidoscope Kids, constantly rifling through different lenses and combinations of influence. It’s no longer about 5-6 tribes; it’s about thousands of social media stars. 37% of Generation Z say they would rather be friends with a social celebrity rather than a regular celebrity (compared to 18% overall).





**EQUALITY**

IS NON-NEGOTIABLE

### **New Nostalgia**

We were surprised to find a number of people in their late teens and early 20's who described their "nostalgia" for a world without technology (a world they've never really known). Thanks to the Internet, the influences from the past are more accessible than ever and cycles of reinvention are faster and faster. We're approaching a time in which the 70's, 80's and 90's are simultaneously "in fashion". The past is a rich new playground for brands.

### **Equality Is Non-negotiable**

Much like many young people have never known a world without technology, in some countries, today's youth have never known a world where equality isn't a primary societal goal. For example 16-20 year olds are twice as likely as 21-34 year olds to say that LGBTQ rights is a social issue that is most important to them.

Fundamentally, young people still demonstrate the idealism that has always been associated with their age group. The thing that has changed is that young people now see brands as powerful allies in their quest to make a difference. 87% of today's youth believe that brands have the power to make the world better.

# PHEW...

That's just the tip of the iceberg in terms of everything we learned across 33,000 interviews.

The way we like to think of it is that while so many deep human truths are consistent over time, the way we express these truths is transforming at breakneck speed. Our research looks to provide a clear roadmap for marketers who are seeking to play a meaningful role in the lives of young people across the globe.

In truth, lots of the initial questions that we marketers tend to ask about connecting with young people are the wrong kinds of questions (how do I get on Snapchat? / how many hashtags should we use?). In fact, in a world where honesty and sincerity are the most valued attributes...we can begin with these 4 simple questions:

1. What is the truth at the heart of my brand? (finding yourself)
2. Who are our people? (finding your people)
3. What is our meaningful role in the lives of young people? (finding your place in the world)
4. And finally...How and where do we earn that role?

To find out more about this research and how to make it relevant for brands, please contact us at [truthcentral@mccann.com](mailto:truthcentral@mccann.com).





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