

Millennials are not a homogenous group

By [Nandi Zambodla](#)

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Millennials and their influential role have dominated marketers' conversations and research for a few years now and, as a result, have dramatically changed how marketers view and communicate.



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So, it might come as a surprise to many that the biggest potential trend for 2018 could be that of these same marketers realising it is time to re-evaluate what we know to be true about millennials as a collective, and starting to understand how much they differ as a group and how they shape the future.

Driving this trend are two questions strategists and marketers in South Africa have begun to ask themselves. Do we really understand all millennials?

Or have we, as South Africans, adopted an American understanding and unwittingly borrowed from these theories to understand South African youth?

It is FCB Africa's belief that, while there are definitely similarities from a global perspective, one needs to understand what separates South African youth from their global counterparts. If we don't, we run the risk of missing what is unique to South

Africans, telling great stories and connecting in a real way that makes use of a South African lens.

So, possibly ahead of the trend, FCB undertook a research study that provided insights on how older millennials and younger millennials differ, as well as how their mindset and experiences can shape the way marketers can build better brand experiences.



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The reality is that the youngest millennials and the oldest are at different life stages, making different decisions and viewing life in a totally different manner. To assume they all think and act the same is risky and leaves room to miss an opportunity of targeting direct messages at the right stage in their lives.

Likewise, South African youth have walked a different path to their global counterparts and indeed their parents' generation. Younger South Africans enjoy unprecedented personal freedoms and access to information and they're now part of an all-embracing global community. These are things many of their global peers always enjoyed and things that their parents were denied.

How do older and younger millennials differ?

Both these groups contain a young market that is breaking down industries, shaping others and communicating differently. Brands are trying to step into this space by fitting into the flow of their lives and create meaningful experiences on- and offline.

But, there are numerous differences between the older and younger millennials. The younger generation has become more relevant as we see them not only engaging with culture, but mostly creating culture. To understand a consumer is to understand a mindset, a way of life and what influences decisions. What we really came to understand is how the youth really have become catalysts for a cultural revolution.

1. Encountering failure

For younger millennials, failure is an acknowledged and accepted by-product of trying to create something. They are a young group who are exploring entrepreneurship earlier, taking risks and trying to create for themselves. This very mindset is the understanding that choosing a different path and abandoning a 9-5 means one may very well encounter failure and that is part of the process. They do this at a faster rate and younger age than older millennials did. While making mistakes, they are creating culture, defining it for themselves and telling their own stories.

2. Growing up in a digital age

One of the greatest contributors towards their explorative nature has been growing up in the digital age and constantly being exposed to the possibilities beyond what is in front of them or their current life stage. Social media has opened many doors and started many conversations.

Growing up exposed to technology as a constant has meant easily navigating the online world to make it work for themselves as a viable business opportunity but also a method to showcase who they are and what they are capable of doing.

The rules have changed and social media has taught the youth about just how much and how far they can go. There is no need to knock on doors and ask for permission to be who you want. They are aware of what possibilities exist, they are

aware and engaged in the collaborative, “I want to see you succeed” narrative that exists online and it is fully utilised to the benefit of themselves and those they want to see get ahead.

Does this mean that older millennials aren't similar? Not at all. Older millennials very much are in the same space - what is clear though, is the younger generation don't wait too long trying to figure it out. They get on with it and figure it out along the way, they chase dreams faster as they have observed older millennials succeed and now know that is indeed possible.

3. Success focused

The younger generation seem to adopt a “go get it” attitude a lot faster. They expect things to work out, they walk out of schools starting businesses, looking for mentors and follow their dreams.

They are bolder, louder, more expressive and more demanding. Take, for example, how older millennials look at #Feesmustfall, #ZulaiikaPatel, how their experiences were similar when they were younger but there was no loud collaborative voice and how taking a stand wasn't as easy back then. The bravery of the younger generation comes through in many ways and says a lot about their approach to life.

The youth today? Inspiring, brave, pushing down doors. This doesn't suggest that the older millennials didn't have that very same courage and bravery. The younger generation just happen to be a lot louder. These are the narratives that should be reflected back to them.

Marketers ought to realise that while millennials may be dominating the conversation globally, we can't afford to view millennials as a collective anymore. There are differences to take note of which can help create more authentic brand experiences. If the younger generation is creating culture and living by their own rules, we have to question where we fit in and how we add value to their lives.

ABOUT NANDI ZAMBODLA

Nandi Zambodla is currently a strategic planner at FCB Cape Town. She has completed a BA degree in international studies at the University of Stellenbosch followed by Honours in Brand Leadership at Vega. Prior to joining the strategy team, she started at FCB in account management. Her interests lie in behavioural economics, trend forecasting and youth culture.

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