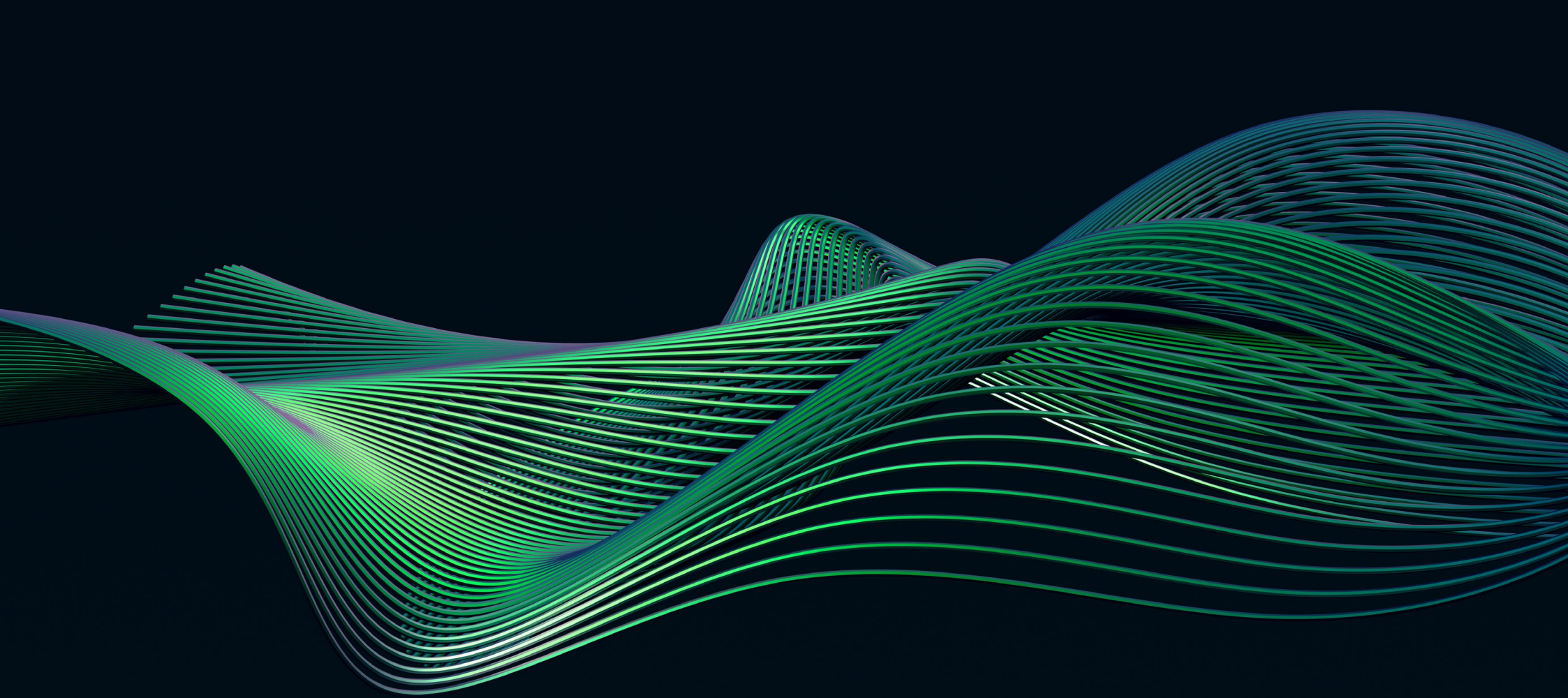


# DEEP DIVES



## DEEP DIVE: GEN Z

“If I get corona, I get corona, at the end of the day I’m not gonna let it stop me from partying.” This was how spring breaker Brady Sluder justified his attitude to the pandemic that has been tightening its stranglehold on the world since the start of the year. When coronavirus first crept into our collective consciousness, it was young people who failed to flinch. Generation Z, aged 16 to 25, felt invincible, flouting social distancing rules and capitalising on tumbling flight prices to visit long-distance friends and family.

Generation expert Dr Eliza Filby says this cavalier attitude was mostly down to the invincibility that young people feel generally, but it was also a result of the lack of immediacy that the virus presented to their lives. “It was clear from

early on that this virus was age-discriminate, it was attacking people with existing health conditions, but predominantly the elderly. Gen Z are in their 20s, with parents in their 40s and 50s, so they’re not in the vulnerable group. They may have grandparents who are, but it’s also whether they know people that have died, or that they’re

worried about. If you’re under 25, you’re invariably less likely to be in that situation.”

They’re also the generation that feels most removed from the more conservative values of their elders, with feelings around activism and social injustice instead more widely shared, so much so that the meme “BoomerRemover”

was trending in the first few weeks of the pandemic. Despite their political anger and initial nonchalance, this pandemic is likely to define Generation Z for the rest of their lives. “Generations are often defined by world events that happen in their youth,” explains Filby. “Whether it’s the Second World War, the 1960s

or the Millennium, for Generation Z this is really their moment.”

Digitally native, adventurous and future-facing, Gen Z is uniquely equipped for a crisis of this nature, where video-conferencing has become the norm and agility in business is vital. It’s likely that once the pandemic lifts, this demographic will feel less anxiety than others to return to work and travel.

At the FlightPlan virtual conference in April, behavioural scientist Rory Sutherland spoke of Generation Z’s “incredible need to travel”, observing that his own children “don’t see it as a privilege – they kind of see it as a right”. Indeed, 25-year-old digital editor Hannah Ralph echoes this sentiment: “The pandemic wouldn’t stop me from travelling. This might be super naive, but I would simply try to

avoid countries that were the worst-struck, and I’d be conscious of personal space and handwashing.”

Generation Z will continue to be one of the most important groups for travel brands post-coronavirus – today, they make up 32 per cent of the global population and have buying power equal to US\$143 billion in the US alone. What this pandemic is likely to bring into sharp relief, however, is a more cautious approach to spending, especially for Gen Z who face volatile job security and less disposable income than older generations.

According to a First Insight survey, 41 per cent of Gen Z said they’re cutting back on spending in preparation for coronavirus, compared with 40 per cent of Millennials, 36 per cent of Gen X and 23 per cent of Baby Boomers. However, a comprehensive travel





insurance policy may be enough to get Gen Z to reconsider their holiday plans once restrictions lift, according to a GlobalWebIndex report.

Before the pandemic, Gen Z's travel priorities were rooted in a desire for cultural immersion and a search for authenticity, which has in turn founded a more heightened awareness of the environmental effects

that tourism can have on the planet.

Apprehension in the months preceding lockdown, alongside a desire to sustain the environmental benefits that it triggered, will likely spur Gen Z to pursue domestic travel first. "At the moment when I've talked about travel with family and friends, it's more around doing something in the UK,

rather than abroad," says 24 year-old content strategist Isabella Speight.

Filby says that after coronavirus, Gen Z will reflect even more on their environmental impact and will be more open to methods that convey a similar experience but without the damage, such as virtual travel. "Train travel, too, will be huge," says Filby, alongside other means of

alternative transportation that have a reduced carbon footprint.

Of all the generations, Gen Z are the most tuned in to issues around social responsibility and the deeper considerations behind travel. According to YouthSight data, 44 per cent either "strongly agree" or "agree" that they think a lot about the environmental implications of their holidays. In the post-coronavirus age, travel brands that foster initiatives with local communities and invest in conservation will garner the most attention from this age group.

Sam Bruce, founder and CMO of adventure travel outfit Much Better Adventures, says: "There was plenty wrong with the travel industry pre-Covid. Post-Covid will provide a good opportunity to hit reset and make things better, fairer and more sustainable. Good tour

operators not only respect those ecosystems and communities but actively work to protect and nurture them."

There will be plenty of unknowns to tackle when international lockdowns start to ease, and while travel has suffered a tremendous blow, history shows that the sector has bounced back from wars, terrorism, recession and natural disasters, and it will again. What we can

assume is that the older people get, the more likely it is that this virus will spur them to stay at home, while younger people will be more willing to seek out adventures and the meaningful connection that travel can bring. Businesses that can transform their models to appeal to Gen Z will undoubtedly triumph in the long run.

**BY MARISA CANNON**



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