

The youth's impact on brand communication

By Sean Cavé, issued by Brandfundi

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The youth (up to 25 years old) are driving change for brand communications globally, and the pace is picking up. It's no secret that communication has been continuously evolving since the beginning of verbal communication: language evolves, as does the way we interpret and express ourselves to one another. So why is it that the youth now have such an impact on the way brands communicate and advertise?



The main driver: Social media

The way business is done in today's fast-moving world is largely online, and online is the home of the youth. Marketers have understood this and are utilising the metaverse and other social platforms to expand their brands' footprint while adjusting their tactics to suit the youth.

[Traditional marketing is essentially out the window](#), and new, entertaining and value-adding tactics are preferred. According to YDx research, today's youth expect change and welcome new experiences, meaning the youth won't be interested in traditional forms of marketing in the likes of newspapers or TV but rather the currently trending social platform. The youth seldom engage with salesy content and don't tend to watch TV ads.

In order to attract attention and engagement, brand messages and news have to be packaged in an entertaining and more subtle 'native content' format than ever before. While this has made the job of the relevant brand comms teams much more challenging, social media encourages and facilitates creative, engaging and innovative communication.

Neuroscience

It can't all be pinned on technology, though. Socrates, a Greek philosopher who lived nearly 2,500 years ago, was the first to point out teenage behaviour's faults and link them to their brain activity. Today we can observe these claims with our advanced technology, and scientists can clearly see that [the brain remains under-developed in the region of rational thought until your 20s](#). This greatly impacts how the youth respond to things; they tend to react emotionally more than rationally. When brands make mistakes, they learn very quickly how the youth feel about it. Mistakes can fast escalate into

a crisis if these feelings are not considered and appropriately managed.

Cancel culture

Cancel culture, and social media are directly related. Social media provides the platform for the public to have their say. The Newport Academy explains that [cancelling an entity or individual is \[done\] through blocking, unfollowing, and/or verbally targeting them on social media platforms](#). As has become evident over recent years, the chat section on YouTube (especially) can get ugly quickly, and the youth are seemingly on a quest to 'cancel' businesses and even people who do not live up to their idealistic expectations. This is somewhat ironic in that the youth have the power to 'cancel' a brand or individual when they are still forming their beliefs and identities and are still in the process of [developing their brains](#). Again, the tolerance for brands to make mistakes is low, especially amongst the youth, resulting in a more politically correct and 'safe' brand communications approach – brand teams tend to be super cautious not to ruffle feathers.

Sustainability

If you place yourself in the mind of the youth today, you may feel that you will bear the brunt of the economic, educational and social fallout from Covid, much like the youth have faced in past pandemics. Despite this, the youth have held onto their [optimism](#) and hope for their future. Some are even standing up in the face of adversity to achieve objectives that will benefit all humanity, not just for financial or self-gain. Take Greta Thunberg, for example, who is still fighting the fight for what is right for environmental stability, with millions of youth worldwide supporting her every step. According to the UN, "The [active engagement of youth in sustainable development efforts is central to achieving sustainable, inclusive and stable societies...](#) to averting the worst threats and challenges to sustainable development, including the impacts of climate change, unemployment, poverty, gender inequality, conflict, and migration." The consequence of this focus is that brands need to behave more ethically, and the youth expect brands to be sustainable and align with their values.

Looking ahead

Adapt or die. The youth are the future, whether you like it or not, and will continue to shape how we communicate. For brand communicators to remain relevant and successful, they must show their ethics are aligned with the youths' hopeful vision of the future and listen more to what the youth have to say.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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