

Do Millennials really exist?

 By [Alon Raiz](#)

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Does the construct of Millennials really exist or is it just hype based on the idealism of the era? Young people, the world over, are idealistic - when I was in my 20s, I was just as idealistic as my 20-year old nephews are today. Idealism is a function of youth and those ideals are expressed in diverse ways, depending on the global issues that raise awareness in that era. If you had to grow up in a time of war, the idealism would be based on peace; it is a reflection of society at that specific time. Youth represents the antithesis of the era, from war and greed to inequality.

In her book, [Generation Me](#), Dr Jean Twenge, often touted as the most widely-quoted critic of Millennials, argues that, instead of being the remarkable and solution-driven generation that we anticipated, we're faced with a generation of lonely cynics who are sorely disappointed by what they find when they exit their adolescence and enter adulthood.

To be clear, I'm not saying that Millennials don't exist, I'm saying that the data that supports the concept of Millennials is often contradictory, or as vague as the daily horoscope in the newspaper.



"I can tell by your beard you are the perfect person to provide insight into our millennial customers."

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It is very dangerous, in my opinion, for a company to blindly build a market strategy on the input of so-called 'Millennial experts' without doing the proper due diligence as to what the prevailing thinking is, and basing the strategy on their own experience without properly engaging in this market. While I am sure that there are many legitimate Millennial experts out there, I am equally sure that there are ten times more snake oil salesman professing to be Millennial experts that have no credibility whatsoever. On my TV show, I've had two so-called Millennial experts give me completely opposite interpretations of how millennials structure their loyalty to a product or brand. I've also had the experience where a Millennial expert provided me with advice, only to find that, when we went to market with his ideas, the Millennial consumer wanted something dramatically different to what he had presented. Not only did I lose money that had been invested into this expert's ideas, but I found that what he said and what the consumer wanted was diametrically opposite.

It is important to remember that labels such 'millennials' are a mirror, and idealism is the mirror of youth. The mirror (youth) has always been there, you simply need to tap into the way in which the youth interpret the zeitgeist of the era. This interpretation also depends on your localised society, social strata and community. In 2008, Coca Cola released their infectious ad 'I'd like to teach the world to sing', which mirrored the Millennials of that time – they were all about purpose, equality, and a better world. Today, if you look at an equally influential ad, you will notice that the focus has shifted. Nine years later, we're looking at marketing campaigns that focus highly on the use of technology to bring the world together. The data behind 'Millennials' simply does not support the construct.

A Huffington Post article titled *Why what you read about millennials seems contradictory* by Haydn Shaw, states that it is impossible to make generalisations that apply equally to a generation of 84 million people. Similarly, experts cannot draw conclusive data from a generation that spans across multiple social settings. How can an expert claim that a Millennial in a South African township has the same relationship or loyalty to a brand as a Millennial in America who lives in New York?

As entrepreneurs, we have to be analytical about what is data, what is noise and what is hype. Very often, people chase after trends and underneath, the data does not support them. When making marketing decisions, it is important to base those decisions on finite data that will result in some sort of return. When you construct campaigns that are aimed at today's Millennials, it is important that you consciously and deliberately tap into the idealism of the day and not on a ghost that might not exist.

ABOUT ALLON RAIZ

Allon Raiz is the CEO of Raizcorp. In 2008, Raiz was selected as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum, and in 2011 he was appointed for the first time as a member of the Global Agenda Council on Fostering Entrepreneurship. Following a series of entrepreneurship master classes delivered at Oxford University in 2014, 2015 and 2016, Raiz has been recognised as the Entrepreneur-in-Residence at the University of Oxford's Saïd Business School.

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