

Africa's youth represent hope for the future

 By Louise Marsland

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When talking about trends on the African continent, the youth bulge is mentioned every time. The impact that Generation Z will have on building Africa's digital economies, as the first generation on the continent growing up in a digital world with social media and the internet, is definitive. They will shape the future.



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In a report on Africa's Generation Z, Liquid Telecom, looks at the digital economy in Africa; the impact Generation Z will have on growing digital societies in Africa and birthing new media platforms; as well as the digital skills needed for this generation to become viable economic partners on the continent.

Industries that will be impacted directly by this rising digital generation in Africa, include media and entertainment, high-speed internet services, gaming, education, and all industries that lead in providing digital services to this mobile-first generation.

By 2020, the digital economy is estimated to account for over 26% of global GDP, according to Liquid Telecom's report, presenting Africa with a "huge opportunity to be part of the new digital world order".

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“Digitalisation is expected to bring an additional \$300 billion to Africa by 2026, and with this comes an expanding digital sector that can fundamentally change how people live and work. However, in order for Africa to fulfil its digital potential, a new generation needs to step forward with fresh ideas, a hunger to learn digital skills and a passion to use technology for the betterment of everybody.”

Generation Z is the generation born between 1995 and the early-2000s – the first generation to be born in the age of the internet and social media, which has shaped their attitudes and abilities, says the *African Generation Z Report 2018*.

“Gen Z are not just comfortable with rapidly changing technology - they are set to become the authoritative figures on technology in the modern workplace.”

These are the key findings of the report:

- Technology and the access of information that it brings, is empowering Generation Z to teach themselves and their peers vital coding and IT skills.
- A culture of entrepreneurship is being created among the youth, who are using technology to come up with solutions to problems on the continent with unique solutions, sometimes bypassing traditional methods.
- Purpose: many of the youth are using technology to empower not only themselves, but their communities, solving problems, teaching and being more altruistic in their approach.
- Innovation is a key by-product of these digitised youth as they find solutions to Africa's challenges.

It's not all sunshine and technology for the world's largest regional youth population though, as unemployment is set to be a major challenge. While some researchers focus on the positive – that Africa has the largest and youngest workforce available in the next two decades; and the region with the least elderly people to have to support; it also presents education and income challenges with so many young people entering a job market that in many countries is still struggling with economic growth, and in some areas, the youth are living in and facing abject poverty.

“Over the coming years, the next generation in Africa has both the most to lose and the most to gain. Their future lies in the hands of a healthy and robust digital economy,” Liquid Telecom's research finds.

Innovation drivers

How's this for a fact: most Generation Z's have probably never posted a letter, read a newspaper, used a library file referencing system, an encyclopaedia, searched for content alphabetically, navigated using a paper map, opened a telephone book, used a landline with a dial or even know what that is, used an iPod, know what a fax machine is, read a newspaper, or used a mobile phone with a numeric keypad.

This is where they hang out in their digital world versus the analogue world of their elders:

- For news and information, they visit BuzzFeed and 9gag.
- To study, they use SparkNotes or self-teach using YouTube tutorials.
- Stream their entertainment via vlogs, discovering and identifying new music and content through Shazam.
- They crowdsource their opinions on social media, where they have both private and public accounts.
- Receive invites through social media alerts or group chats on instant messaging.
- Find love through social media and dating apps.
- Find their way using Google Maps.

While marketers are still largely focussing on millennials, as the largest group in a century and first digital adopters and

those with the spending power and decision making power right now, Generation Z are the “appified” generation who are already plugged into multiple screens and a pay-per-use, sharing generation who have no idea of the analogue world that existed before them.

“Analysts believe this generation has lost faith in formal tertiary education and the traditional career path, and may be more inclined to move directly into the workplace if possible. US marketing agency Sparks & Honey found in a recent survey that only 64% of Gen Z-ers are considering an advanced college degree, compared to 71% of millennials.

“Gen Z, inundated with information and communication channels, is reported to have a lower attention span than any preceding generation. Up to 60% of Gen Z youths polled by Sparks & Honey want to have an impact on the world, and around one-quarter are involved in volunteering. Google’s study of teens, entitled ‘It’s Lit’, concluded there were around 60 million Gen Zs aged 13 – 17, with a purchasing power of up to \$200 billion a year, thanks to their influence on household purchases,” the report reads.

The African differentiator

Africa’s Generation Z are a hopeful generation compared to their peers in the Western world. They face more challenges, but also have a more entrepreneurial spirit and are driven by a fiercely aspirational middle class that encompasses their parents and their older siblings. They are encouraged and almost mandated to succeed at any cost.

And while the digitisation of Africa is moving along at an accelerated pace, there are still many youth who do not have access to reliable digital infrastructure or even electricity, adequate sanitation, dependable education and digital technology as data costs remain high on the continent. Income disparity is a major factor in the digital divide.

The report stated: “The ITU’s *2017 IT Facts and Figures* report noted that in 104 countries, more than 80% of the youth population are online. In developed countries, 94% of young people aged 15-24 use the internet compared with 67% in developing countries and only 30% in Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Nearly nine out of 10 young individuals not using the internet live in Africa or Asia Pacific. However, given the opportunity, young people across Africa lead adoption. In Africa, where the average internet penetration is around 21%, the average penetration among youth aged 15-24 is around 40%.”

In fact, ‘Afrillennialisms’ included an indebtedness to families and community, with an associated feeling of responsibility to give back; as well as a deep commitment to transformation and cultural diversity. The differences between Afrillennials and global millennials are likely to extend into the Gen Z zone for years to come, but given that ‘Africa rising’ is a global megatrend, Afrillennials and Africa’s Gen Z will benefit from the economic resurgence of the continent and the political change sweeping across regions as younger political leaders embrace the digital economy and commit to Africa’s transformation Agenda 2030.



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Liquid Telecom found that with the “natural” Generation Z integration with technology, Africa’s youth are poised to drive massive digital innovation – providing themselves with employment opportunities and the ability to solve some of the continent’s most pressing challenges, including socio-economic development hope for their own countries.

“We are seeing massive innovation coming out of Africa, much of it from very young entrepreneurs. It’s encouraging. Africa’s Gen Z is displaying value systems that differ from those of their predecessors. They are growing up in a global sharing economy, so they have a new approach to ownership of goods. They are very passionate about what interests them and will immerse themselves in it. They are also very entrepreneurial, confident, and less likely to want to work for a

boss.”

The new consumers

Liquid Telecom quotes GfK research that found that Gen Zs are, “highly enterprising, challenge the status quo and expect their voices to be heard. For future employers, this could present both challenges and opportunities”.

“Enterprises wanting to be the disruptors rather than the disrupted should harness these characteristics. They should create an environment in which Gen Zs have some level of autonomy and space in which to innovate.”

Brands needing to market to this strong, purpose-driven, independent, creative and digital-led generation, need to take the following into account, according to the report:

- Co-create with Generation Z. They will be more loyal to a brand that allows them to shape future products – 76%, according to GfK research.
- Purpose-driven: Gen Z cares about where their products come from and the impact on the environment.
- Help them find their place in society – they feel disconnected from the older generations due to the digital divide, which also conflicts with a more traditional upbringing. Brands can help give them purpose.
- They want to solve problems that impact on their communities. They are conscious and aware consumers that want to make a difference. Help them do so. Involve them.
- They are integrated with technology more than any other generation, but lack real-time communication skills to connect with people – they need guidance. Brands that create experiences and help them connect with their peer group will be winners.
- Generation Z are entering a world where the 9-5 job with job security for 30 years plus is a thing of the past. They need help in crafting a sustainable future.
- Flexibility is key to them. They won't work well in a rigorous rule-driven workplace. Allow them the space to create and share their ideas. Business and brands need them to plot their way to mutual future sustainability.

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

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