

Generation S

How has the introduction of social media influenced the working lives, aspirations and ambitions of 18-30 year olds?



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What people think, feel and do.



Those aged 18-30 are the first generation who have begun their careers at a time when social media is a prevalent force in society, and for the purposes of this article and wider context we have dubbed them “Generation S”.

But what effect is social media and the digital world having on young people’s employment prospects, development and careers?

At Opinium, we’re interested in what this unique generation think, feel and do, so we took a deep dive into their hearts and minds, speaking to those aged 18-30 about their use of social media, and compared their attitudes to their career and employment with other generations. We also talked to three young business owners who have used social media to launch their brand.

The effect of social media upon Generation S is very apparent: it has changed everything from who they look up to, how they learn and their attitudes to entrepreneurialism. It also allows them to more easily express themselves and connect with others who have the same interests as them. These two elements allow them to explore their hobbies and now more than ever, to make money from them. As many existing online YouTube stars and online/social media businesses illustrate: expressing yourself online and indulging your passions is something that can earn you a living.

Key Learnings

Generation S are dealing with the after effects of a major recession, and this has, to an extent made them feel insecure about their future, especially the younger members (18-24s) and those who are currently studying with 31% and 35% respectively saying they feel insecure about their future.

Despite their insecurities, the sheer amount of career choices out there (thanks in part to the digital world and social media) meant over two in five (42%) 18-30 year olds found deciding on their future employment path difficult.

Social media has also changed the way that Generation S look at employment. In their minds, there is more than one career out there for them as 74% of 18-30 year olds believe they will have more than one career in their working life.

Generation S are more inspired by online stars and entrepreneurs than traditional celebrities.

48% of those who are aware of the YouTube channel FitMenCook said they were inspired by a stark contrast to the traditional celebrity, with the highest rate of inspiration among those who were aware of him being Ed Sheeran with 25%. This has a big impact on how brands and organisations can engage with Generation S, especially those who rely on celebrity endorsements.

They also aspire to be fit and healthy, driven by the current global obesity epidemic and by inspiration from social media, a third of 18-30 year olds said that they have started eating more healthily (33%) and exercising more (32%) because of channels/ personalities on YouTube, Instagram or another platform.

Many of Generation S have dreams of starting their own business, half (58%) of those aged 18-30 either have their own business or wish to start one in the future compared with 48% of 31-55s and 33% of over 55s.



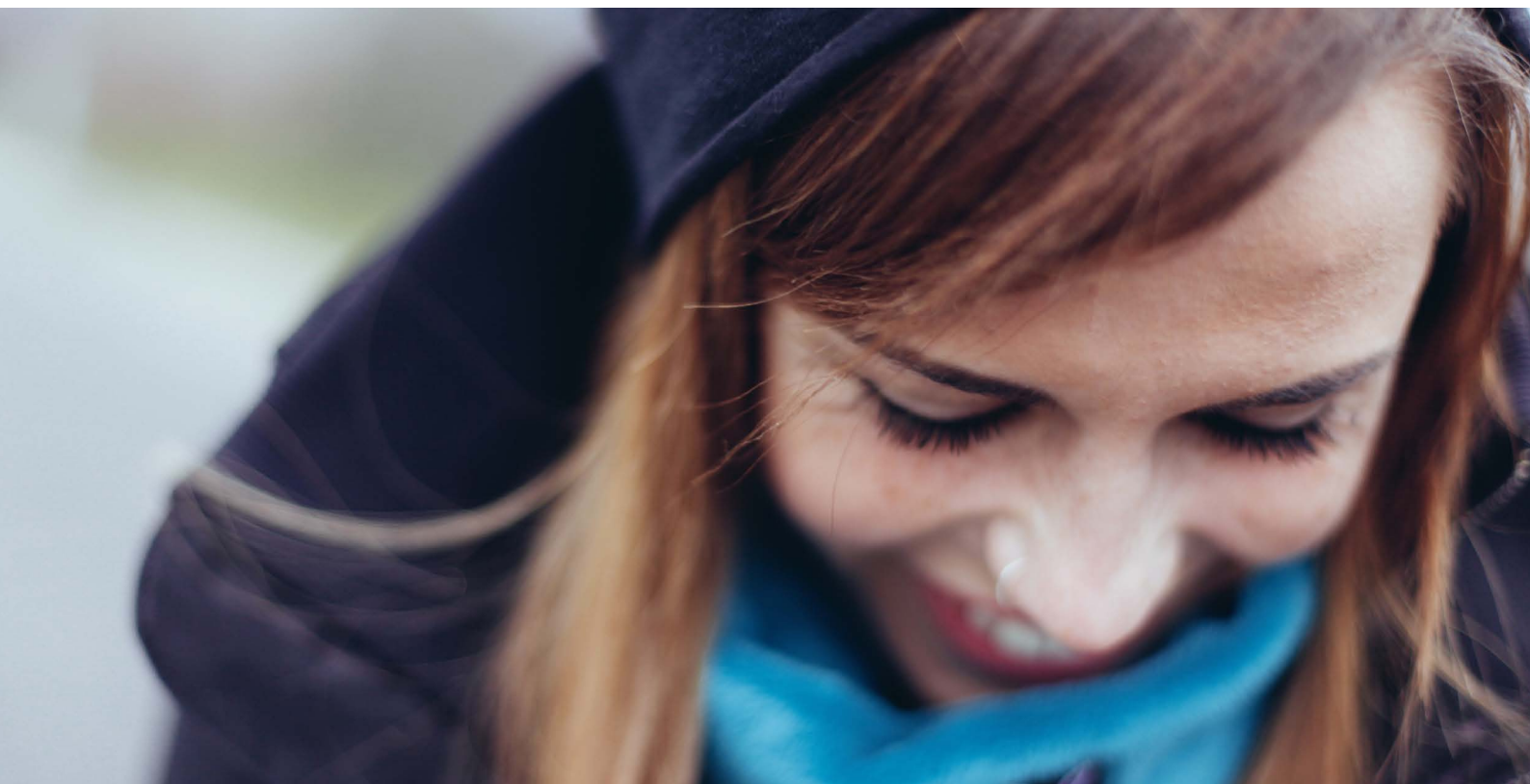
An interest in entrepreneurialism could be explained by a higher engagement with YouTube stars compared to celebrities, along with the accessibility of social media. Three in five (61%) think that Social Media sites and online platforms make it easier for people to start their own business.

Growing up with the internet at their disposal has left Generation S hungry to innovate therefore, they are more likely than previous generations to consider start-ups as a career option over traditional large companies. Employers need to ensure now more than ever that they are satisfying this need, and not restricting new talent.

Education is another area that is affected by the evolution of the online world, as it changes the career landscape for Generation S and young people leaving education, therefore course content and career advice needs to be better tailored towards an ever changing digital landscape to ensure that young people do not get left behind.

Generation S expect variety in their working life despite being left shaken from the recent recession.

The younger end of Generation S are left reeling from the recent recession and spike in youth unemployment. Nearly one third (31%) of 18-24s said they felt insecure about their future employability vs 16% of the general population. Of this one in ten (11%) of 18-24s said they feel very insecure. Among those who are currently studying, the number who feel insecure rises to 35%, demonstrating the impact of graduate and youth unemployment, and leaving many of Generation S feeling vulnerable about their future.



40% of 18-30s said they wanted to work for a large global company vs 28% of those aged 31-55, showing that despite uncertain economic circumstances, there is still a bias towards working for a large company when starting out in employment. This could be led by a desire to gain initial experience or for job security. However, one in five (21%) UK adults want to work for themselves or start their own business, and this was reasonably consistent across all age groups, challenging the stereotype that only older people want to have their own business.

What part does social media have to play? Half (51%) of 18-30 year olds believe it is easier to start a business now than before social media existed. We have spoken to several members of Generation S who have started their own business through social media.



“There's so many paths and it's overwhelming picking a single one.”

“I like to explore everything life has to offer, I dislike the idea of doing one job for my entire life.”

“There are so many different options and you are bombarded with them whilst still in education making it difficult to decide.”

Above: Verbatim from 18-30 year olds who found it difficult to choose their path of employment

Over a quarter (27%) of 18-30s are unsure about what they want from their current or future career. Despite economic growth, a recent study by the CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development)⁹ showed that just under three in five (58.8%) graduates were employed in non-graduate roles. This may also go some way to explaining why Generation S are not feeling all that confident in their future.

For Generation S, choosing their path of employment was something that two fifths (42%) said they found difficult, with nearly one in five (18%) saying they found it very difficult. This was even higher among 18-24s, as half (57%) said they found it difficult with a quarter (24%) saying they found it very difficult. Some of the most common reasons given were that the sheer number of options makes it difficult to decide, and many said they don't just want to do one particular type of job.

Case study













Zoe Bee Beauty

One person who started her own business through Facebook is Zoe, who founded Zoe Bee Beauty in 2013 after discovering an interest in beauty products she made for herself. “I often did pamper evenings for my friends, where I’d make face creams, body butters, massage oils and they all told me to start my own business selling my products. I had made my own beauty products for years, yet it never occurred to me that others would be interested in it too.”

Zoe originally started her Facebook page to share recipes for face masks, as well as natural beauty tips and made and packaged orders, while she worked in a full time IT job. “I could only really work on my business during breaks or late at night. If social media wasn’t around, then I’m not sure how I would have found time to get started in the first place.”



Above: Zoe and her products for sale on her Etsy page

 Dry Skin Cream ZoeBeeBea... £8.99 GBP	 Coconut Coffee Face Scrub ZoeBeeBea... £5.99 GBP	 Stretch Mark Cream ZoeBeeBea... £8.99 GBP	 Lovely Lashes Night Serum ZoeBeeBea... £8.99 GBP
 Lip Healing Balm ZoeBeeBea... £3.99 GBP	 Propolis and Honey face cr... ZoeBeeBea... £11.99 GBP	 Eyelash/Eyebrow Growth S... ZoeBeeBea... £9.99 GBP	 Psoriasis & Eczema Cream ZoeBeeBea... £7.99 GBP
 Sleeping Beauty Lavender ... ZoeBeeBea... £12.00 GBP	 Whipped peppermint & gre... ZoeBeeBea... £19.99 GBP	 Tea Tree Pimple Cream ZoeBeeBea... £7.99 GBP	 Mint Chocolate Body Butter ZoeBeeBea... £12.99 GBP

Now Zoe has nearly 6,000 likes on Facebook and her own Etsy store, where she sells her products to customers from all corners of the world. Some of her biggest customers are in the US, India and Malta. She doesn't think she would have been able to get that kind of range without the use of social media.

The majority of 18-30s (74%) see themselves having more than one career within their working life, showing that Zoe's decision to switch her career is a more common decision than generally perceived. 70% of UK adults say that they have had more than one career in their working life, showing this is also the reality for those who are over 30 and more established.

The fact that Generation S are starting out in their working life, expecting that they are going to end up in a different career from what they started in, is an interesting revelation and illustrates that the notion of having a single career is perhaps just as redundant in today's world as the expectation of a traditional job for life.

Generation S see YouTube stars and online personalities as more inspirational than popular celebrities such as Kim Kardashian-West and One Direction

Generation S are the first generation who have had YouTube prevalent in their earlier lives. The vast majority of 18-30 year olds (69%) say that they use it on a regular basis, rising to 78% among 18-24s. Engagement among this group is high. Two in five (44%) 18-30 year olds said that watching YouTube has enhanced their life and over a third (35%) wish that online platforms like YouTube were around when they were growing up.



With the rise of YouTube and its acquisition by Google, a number of 'vloggers' have risen to a celebrity like status. When asked about a number of YouTube stars, vloggers that 18-30s were most aware of were: Zoella (35%), PewDiePie (28%) and Jenna Marbles (25%). Generally, younger users were more familiar with YouTube stars. Among 18-24s, awareness rises with Zoella & PewDiePie (43%) and Jenna Marbles (41%) being more popular among the younger members of Generation S.

Although awareness of celebrities among Generation S such as One Direction (83%) Kim Kardashian-West (82%) and Rhianna (78%) was much higher than YouTube stars, when asked who they were inspired by and wanted to be more like among who they were aware of, YouTube stars came out ahead of traditional celebrities. Nearly half (48%) of 18-30s aware of them said they were inspired by Fit Men Cook, a healthy eating vlog. Global Cycling Network (36%), Alfie Deyes/Pointless Blog (35%) and Toby Games (32%) were also seen as inspirational. In contrast, the most inspirational celebrities among those aware of them were Bill Gates (31%), Ed Sheeran (25%) and Cara Delavigne (22%).

Some YouTube stars have turned their aspirations into large money making schemes, PewDiePie has an estimated net worth of around \$9 million², while Jenna Marbles has a net worth of around 3 million². Beauty bloggers Zoella (below) and Tanya Burr have experienced a wave of popularity and have teamed up with Superdrug to launch their own product range as well as working with other brands. Zoella achieves an average of 14.3 million video views monthly⁸. She is worth over \$7.5 million and owns her own house worth over 1 million² which she shares with her boyfriend Alfie Deyes (Pointless Blog) also a YouTube star².



Above: Zoella (Zoe Sugg) and her YouTube page



Seemingly ordinary people being able to make large amount of money via YouTube is a powerful statement, demonstrating an alternative to the traditional career path. Generation S no longer just has the traditional celebrity to aspire to, but also YouTube & social media stars.

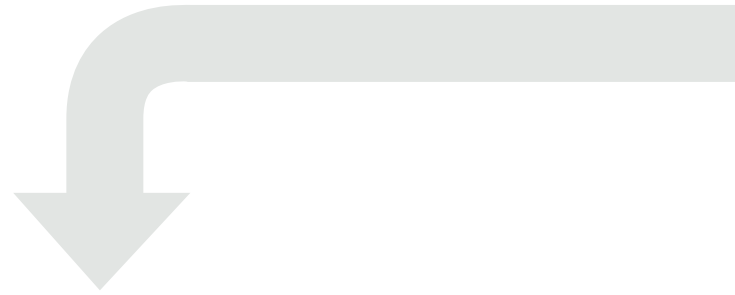
Health and Fitness stars are the most aspirational for Generation S and many have taken up healthy habits after being directly influenced by content on YouTube and Instagram

A third of 18-30 year olds said that they have started eating more healthily (33%) and exercising more (32%) because of channels/ personalities on YouTube, Instagram or another platform. The ease and availability of social media has enabled those who are passionate about health and fitness to reach a wider audience. 'Clean eating' and 'Fitspiration' (Fitspo for short) are terms that have been coined by social media stars, and is a rising trend.

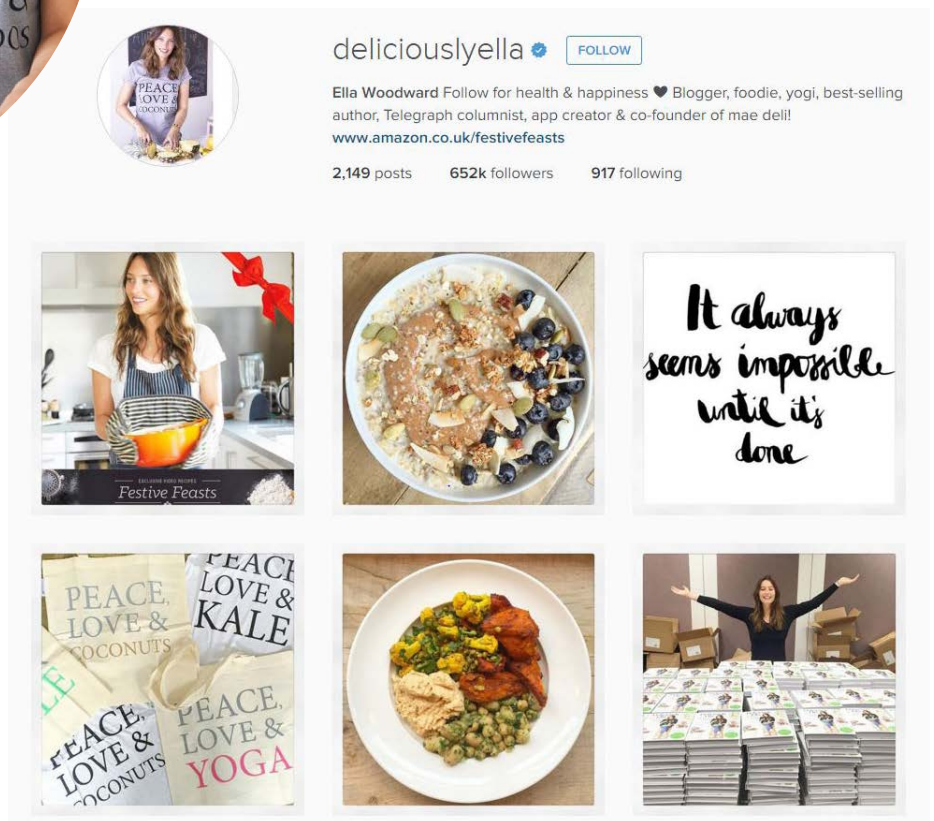
When we asked who 18-30 year olds wanted to be like, from the social media stars they were aware of, the most aspirational were Emily Skye (48%), Honestly Healthy (47%) and Tanya Burr (41%), two of whom are health and fitness bloggers. This could well mean that the lifestyle of excess that some celebrities lead is simply not appealing to Generation S in the way that it used to. This is demonstrated to some extent by their falling consumption in alcohol and rising number of teetotalers in the 16-24 year old age bracket⁷, a stark contrast from partying socialites.

Nearly a third (31%) of 18-30s in employment thought that their employer should provide healthy food options (e.g. in their canteen, in meetings, at events) and a quarter (25%) thought that their employer should offer fitness activities during lunch hours (e.g. Yoga, Running Club, etc.).

This is not necessarily a surprise, given that Generation S are dealing with a global epidemic of obesity and diabetes, an issue that is heavily covered in the media thanks to health implications such as type 2 diabetes.



Above and opposite:
Ella Woodward and her
Instagram page

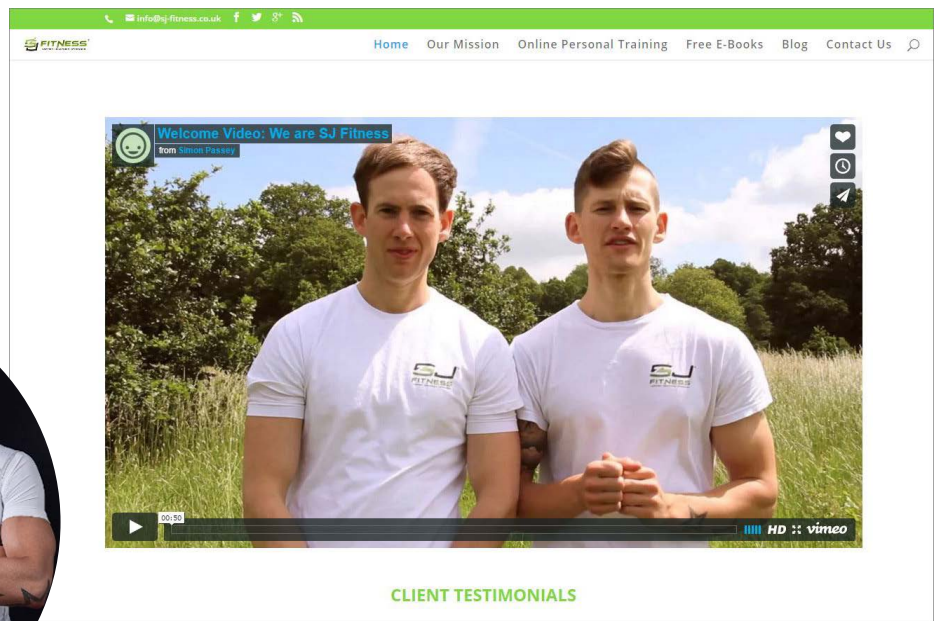


Ella Woodward's debut cookbook has landed her in the top 10 best-selling authors of 2015, with over 1.8m in sales³ at the middle of the year, placing her just below Bake Off star and esteemed home cook Mary Berry. Thanks to her success, she has teamed up with both Marks and Spencer and Waitrose.

Case study

SJ Fitness

Simon and Joe Passey are two brothers who recently started their own online personal training business with the intention of providing health and fitness plans that takes their client's lifestyle into account as well as the aspect of training. Both in their 20s, the brothers pursued a hobby with the intention of starting their own business. They made mistakes with their own training in the past as they didn't have proper guidance, and this is something they were keen to help others avoid, becoming the foundation for their business.



Above: Simon and Joe, and their website

Social media has been a major tool in growing their business, without it, progress would have been much slower, because they didn't have the funds or financial backing to throw at it. Using the free business provisions that were available to them on Facebook, which enabled them to grow organically, they tailored their posts to what their audience responded to.

"Facebook ads has also helped us boost certain posts to help us reach a wider audience and get more people interested in what we were doing, because at first it was just friends of friends following us. Then the more people who start engaging in your content, the more it spreads."

Simon Passey, SJ Fitness

Generation S have instant access to rich educational content, the majority have used an online platform to learn a new skill, providing alternatives to traditional academia

Nearly three quarters of 18-30 year olds (72%) have used an online platform to learn a new skill vs 42% of 31-55s and 20% of those aged 56 or over, showcasing their hunger to learn. The accessibility of online education is having a positive impact, as 30% of those who learned a new skill online said that it saved them money, while it helped one quarter (24%) of those in full time employment find a job. 17% of 18-30s said that it helped them start their own business.



With the growth in popularity of the internet, a huge abundance of information became easily available to Generation S at a time when they were in education, which wasn't previously available. Among 18-30 year olds YouTube (49%) and Google (45%) were the most popular services used, but one in ten have used TED-ed (13%), Edx (10%) and CodeCademy (10%). Increasing numbers of online platforms are offering online education: edx, Treehouse, Coursara and Apple University are examples of these, offering both free and paid courses covering coding, finance, sociology, languages and more. Edx provides free online courses from US top universities such as Harvard, Berkley and Massachusetts institute of technology. These services have become viable and accessible alternatives to traditional academia for Generation S when they want to learn a new skill.

It is not just purely educational.

YouTube and the wider online world has become a place where people can learn new skills: including everyday skills such as DIY and cooking, to functional such as coding and website building. The rise of platforms like TED, where users can learn more about a number of issues, is a testament to how people want to inform and educate themselves.

Social media is making becoming an entrepreneur easier and more accessible for Generation S

With the availability of online platforms that allow young people to turn their ideas into something profitable, with the world at their fingertips, it is no wonder that over half (58%) of those aged 18-30 either have their own business or wish to start one in the future compared with 48% of 31-55s and 33% of over 55s. Half (51%) of 18-30s believe that it is easier to start a business now than before social media existed, compared with 34% of 31-55s and 27% of over 55s.

The fact that social media is initially free when you first start up makes it an attractive marketing tool.

Websites such as Kickstarter and Crowdcube which allow individuals and start-up businesses fund new projects have been created to address this need.

A quarter (26%) of 18-30 year olds claim that they have used a form of crowd funding service, with one in ten (11%) saying they have applied for funding on a crowd funding service. One third (32%) say that crowd funding platforms encourage them to start their own business or project.





Above: Sara, from Pomodoro e Basilico

Pomodoro e Basilico

Sara, a chef who started her own business, Pomodoro e Basilico, used social media to kick start her business, with very little cost. She originally worked in retail, both in her native Italy and in London, but her passion for food and inspiration from chef and supper club pioneer Kerstin Rodgers (aka Ms Marmite Lover) inspired her to start holding her own supper clubs, which involved inviting people she had never met round for dinner as paid guests. This gained online attention and led to her being listed and approved with the website EatWith.

“As a young business owner, I know myself that when you start you can’t afford the high prices charged for advertising, so if you spend the right amount of time on social media and you do it constantly it’s very rewarding!”

Since starting her supper clubs, she now also sells homemade doughnuts, holds pasta making classes and works various market stalls throughout London. She says that recently Instagram has been her most useful tool for promoting her business, and quickly growing her following from 500 to over 3000 in a short space of time.

“Instagram allows me to show people the food along with descriptions and I think it couldn’t be more effective in this type of business!”

Like other young business owners, Sara believes her progress with her business would have been very different and much slower without the use of social media. Of those who believe it is easier to start a business now using social media, the majority (76%) of 18-30 year olds believe that it is easier to reach new customers because of social media and 70% think that you can target people you want to reach more easily via online channels.

Generation S are a generation who have more options available to them than ever before. As a result, they are likely to be more open to trying new services than older generations and support innovation. This also means that they may be a more difficult generation to engage with than others, because they are more diversified and independent.



Case study

What impact does this have on organisations interacting with Generation S?

Passion and freedom of expression is something that is prevalent for Generation S, and we can expect further growth in online businesses, as Generation S increasingly learn towards start-ups and aspire to work for successful online platforms over traditional heritage companies⁶. This is something that employers need to watch out for, to ensure they are giving their younger employees opportunities that satisfy their craving to express themselves and innovate, as well as satisfy their growing entrepreneurial spirit.

Online platforms are a great opportunity to attract the attention of employers, and by showcasing their passions and interests and getting interest from other users, this may well make them more attractive to potential employers, especially with online platforms, which many increasingly wish to work for.

The educational sector also needs to innovate in order to satisfy the needs of both Generation S and evolving employers. More attention needs to be paid to the online world, and to nurture their entrepreneurial spirit. Course content needs to be relevant to digital and well as academic and there needs to be better coverage of skills such as coding.

The increasing amount of career options available and the expectation of Generation S to switch career, means that schools and universities may need to rethink their approach of pushing young people to choose one career, and encourage them to learn more skills and be adaptable in a quick paced and ever changing world. It should also provide better advice to those who want to start their own business, and encouraging self-starting and entrepreneurial qualities in order to better equip young people for the future.

Brands can also learn from insight around Generation S, especially in terms of celebrity endorsements. Although Generation S are more aware of traditional celebrities, they are not strongly inspired by them, and don't find them as aspirational as entrepreneurs and YouTube stars.

As Generation S has grown up with rapid change in technology, organisations dealing with them need to constantly innovate and embrace change, as well as the use and integration of online platforms in order to stay relevant.





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Businesses

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SJ Fitness

Pomodoro E Basilico



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