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BEYOND FAKE NEWS
How to win the hearts, minds and wallets of Generation Z
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FAKE NEWS ABOUT GEN Z

What do you know about Generation Z, [the cohort of 2 billion teens, tweens and young adults](#) born between 1997 and 2012?

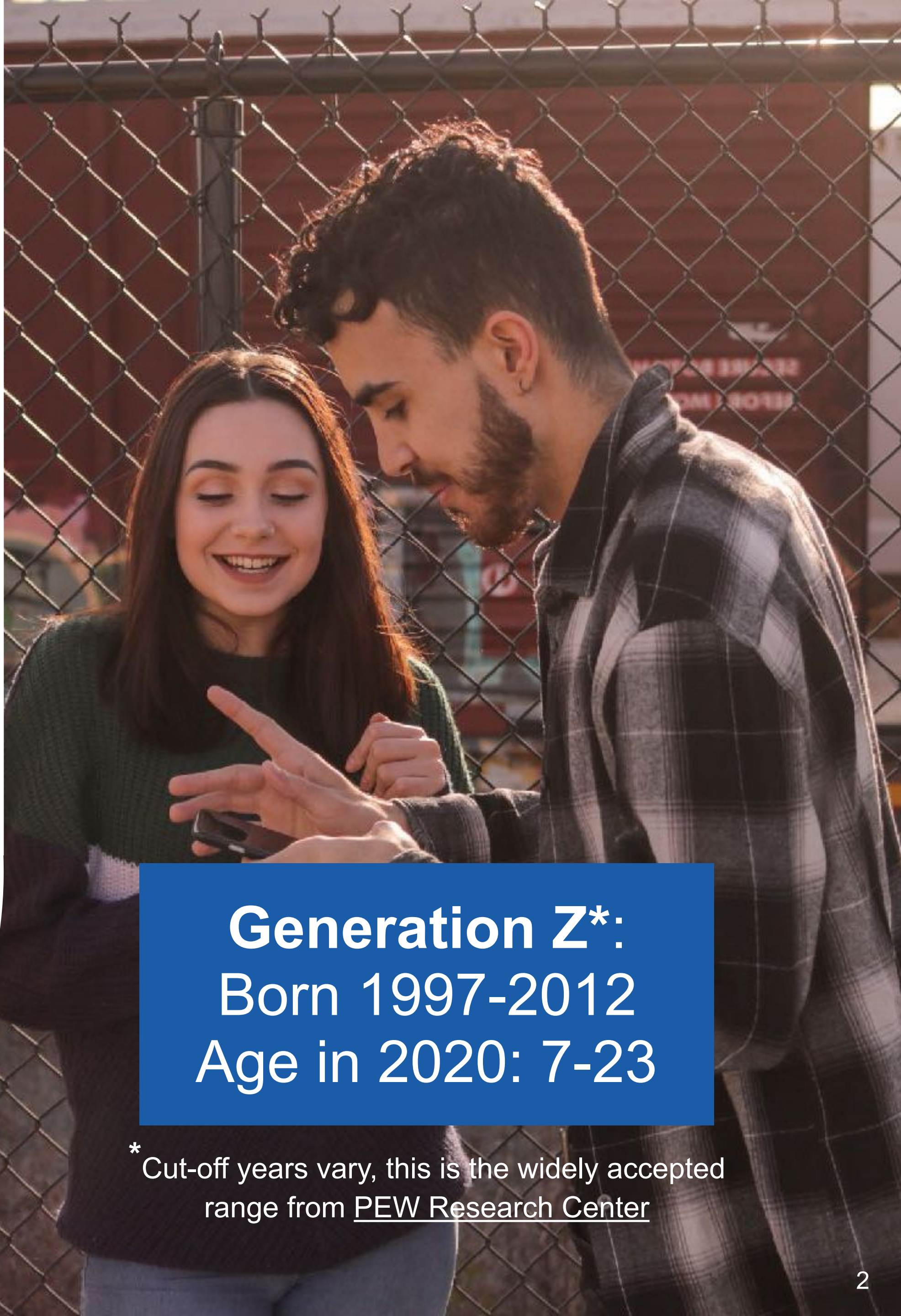
The answer is possibly less than you thought. [A quick dose of fact-checking reveals many Gen Z claims to be little more than fake news](#); false information promoted as truth, but with little or no basis in fact.

Take, for example, [the claim](#) that Gen Z is less materialistic than previous generations. Fact-checking this claim against robust data where it exists, such as in the US, reveals little supporting evidence. [On the contrary, data reveals a cohort more likely to value material wealth than Millennials](#), and less likely to value the pursuit of a meaningful life. As generational psychologist Dr. Jean Twenge concludes from a [forensic review](#) of the evidence, for Gen Z [‘money is in, and meaning is out’](#).

Other ‘alternative facts’ about Gen Z, includes ideas that Gen Z is more optimistic ([fact](#) – they are more likely to be depressed and anxious), more entrepreneurial ([fact](#) – they are less likely to want to work for themselves), or more self-reliant ([fact](#) - they are more likely to live with their parents longer, and more likely to be economically dependent).

However, [perhaps the biggest fake news about Gen Z is the idea that there is cookie-cutter uniformity for this cohort around the world](#). On the contrary, [data](#) reveals as much diversity within Gen Z as exists between generations. This is a generation that defies stereotyping.

But not all Gen Z claims are fake news. Based on a review of the evidence, this short report highlights three core Gen Z insights that are supported by robust data. First though, we outline three ways for you to spot Gen Z fake news when you see it.



Generation Z*:
Born 1997-2012
Age in 2020: 7-23

* Cut-off years vary, this is the widely accepted range from [PEW Research Center](#)



TOP GEN Z MYTHS

The following are claims about Gen Z - published reports or articles - for which there is robust counter evidence, or for which we could find no credible supporting evidence:

1. Gen Z is **more optimistic**
2. Gen Z **processes information faster**
3. Gen Z is **better at multi-tasking**
4. Gen Z has **shorter attention spans**
5. Gen Z is **more self-reliant**
6. Gen Z is **more entrepreneurial**
7. Gen Z is **more innovative**
8. Gen Z is **more politically active**
9. Gen Z is **more self-aware**
10. Gen Z is **more industrious**

THREE SIGNS YOUR GEN Z INSIGHTS ARE FAKE NEWS

Fake news about Gen Z is a problem for brands because it can lead to bad decisions. But **how do you know fake news when you see it?** One sure sign is a sweeping Gen Z claim made from a small localised sample. A little fact-checking will usually debunk such myths. Similarly, look for claims justified by qualitative investigation. Qualitative research can be exceptionally powerful at *illustrating* distinctive Gen Z traits, but as non-numerical research, it cannot identify them.

Based on a review of Gen Z reports, **here are three additional warning signs** that you may be reading or watching fake news.

COMPARED TO WHAT?

The first sign of Gen Z fake news is the **absence of comparative data contrasting Gen Z with other generations**. For example, some generational studies involve deep dives into Gen Z, and only Gen Z. These studies can help illustrate what is known about Gen Z, but they can't identify new news about Gen Z because

of the confounding variables of context, circumstance or convention (period effects).

SNAPSHOT SURVEY?

A second sign of Gen Z fake news is the **use of snapshot surveys comparing Gen Z with older Millennials (or younger Gen A)**. The problem here is that this research may simply be telling us that younger people think and behave differently to older people. To identify true generational traits, data must be controlled for age. This is the reason why robust generational research uses time-series data to compare Gen Z today with age-matched previous generations.

VALIDATED SCALES?

A third fake news warning sign is when they are **based on self-reports and opinion polls that are subject to social desirability bias** (presenting oneself in a false, but favourable way). To avoid this, strong generational research uses behavioural data and data from validated psychological scales.



BEYOND FAKE NEWS:

1. EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

With so much fake news circulating about Gen Z, what do we actually know about this cohort? At Brand Genetics we've cross-checked claims with peer-reviewed academic research conducted by social scientists, epidemiologists and demographers.

Based on our review, there are three core insights left standing that are supported by robust evidence. These three insights focus on the emotional wellbeing, physical wellness and values of Generation Z.

GENERATION ANGST

Anxiety is an emotional and physical response to threat, and as a cohort Gen Z feels threatened. [Internationally, as many as one in six suffer from anxiety disorders](#), indicating a trend in this cohort to seek safety, security and sanctuary from perceived threats.

STRESSED OUT

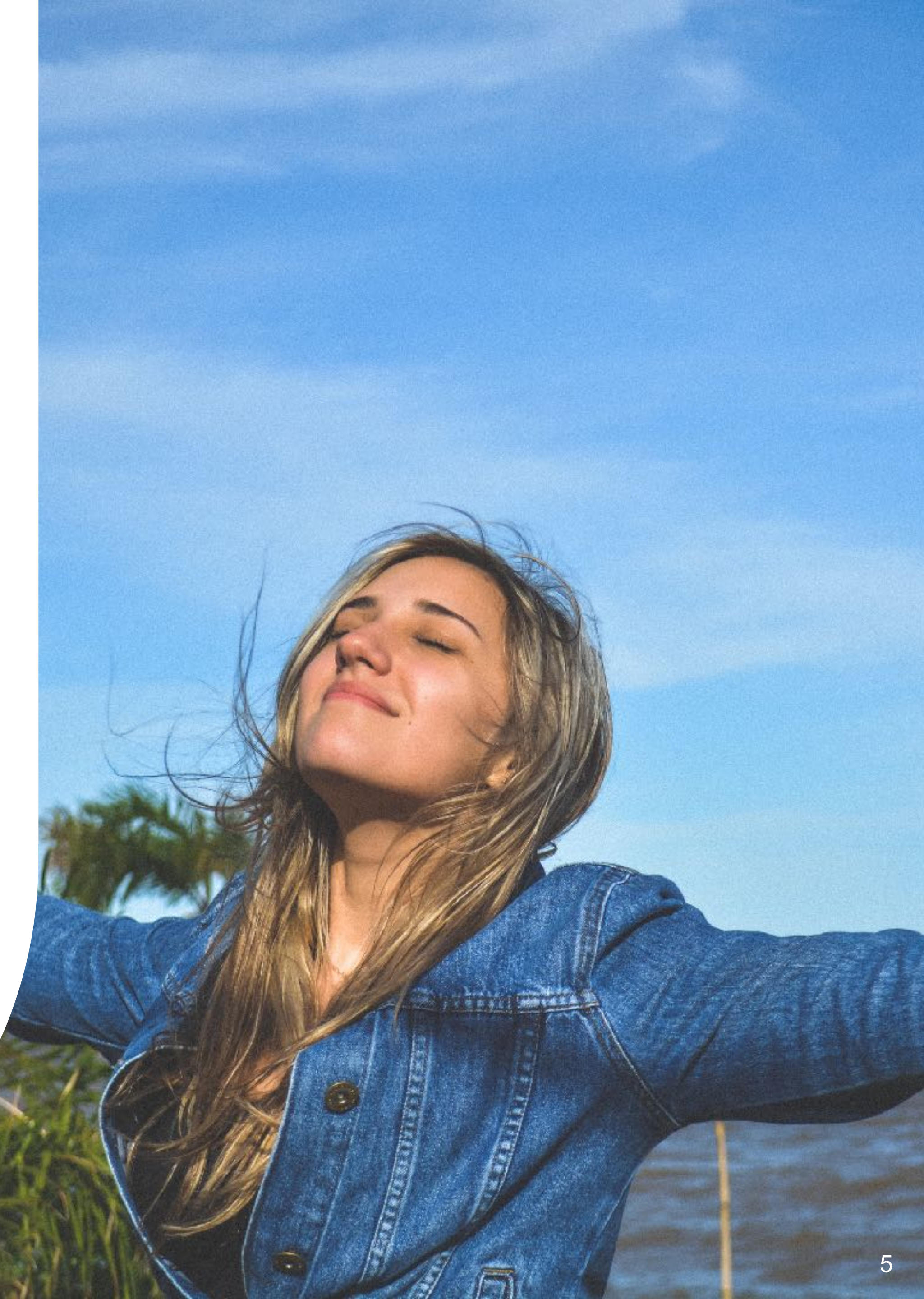
Stress is the emotional and physical response to pressure, and as a cohort Gen Z feels under elevated pressure. [In the US, more than 90%](#)

[of Gen Z suffer from significant stress, and international data indicates that as many as one in four are suffering from serious stress](#). As a cohort, Gen Z is looking for relief from the pressures of life.

THE BLUE-Z

Depression involves a persistent negative mood and is accompanied with a lack of positivity, purpose or pleasure in life. [Internationally, one in five among Gen Z has experienced a major depressive episode in the past 12 months](#). This is indicative of a generation in need of positivity, purpose and pleasure.

[Overall, Gen Z is growing up more anxious, more stressed, and more depressed than its Millennial counterpart. This makes emotional wellbeing a core need for this cohort. Beyond promoting resilience, brands can look for ways to remove or alleviate stress, anxiety and negativity associated with their products or services, whilst offering the benefits safety, security and sanctuary.](#)



BEYOND FAKE NEWS:

2. PHYSICAL WELLNESS

A second strand of peer-reviewed research into Gen Z has focused on the physical wellness of this cohort.

Overall, the data is mixed. On the one hand, Gen Z is emerging into a world increasingly influenced by a \$4.2 trillion wellness industry. Looking after your body in a body-conscious and image-centric world is an increasingly dominant social norm. As a cohort, Gen Z feels responsible for its own health. In the US, this is a group that drinks less alcohol, smokes less tobacco, takes fewer risks with their health, and is beginning to consume less refined sugar.

On the other hand, despite health campaigns and the pressures of social media perfection, Gen Z is more overweight and less active. Globally, one in five among Gen Z is overweight or obese, with levels tripling vs Gen X in the US, where one in five Gen Z adults engage in no leisure time physical activity at all. Sleep problems and eating disorders are also elevated for this cohort.

Overall, core wellness needs for Gen Z include new solutions that promote sleep, nutrition, exercise and healthy lifestyles. The challenge for brands is to make these solutions relatable for Gen Z so that they inspire more action.

One strategy we are exploring at Brand Genetics is taking a more holistic view of physical wellness that encompasses not only the physical wellness of our bodies but also the physical wellness of the planet. We believe this could resonate with Gen Z who are increasingly stressed about inheriting a planet threatened by climate change, pollution and waste, resource depletion and biodiversity loss.

Growing up under the shadow of environmental catastrophe, Gen Z represents a clear opportunity for brands to promote holistic wellness for both people and the planet.



BEYOND FAKE NEWS:

3. HONESTY, KINDNESS AND FAIRNESS

At Brand Genetics, we use the internationally-validated VIA (values in action) framework of positive human values to identify innovation and branding opportunities - as **over 8 million people have now completed the test** it's one of the largest data sources of its type.

The VIA scale identifies the top values held by a chosen segment or cohort, and this allows brands to align their values with those of the market. The advantage of focusing on values, as opposed to attitudes and behaviour, is that values are enduring and stable. Values are persistent beliefs about what is good, right and fair and act as a moral compass, guiding behaviour over the long term. In contrast, attitudes and behaviour are highly volatile and depend on context, circumstance & convention.

As a result, international Gen Z research has focused on cohort values. This research, using the VIA framework has identified the three top values for Gen Z.

There are three clear lessons for brands addressing Gen Z. Be honest. Be kind. Be fair.

HONESTY

As a cohort, Gen Z values honesty. Honesty is about speaking the truth and presenting oneself in an authentic and genuine way. It involves integrity, taking responsibility for actions, and admitting when having done something wrong. **Are you an honest brand?**

KINDNESS

A second value priority for Gen Z is kindness, which is about a willingness to help and care, even if it costs. Kindness involves doing favours and good deeds for others. **Are you a kind brand?**

FAIRNESS

The third top priority for the Gen Z cohort is fairness. Fairness means treating all people the same with justice and without bias or prejudice. **Are you a fair brand?**

TOP GEN Z VALUES

HONESTY

speaking the truth and presenting oneself in a genuine way

KINDNESS

Doing favours and good deeds for others

FAIRNESS

Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice

Source: VIA Institute

SUMMING UP: A CLEAR PATH TO GROWTH

Once free from misleading Gen Z fake news, a clear path emerges for winning the hearts, minds and wallets of Gen Z.

Promote wellbeing and wellness with honesty, kindness and fairness.

This is a positive vision that is broad enough for different brands to establish their own distinctive take on the opportunity, yet focused enough to guide strategy and inform decisions.

Different brands in different markets will have different ways of showing honesty, kindness and fairness. But the key questions remain the same. How do we to create and communicate value with honesty, kindness and fairness?

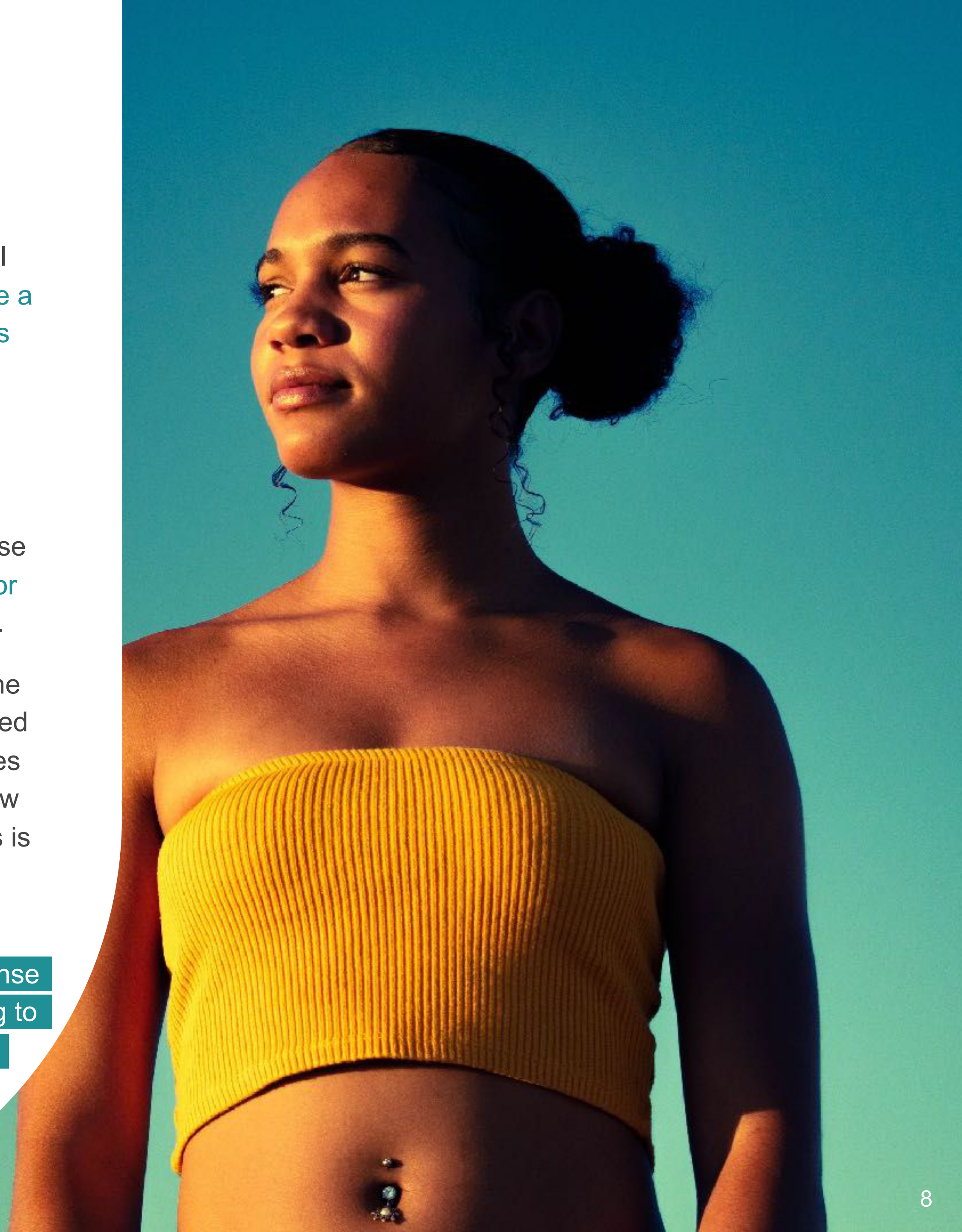
Similarly, brands will have different takes on how to promote the twin needs of wellness and wellbeing in different markets. For example, wellness is more than the absence of illness or injury; it is about caring for our bodies through good sleep, diet, exercise, self-care and healthy habits. Different markets will have

different opportunities. And beyond personal wellness, there are opportunities to embrace a more holistic and integrated idea of wellness that is about healthy people and a healthy planet.

Likewise, wellbeing is about more than the absence of fear, worry and negativity. It is about experiencing life with positivity, purpose and pleasure. The wellbeing opportunities for brand creativity in this space are wide open.

As Gen Z comes of age and begins to set the cultural agenda, we expect to see a continued and growing focus on the interlocking themes of wellness and wellbeing as brands find new ways to help people thrive and flourish. This is already being reflected in the latest trend reports.

In summary, there is no cookie-cutter response to Gen Z opportunities. But brands choosing to promote Gen Z wellness and wellbeing with honesty, kindness and fairness will enjoy a positive and profitable future.



HOW TO WIN WITH GEN Z

If you're looking to move beyond fake news and help create a healthy and happy future for Gen Z, then we'd love to hear from you.

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APPENDIX: THE VIA FRAMEWORK

At Brand Genetics, we use the psychometrically validated VIA framework (values in action) of human character strengths to identify positive innovation and marketing opportunities.

The more brands help people exercise their character strengths, the happier people become.

See the short video, and take the free online test yourself to identify your own personal character strengths.

