



Gen Z

Trends, Truth and Trust

CHANNEL 4 CEO: URGENT INDUSTRY ACTION AND NEW REGULATION NEEDED TO PROTECT 'GEN Z' FROM FALSE INFORMATION ONLINE

Channel 4 CEO Alex Mahon today delivered an impassioned call for urgent joint industry action and new regulation to ensure young people can find verified, independent news easily on social media. The call to action follows new Channel 4 research revealing the scale of the challenges facing Gen Z in an era where platforms have “publicly announced a wanton abandonment of the pursuit of truth”.

Speaking at a joint Channel 4 and Royal Television Society event in London, Mahon revealed the findings of Channel 4’s latest landmark study into 13-27-year-olds, which shows a generation grappling with the idea of truth itself and argued that the way in which Gen Z learn to judge fact, fiction and fairness as they grow older may become the defining issue of our age.

Mahon said that the UK is better positioned than most other countries – with “spectacular advantages” given the world-leading regulatory structure that underpins Public Service Media – but stressed that urgent action is required to ensure this “brilliant, vibrant, creative” generation has “a Britain they can trust in”.

She called for wider regulatory action because “global platforms are dominant” and have no legal requirement to take responsibility for what they publish; and “defenders of truth are always on the back foot” because “lying is more exciting and fiction travels faster than fact”.

“We must start thinking about objective truth and validated news as a public good,” Mahon said. “We need to ensure they are present on new platforms, rather than see them as compensating for a market failure that we regulate for on the old platforms.”

Mahon put forward three major solutions to counter false information online, and how validated, duly impartial content is identified, promoted and paid for:

1. **Trustmark:** Introduce a trustmark as an indicator of factual, trusted accuracy for content that emerges from professionally produced, regulated media. This could allow tech companies, their algorithms, advertisers and consumers to distinguish instantly between what is checked and true and what is not.
2. **Algorithmic prominence on social media:** Regulate for PSM content to be prominent on social media platforms. This is already being implemented for PSMs on TV platforms and algorithmic prominence could use the same principle to ensure high-quality, trusted content is boosted – not throttled – on social platforms and rises to the top. Regulators should also explore mechanisms for a fair revenue share, ensuring PSMs are compensated for the value and engagement their content generates.
3. **Regulation that supports PSM to shape AI:** Train large language models (LLMs) using validated PSM content. The existing LLMs have been trained on the vast and variable global internet but outputs could be higher quality if the input included PSM content. Robust regulation should ensure transparency about what AI models are trained on, secure fair value and compensation for data owners, and create outputs that are based off of quality inputs.

The research that informed Mahon's speech was delivered by insight agency Craft based on a nationally representative sample of 3,000 people aged 13-65, and shows the complexity and contradictions within Gen Z. In 2024, adults on average spent more than 5 hours a day watching video, with 34% of that on social platforms and YouTube. For 16-27s, that rises to 64%. Beyond any other generation, Gen Z defy easy pigeonholing. The research reveals developing issues, including:

1. **Growing gender divergence:** Nearly half of Gen Z men (45%) believe that "we have gone so far in promoting women's equality that we are discriminating against men" and 44% think women's equal rights have gone far enough.
2. **Democratic disengagement:** More than half (52%) think "the UK would be a better place if a strong leader was in charge who does not have to bother with parliament and elections" and one-third (33%) believe "the UK would be a better place if the army was in charge".
3. **Uncertainty in who and what to trust:** Young people have flatter hierarchies of trust across media, having confidence in posts from friends (58%) and influencers (42%) as much as – and sometimes more than – established journalism. One-third (33%) trust alternative internet-based media personalities vs 12% of 28-65s.

Mahon highlighted four ways that the change in consumption by platform impacts what is consumed: short form means less detail; speed means less context; the algorithms move the salacious faster to the top of feeds; solo viewing reduces socialisation of points of view, therefore reducing the likelihood that radical or socially destructive perspectives will be questioned.

She outlined the dangers arising from the research findings and argued "we are now at a point where we need to think much more urgently about the risks."

"Algorithms designed to elicit anger, surprise or outrage have a devaluing effect on the currency of reliable information. The business model of the technology giants is at odds with the safety of our societies," she warned. "The way in which Gen Z learn to judge fact, fiction and fairness as they grow older may become the defining issue of our age."

"A world where trust declines, truth is not universally accepted, the gender divide is widening and young people increasingly feel they are missing out is dangerous world," she went on. "We will lose the connections that bind us into community. And increasingly disconnect from democracy. The breakdown in cohesion around a set of shared facts leads to weaker civic society. If we cannot even agree on the facts, how can we reconcile our interests?"

Mahon closed with a shared challenge: "Gen Z are a brilliant, vibrant, creative, bubbling mass of ideas and deep beliefs. Their collective genius is our future but they need a Britain that they can trust in. We need to ask what we can do to keep them with us, to weave them into a community that we who came before them and those who come after them can all share. It is our duty to them and to ourselves. We should all face these two questions: If not us, who? If not now, when?"

Notes to editors:

Channel 4's research study, *Gen Z: Trends, Truth and Trust* follows two previous Channel 4 studies into young people's habits: *Beyond Z* in 2022 and *Too Much To Watch* in 2023.

A summary of the research - Gen Z: Trends, Truth and Trust – can be found [here](#).

The research showed the most significant divisions among Gen Z are explained by their worldviews and beliefs and how happy and in control they feel. The research identified six Gen Z worldviews:

1. Girl Power feminists: young women who are happy, optimistic and not politicised.



2. Fight for Rights activists: young men and women who are empowered and happy but they feel the UK is fundamentally an unfair place to live and want to push for justice for those they feel are losing out.
3. Blank Slates: disengaged boys and men.
4. The Boys Can't be Boys: both young men and women, who believe that traditional masculinity and values are under threat.
5. The Dice Are Loaded: young men and women, who are unhappy, don't feel in control and believe economic and political systems are stacked against them.
6. Zero-Sum Thinkers: young men and women who believe that for one group in society to succeed, another has to lose out.