



Gen Z

Trends, Truth and Trust

RESEARCH SUMMARY AND CALL TO ACTION

Channel 4's latest landmark research into British youth shows the complexity and contradictions within Gen Z (13-27-year-olds). Beyond any other generation, Gen Z defy easy pigeonholing. In 2024, adults on average spent more than 5 hours a day watching video and 34% of that was on social platforms and YouTube. For 16-27s, that rises to 64% – a stunning difference.

The research reveals some deeply worrying issues that have profound consequences for UK society. Channel 4 calls for urgent industry action and regulation to ensure young people grow up and live in a Britain they can trust.

Key research findings:

- **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.
- **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”.
- **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.

The impact of these trends:

- **Lack of reliable information:** Gen Z are media savvy and smart, but they have been exposed to the full force of the less regulated, polarising and sometimes wilfully misleading nature of social media since they were born. Algorithms designed to elicit anger, surprise or outrage devalue reliable information. 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.
- **Loss of social cohesion:** A world where trust declines, truth is not universally accepted, and societal divisions widen is a dangerous place. The breakdown in cohesion around shared facts puts at risk the connections that bind us, increasing the disconnect from democracy and weakening civic society.
- **Disengagement, division and radicalisation:** The last three years have seen a three-fold increase in the number of children being investigated by MI5 for involvement in terrorism (13% are under 18) and police have identified a pattern of young men becoming increasingly interested in brutality because of what they have seen online.

Call to action:

There are three major solutions we should be discussing to counter this and determine how duly impartial Public Service Media (PSM) content can remain a public good, and how to identify, promote and pay for it:

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. 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.

Conclusions:

- Our research shows action is needed now.
- Gen Z are the future but they need a Britain that they can trust in. They are hungry for reliable information, but have grown up in a non-stop news cycle where it is hard to distinguish fact from fiction.
- False information is promoted for profit and not for public good: 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.
- The UK is well positioned to tackle these issues, with its world-leading regulatory structure and some of most trusted PSM organisations in the world.
- Ofcom’s Public Service Media Review provides opportunity to decide how the UK can fight back and lead the world in this area.

Alex Mahon, CEO, Channel 4: “Gen Z in this country are a brilliant, vibrant, creative, bubbling mass of ideas and deep beliefs. Their collective genius is our future, but Britain’s need for them has to be matched by a Britain they can trust in. So, please, ask yourself what you can do to keep us together with them in one cohesive, shared society. Because, if not us, who? If not now, when?”

Link to Alex Mahon’s full speech: [Read it here](#)

Link to Channel 4’s *Gen Z: Trends, Truth and Trust* research booklet: [Read it here](#)