



# Truth About Youth Japan



## Introduction

Every generation of youth has been met with the familiar refrain: 'Young people these days...' While Japan's so-called 'Yutori generation'—those a few years older than Gen Z, who used to be seen as the face of youth themselves—and Gen Z appear to share many traits shaped by similar social conditions, Gen Z also shows signs of holding distinct values and attitudes of their own.

Contrary to the traditional perception that young people prioritize romance and nightlife:

- 61% of Japanese Gen Z feel that their friends are more important to them than their romantic relationships
- 62% of Japanese Gen Z prefer relaxing at home over going out

They question outdated values and social norms regarding gender, family, marriage, health, and work:

- 82% of Japanese Gen Z believe that gender is not a fixed concept but a fluid one (Japan average: 65%).
- 49% of Japanese Gen Z believe that everyone should go to therapy at least once in their life (Japan average: 39%).
- 41% of Japanese Gen Z expect to have multiple career paths in their lifetime (Japan average: 29%).

Rather than doing something simply because "it's what you do" and following traditions blindly, they are choosing to do things because it's the rational choice for them. Trends such as "Cancellation Community" (selecting or cancelling habits based on what is the rational choice for themselves), "Sober Curious" (rethinking drinking habits), and "Time Performance" (seeking efficient time usage) reflect this mindset.

So, what fundamentally differentiates Gen Z from previous generations? The answer lies in the world they inhabit—a world vastly different from that of past youth.

*"It's the first time in human history, that nobody has*

*any idea how the world will look like in twenty years. Nobody has any idea what to teach young people that will still be relevant in twenty years."*

—Yuval Noah Harari (Author, Professor & Historian)

As the world undergoes rapid change, Gen Zs are searching for ways to live on their own terms.. However, navigating this landscape is by no means an easy path.

- 69% of Japanese Gen Z think the world is too unstable/uncertain to make plans for the future (Global Gen Z average: 56%).

In such an era of uncertainty, how should brands connect with young people? "Truth About Youth Japan" presents three key truths based on data:

**Chapter 1 : Elevate with Positive Escape**

**Chapter 2 : Fuel the Chase, Not the Shortcut**

**Chapter 3 : Curate, Don't Crowd**

## Chapter 1 : Elevate with Positive Escape

Gen Z grew up alongside social media, constantly under the gaze of others from a young age. They have been conditioned to curate a socially acceptable version of themselves online, whilst always staying conscious of how they are perceived.

- Given a choice between "People should be free to express themselves however they choose " vs. "People should be careful how they express themselves, so they don't offend others" 59% of Japanese Gen Z said the latter was closer to their own beliefs. This is higher than the Millennial generation in Japan (56%) and also stands out globally: among Gen Z respondents in 16 countries, Japan ranks highest in agreement with the idea that "People should be careful how they express themselves, so they don't offend others" (Global Gen Z average: 31%).

Through constantly worrying about how they are

information through social media, Gen Zs have subconsciously internalized various pressures.

- The trend of striving to appear "sophisticated" and "refined" ("Akanuke" 垢抜け) increases the desire to return to a carefree childhood.
- 61% of Gen Z says they'd rather mess around with their friends and have fun over having meaningful conversations (Global Gen Z average: 40%).
- 40% of Japanese Gen Z frequently play games to feel like a child again (Japan average: 26%).
- The popularity of capsule toy vending machines and Jara-Jara decorated smartphones (じゃらじゃらスマホ a Gen Z trend in Japan where people customize their phones with an excessive number of charms, straps, and accessories).

Some other growing counter-reactions to various pressures faced by Gen Z in Japan include:

The rise of digital detoxing, as a response to the pressure of always being connected—48% of Japanese Gen Z say they are trying to increase their offline hobbies. Another is the growing desire to escape into fantasy worlds as a reaction to an unfulfilling reality. This is reflected in the popularity of "isekai" (otherworldly reincarnation) anime and immersive pop-up events that create fully realized fantasy settings. Lastly, the societal pressure to behave perfectly in order to avoid backlash or being "canceled" has led to the rise of content that embraces imperfection—such as the popularity of "miserable-cute (不憫かわいい)" characters like Opanchu Usagi and Chiikawa, which celebrate failure and vulnerability. This shift is also reflected in attitudes toward failure—45% of Japanese Gen Z believe that failure should be seen as something positive. While these moments of escape might seem like "running away", for Gen Z, they are essential refuge and coping mechanisms to help them survive each day.

- 93% of Japanese Gen Z believe that distractions can be a healthy way to cope with the stress of everyday life (Global Gen Z average: 83%).

## **ALWAYS BEEN TRUE:**

Young people have always sought escapes.

## **MORE TRUE TODAY:**

Escapes are not about "running away" but something that gives them the energy to get through each day.

## **Brand Provocation:**

How can brands provide positive escapes that energize and empower youth, elevating their everyday lives?

## **Chapter 2 : Fuel the Chase, Not the Shortcut**

The Gen Z generation, having grown up with smartphones in hand, lives in an era where everything is accessible with a single click. They have endlessly consumed an overflow of content and entertainment, dictated by algorithms. As a result, they now find it increasingly difficult to focus on a single thing.

- 53% of Japanese Gen Z worry about their attention span

Gen Zs, because of their struggles with focus, often gravitate toward short-form content on Reels and TikTok. However, simply consuming the endless stream of content no longer satisfies them. Having grown up with everything readily available, this generation now values things that require effort and ingenuity over those that come easily. This shift is evident in the rise of analytical culture, where individuals actively seek answers themselves, or the resurgence of Tamagotchi, which allows users to develop an emotional attachment through time and effort. Rather than just consuming, they find joy in engaging their minds, using their hands, and investing time in the process of making something their own.

## **ALWAYS BEEN TRUE:**

Young people have always been curious-minded creatures.

## **MORE TRUE TODAY:**

It's what they *can't* immediately attain that fuels

their passion most

## **Brand Provocation:**

How can brands create experiences that transform Gen Zs from 'passive recipients' to 'enthusiastic explorers'?

## **Chapter 3 : Curate, Don't Crowd**

Gen Z have grown up in a world of diverse values, and as a result witnessed many confrontations, making them acutely aware of the diversity of perspectives.

- Given a choice between “It's important to put the truth before other factors in all situations” vs. “The truth can be flexible depending on the situation at hand”, 57% of Japanese Gen Z said the latter was closer to their own beliefs. This is significantly higher than Japan's Gen X (45%) and Baby Boomer generation (36%) and stands out globally: among Gen Z respondents in 16 countries, Japan ranks second only to China in agreement with the idea that truth can be flexible (Global Gen Z average: 41%).

They are a generation that accepts it's impossible—and unnecessary—for everyone to understand them. Yet, this doesn't mean they want to be isolated.

They are highly sensitive to having their opinions rejected, fear being left behind, and still crave acceptance from others.

- Only 56% of Japanese Gen Z like it when people who are different to them challenge their point of view. The global Gen Z average is 73%, whereas Japanese Gen Z ranks the lowest among the 16 surveyed countries.
- Only 43% of Japanese Gen Z worry less about FOMO (fear of missing out) than they used to. The global Gen Z average is 66%, whereas Japanese Gen Z ranks the lowest among the 16 surveyed countries.

These data reveal a glimpse into the mindset of Gen

Z—while they understand that it's impossible to be liked by everyone, they seek a place where they can feel affirmed. This psychology is reflected in the rising popularity of “Besties Only” Social Media Apps such as BeReal, which allow users to connect only with their closest friends, as well as in the phenomenon of kawaii (界隈 i.e. neighborhood), such as the “bath cancellation kawai”, which serves as a kind of boundary—a space where individuals with shared values can loosely connect while maintaining a certain distance from rational arguments and criticism.

## **ALWAYS BEEN TRUE:**

Young people have always wanted to connect.

## **MORE TRUE TODAY:**

Young people want to feel connected to those who allow them to be themselves.

## **Brand Provocation:**

How can brands create a space for communication where they can express their individuality without worrying about what others think so that the brand's message can be delivered effectively to the right target?

## **Further Information & Contact**

<https://mccannwg.co.jp/contact/>

## **Research Methodology**

- Total Sample Size : **16,112 people**
- Surveyed Countries : Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, France, Germany, India, Japan, Mexico, Spain, UAE, Peru, Thailand, United Kingdom, United States
- Gen Z Sample Size : **3,158 people**